

The Political Forum

*A review of social and political trends and events
impacting the world's financial markets*

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THEY SAID IT

“Full of pride and petulance, hot as a leak and amorous as a goat.”

Donald McCormick, in *The Mask of Merlin*, a biography of David Lloyd George, the British Prime Minister who led that nation's liberal party into extinction.

LOOKING FOR SOMEONE TO BLAME FOR SEPTEMBER 11? I have been paying a great deal of attention lately to the brouhaha among politicians and in the press over the question of who is to blame for September 11.

I ignored the issue when Rep. Cynthia McKinney, an outspoken liberal Democrat from Georgia first brought it up several weeks ago on a radio show in, of all places, Berkley, California. The gist of her remarks was that President Bush knew in advance of the attacks and intentionally failed to warn Americans because, in her words, “persons close to this administration are poised to make huge profits off of America's new war.”

I continued to ignore it even when Ms. McKinney's counterpart in the Senate, Hillary Rodham Clinton, joined in the fray. I considered it to be little more than another example of two, slightly loony Democrats desperately looking for a campaign issue. Indeed, I began a prior piece on the subject, which I subsequently discarded, as follows:

(Well, it looks like the Democrats finally have “an issue” around which to organize their political campaign against the Bush administration. And what an issue it is! George W. had enough information to stop September 11 from happening . . . and he didn't do it! Wow!

This isn't quite as good as some of the little beauties that Republican critics hung on Bill during his early days in the White House; things like looting a savings and loan, cooking up a crooked land deal with his wife, taking a \$100,000 bribe from a cattle

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futures trader, or having his wife's boyfriend killed and his body dumped in Fort Marcy park. But it is better than what Democrats have tried to hang on Bush in the past, and after all, the Republicans had more to work with. . . .)

But the longer this debate has gone on, the less funny I find it to be. I mean, for eight years, this nation had a president who, with the help of his wife, staffed virtually the entire upper echelon of the executive branch of the government with a veritable parade of crooks, incompetents, political hacks, and fools, the likes of which few banana republics have ever seen. Scandals consumed one important agency after another, from the Departments of Justice, State, Energy, and Commerce to the chief law enforcement and intelligence gathering branches of the government, including both the FBI and the CIA.

The entire senior White House staff, for eight straight years, consisted almost exclusively of political spin control experts and defense lawyers, whose sole combined purpose in life was to "manage" the multiple scandals that swirled around this poor sap of a president, who was not only deeply unethical but whose sexual antics made England's Lloyd George, known as the "Welsh goat" in his time, look like a school boy. No foreign policy experts there. No law enforcement experts there. No intelligence experts there. Just political hacks and shysters, wall to wall. And now, the Democrats, wonder, "what happened?"

Well, if they really want to know, dozens of books have been published explaining in painful detail "what happened," books with such titles as *Unlimited Access*, *Betrayal*, *Partners in Power*, *The Strange Death of Vincent Foster*, *The First Partner*, *The Impeachment of William Jefferson Clinton*, *Spin Cycle*, *Hillary's Choice*, *Sell Out*, *The Agenda*, *The Star Report*, *A Washington Tragedy*, *Boy Clinton*, *On the Edge*, *The Secret Life of Bill Clinton*, *Hell to Pay*, *The Final Days*, *High Crimes and Misdemeanors*, *Uncovering Clinton*, and the list goes on, each one offering gruesome details of a president who "fiddled," or "diddled" as the case may be, while radical Arabs prepared the fire that would burn the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.

Oh yes. And there's another book, which isn't exactly about the Clintons, but which sheds some light on today's "big story" the one about the failure of "Bush's FBI" to respond properly to the clues that something was up. This book, entitled *A G-Man's Journal*, was written by a friend of mine, Oliver "Buck" Revell.

Buck knows something about the FBI. He spent 30 years there as a special agent and senior executive. He is, in fact, I think it is safe to say, a legend at the agency. He spent 11 years at headquarters, five as Assistant Director in Charge of Criminal Investigations, and then six as Associate Deputy Director, the bureau's number two career position. From 1964 to 1994, he either directed or participated in virtually every major FBI investigation, including the JFK assassination, Watergate, the Iran hostage crisis, and the Gulf War antiterrorist operations. As part of his job, Buck was the senior FBI representative to the National Security Council, where he was recognized as one of the nation's leading authorities on terrorism and national security issues.

Buck left Washington to head the bureau's Dallas office in May 1991, shortly after Bill Clinton came to town. He retired from there in 1994. While he doesn't say so in his book, Buck's career

in Washington was not helped by a letter he wrote to his then boss, FBI direction William Sessions, suggesting that Sessions resign in the wake of numerous scandals surrounding him, “while you still have some semblance of dignity and before you do further harm to an agency that you have professed to honor and respect.”

Buck currently runs his own security consulting firm, but still acts as a regular advisor to the Pentagon, the Bureau, and the National Security Council. He is also founder and President of the “Institute for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence,” where I have had the distinct pleasure of spending some time with him.

Among other things, Buck discusses in his book the respective strengths and weaknesses of the various Directors under whom he served. And although the section on Louis Freeh, Bill Clinton’s choice to succeed Sessions, begins well enough, with Buck applauding the appointment of this “outstanding” candidate, things turn sour rather quickly, or, as Buck puts it, “signs of trouble began to appear immediately.”

Freeh’s many miscues are too numerous to recount in this space, so I will summarize a few of them. According to *A G-Man’s Journal*, Freeh’s transgressions include: interfering with an ongoing investigation (the Centennial Park Bombing in Atlanta); suspending agents without due process (in the wake of Ruby Ridge); “substantially lessen[ing] the Bureau’s policy on pre-employment use of drugs,” a move rumored to have been taken in order to accommodate friends with questionable pasts; misusing “federal employees for purposes that are not authorized by law or regulation;” awarding promotions for political reasons and to reward friends; and retaliating against agents “who held views contrary to his own.”

The most significant of these missteps was, undoubtedly, Freeh’s tendency to use (abuse?) the Bureau’s promotion and reassignment policy to reward friends and political allies and to punish opponents. The unfortunate and obvious side effect of such action was, according to Buck, that personal and political preference were allowed to trump competence and professionalism. In so acting, Buck argues, Freeh compromised the ability of the Bureau to execute its mandate effectively. The following quotes succinctly encapsulate Buck’s thoughts on Freeh’s actions.

Freeh sent a clear signal that he did not want free and open discussion and would retaliate against those who held views contrary to his own.

These moves quickly established that Freeh was going to return to a system of promotion by favoritism, cronyism, and *political correctness* (emphasis added).

The investigative division could still function, but less efficiently. The problem in all this was that no adequately trained replacement personnel were identified or capable of being placed in the positions vacated [as a result of Freeh's actions]. In some of the more technical positions it would be months, if not years, before adequate replacements were available.

By his failure to protect the rights of Bureau employees, Freeh failed the first and foremost important responsibility of leadership . . . Freeh sent a signal throughout the

FBI that anyone was expendable, and there would be no recourse through due process for FBI officials.

With Freeh's obvious disdain for senior executives in the FBI, it is no wonder that there has been a 100 percent turnover in the SAC [Special Agent in Charge] and Assistant Director positions during his tenure. Virtually every former SAC or Headquarters senior executive I have spoken with feels the FBI is being poorly managed, and that there is a tremendous lack of leadership on the part of the Director.

In my view, he [Freeh] has failed [to lead effectively], and as a consequence, morale is at its lowest ebb in years.

Under Freeh, there has been "a tremendous loss in morale and collegial leadership relations and the premature mass exodus of senior Bureau executives from the FBI at a time when their experience and expertise is desperately needed.

So now, gentle reader, you know more than the Democrats in Washington want you to know about the FBI that President Bush inherited from Bill Clinton. And you also know the answer to the question, "What went wrong there?" This book, by the way, was published in November 1998, two years before Bill Clinton left town -- with Louis Freeh still in charge of the FBI. Was anyone paying attention?

RUSSIA: AMERICA'S NEW STRATEGIC PARTNER? During the Cold War, it was common to hear European foreign policy gurus worry aloud that the global rivalry between the United States and the U.S.S.R. would eventually end in a formal agreement between the two nations to divide the world into two distinct "sphere's of influence." This agreement, they said, would be publicly hailed by the two super powers as a means to ensure "lasting world peace," but its long-term affect would be to subjugate the rest of the world to their combined wills, and deny forever the hope of establishing a "United States of Europe" as a rival, global competitor.

This paranoid geopolitical view crumbled along with the Berlin Wall in 1989 and was swept into the dust bin of history with the signing of the Maastricht Treaty just over two years later. In my opinion, it was never a realistic scenario anyway because, among other things, it underestimated America's commitment to containing the spread of Soviet totalitarianism, and it assumed an economic and military parity between the United States and the U.S.S.R. that never existed.

I mention this this week because it occurred to me while watching Presidents Bush and Putin interact last week that now would be a good time for the European paranoids to begin worrying once again about a Russo/American alliance that would diminish Europe's importance in the world. This was not a new idea for me. I had flirted with it shortly after September 11, when Putin announced that Russia would not object to the United States establishing staging bases in the former Soviet republics from which to fight the war in Afghanistan. My comments at the time were as follows, in an article entitled "Strength from Adversity," and dated October 29.

I now think it is fair to say that Osam's recent attacks on the United States "with non-conventional weapons of terror," will not only accelerate the expansion of U.S.

authority throughout the world, but will also provide some important, early clues as to how certain key players will react to this reality.

Russian President Putin, for example, is sending remarkably strong signals, in the wake of bin Laden's actions, that he has decided that Russia's long-term interests will be best served by friendly, cooperative relations with America.

I am not predicting here that all will be sweetness and light between the U.S. and Russia in the years ahead. Indeed, I would anticipate considerable tension between the two countries at times, if for no other reason than the fact that Russia continues to be a sponsor, friend, and supplier of conventional, and some say non-conventional weapons to virtually every nation that has been identified by the U.S. State Department as sponsoring terrorism, including Iran, Iraq, Syria, Libya, North Korea, and Cuba.

I am simply saying that Putin's friendly, and by all appearances, sincere, response to President Bush's request for help in the fight against bin Laden is a sign that Russia may, just may, recognize that a genuine friendship with America makes considerable practical sense right now and is likely to make ever more sense in the future.

Among other things, Russia will need vast amounts of American capital and technical expertise if it is to overcome its severe economic and social problems. In addition, Putin certainly understands that Russia's goal of reestablishing a dominant, meaningful position on the world stage, as well as in its own neighborhood, could be accomplished more quickly and more easily if it could be done within the contest of U.S. cooperation and support.

And finally, while Putin continues to pursue friendly relations with China, largely in response to America's growing worldwide power and influence, he certainly knows that Russia's hand in this Sino-Russian alliance would be strengthened, not weakened, by friendly ties with America, especially if Russia's "friendship" with China should ever become strained.

I am not predicting here that Russia will replace Europe as America's principal strategic partner in the European theater . . . anytime soon. I am saying, however, that much closer relations between Russia and the United States make a great deal of economic, political, and military sense for both nations as they begin the process of adjusting to a 21st century that is likely to be marked by terrorism; widening gaps between the world's rich and poor nations; intense worldwide competition for both capital and natural resources; and the strong possibility of highly disruptive, demographically-caused upheavals in such important places as China and Europe.

From the perspective of the United States, Russia is, after all, already well along in the terrible and costly process of shedding the burden of radical socialism, and is struggling to build a capitalist democratic society out of the rubble. Europe has yet to go through that traumatic period. Indeed, it is headed in the other direction, as it labors to build a giant bureaucratic apparatus that is untouched by even the pretense of a democratic dimension.

David Pryce-Jones once asserted that the European Union is the successor to the Soviet Union, noting that while it had a common passport and currency, it had no national identity, but was a conglomeration of nationalities united under the rule of a politburo in Brussels. One wonders, in line with this assertion, if Russia, which is struggling to regain and reassert its ancient national identity, will not be the successor to the once culturally and economically dynamic states of France and Germany. Just a thought, mind you.

JOE CAMEL, RONALD McDONALD, AXIS OF EVIL REDUX. In the April 2, premier edition of this newsletter, I wrote a piece about the government's new BMI (Body Mass Index, calculated from height and weight) standards, and the resulting consequence that "30 million Americans overnight went from being government approved to 'overweight' or 'obese.'"

The purpose of the piece was to note that this new "standard" had already prompted some "activist groups" to renew their demand for "fat taxes" on snack foods and tobacco-style calls for action lawsuits against restaurants. In fact, I pointed out that the ever-svelte California State Senator Deborah Ortiz had already had herself hoisted onto this proverbial bandwagon by proposing a tax on soft drinks as a means of helping to reduce "skyrocking rates of childhood obesity."

Anyway, in an effort to keep readers up to date on the subject, I thought I would note this week that the Senate Subcommittee on Public Health recently convened hearings on this "obesity epidemic." And, in one of those brilliant promotional ploys, for which the Senate Democrats are so well known, the hearings were chaired by none other than the Senate poster boy for the ill effects of unchecked indulgences of all sorts, Senator Ted Kennedy. What a guy! What a party!

CLINTON WATCH: A Redundant Exercise? Next month, the University of Arkansas will host a symposium on the Clinton presidency. This meeting made the news some time ago because several historians agreed to attend only if Bill didn't. They apparently were worried that his presence would make it uncomfortable for them to say what they really think of him.

So far as I can tell, the meeting's "purpose" received little attention, which I think is a shame, so I thought I would remedy that here. The purpose, brothers and sisters, is to begin the process of compiling an "oral history" of the Clinton presidency.

And I thought Ken Starr had already done that.

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