

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

“Faith, there hath been many great men that have flattered the people who ne’er loved them; and there be many that they have loved they know not wherefore, so that if they love they know not why, they hate upon no better a ground. Therefore for Coriolanus neither to care whether they love or hate him manifests the true knowledge he has in their disposition, and out of his noble carelessness lets them plainly see’t.”

“. . . our heads are some brown, some black, some abram, some bald, but that our wits are so diversely coloured; and truly I think if all our wits were to issue out of one skull, they would fly east, west, north, south, and their consent of one direct way should be at once to all the points o’th’ compass.”

Coriolanus, William Shakespeare.

THE ELECTION? YOU WANNA KNOW ABOUT THE ELECTION? Now I am aware that I have not been doing a good job of covering the upcoming election. In fact, I am aware that I haven’t been doing *any* job of covering the upcoming election. But I have an excuse. “And that is?” you ask. It is, quite simply, that I am not very good at covering elections. In fact, I’m terrible at it.

I used to do it as well as anyone, back in the good old days, many years ago, during that period that is now commonly known as B.C., or “before Clinton;” back before the baby-boomers foisted their boy Bill on an unsuspecting nation. But I don’t do it very well anymore. I finally had to ask myself, “How can you possibly make a rational judgment as to the outcome of a particular election if you are incapable of understanding how anyone, that’s *anyone at all*, could vote for Hillary Clinton, Janet Reno, Tom Daschle, Paul Wellstone, or . . . or . . . or . . . or Bill Clinton for that matter?” And I had to be honest with myself and admit that I cannot.

I could, of course, write about what the polls are telling us about the elections. This poll says this, this poll say that. But that wouldn’t add anything. Or I could say what I really think, which

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is, "I think all the Democrats will lose because they are all losers." Or, conversely, "I think all Democrats are going to win because a vast portion of the American public are losers." But then, as Bunny Berrigan sang so plaintively so many years ago, "What good would it do?"

Now let me assure you that I *know how* to forecast elections. I mean, I know the process. You forecast elections by focusing on those people who are known as "undecideds," also called "swing voters."

Here's an old joke my Father tells.

This fellow was asked why he is a Republican. He says he is a Republican because his great-great-granddaddy was a Republican, and because his great-granddaddy was a Republican, and because his granddaddy was . . .

At this point he is interrupted by his interrogator who says, "You mean the reason you are a Republican is because your ancestors were Republicans?"

To which the fellow responds, "Yes."

Well, the other fellow says, "What if your ancestors had been horse thieves?"

To which the fellow answers, "Well then, I guess I would be a Democrat."

The assumption is that a certain number of people in each district will vote for the Democratic candidate, no matter who he or she is. It is probably just a coincidence, but the number of such people in any given district is roughly equivalent to the number who, psychiatrists say, suffered permanent damage to their psyches in childhood due to improper toilet training.

Then, of course, there are a certain number of people in each district who will vote for the Republican candidate, no matter who he or she is. Needless to say, these individuals are generally believed to be those that "got it right" during the difficult potty training period.

Election forecasters need not pay attention to either of these two groups, except as a starting point from which to add that portion of "undecideds" that they determine will side with

one or the other group. In short, it is these "undecideds" who actually decide every election.

Now it may sound strange that those people with no firm opinion about anything political make the final determination as to who will run the country. But that's the way the system works. It is, I believe, reminiscent of Mark Twain's comment on the way juries are selected.

"We have a criminal jury system which is superior to any in the world; and its efficiency is only marred by the difficulty of finding twelve men every day who don't know anything and can't read." Or this.

"The jury system puts a ban upon intelligence and honesty, and a premium upon ignorance, stupidity, and perjury. It is a shame that we must continue to use a worthless system because it was good a thousand years ago. In this age, when a gentleman of high social standing, intelligence, and probity, swears that testimony given under solemn oath will outweigh, with him, street talk and newspaper reports based upon mere hearsay, he is worth a hundred jurymen who will swear to their own ignorance and stupidity, and justice would be far safer in his hands

than in theirs. Why could not the jury law be so altered as to give men of brains and honesty an equal chance with fools and miscreants?"

Now I know what you're thinking. You're thinking, "Aha Mark, you've missed something here. You've missed the fact that the "undecideds" are not as stupid as Twain's jurors, but actually are the smartest of the three groups. They are the ones who didn't worry one way or the other about toilet training when they were children, and don't worry one way or the other about the adult equivalent today, namely politics, but concentrate instead on things that matter. It is entirely fitting that these 'normal,' 'balanced' folks should decide elections." To which, my answer is a conclusive, opinionated: "All right, you win."

But be that as it may, the election calls, and being as how I write about politics for a living, I thought this week I would offer a few thoughts on the subject, recognizing that everything could change entirely if something important were to happen, something that would excite the interests of the "undecideds," something dramatic, something extraordinary, something, for example, like a particularly edifying and gripping episode of "West Wing."

The first observation I would make is that Tom Daschle looks worried and George Bush doesn't. Now this doesn't *necessarily* mean anything. Daschle always has a sort of pained look about him, like he's one of two people on an elevator after just having eaten a big meal at a Mexican fast food joint. And Bush always looks kind of silly/happy, which figures, cause as Bill Clinton demonstrated time again, even bad days for presidents are better than good days for most of us.

Nevertheless, I think Tom looks more worried than usual and George looks cheerier than usual. And I think this means that things are not going well for the Democrats.

One of Tom's problems, as far as I can tell, appears to be that he would like to focus the nation's attention, or at least the attention of the "undecideds," on the fact that they are all starving in the dark, and are likely to have to begin eating the soles of their shoes unless Democrats keep control of the Senate and regain control of the House and are thus able to control the destructive economic instincts of this president who has single handedly brought the nation to the brink of financial collapse. He also would like them to stay awake nights worrying about the "future of Social Security," instead of what they are going to buy at WalMart next Saturday.

This task is made difficult for him by several factors. The first is that he is trying to do this at a time when things aren't all that bad for most Americans; when a high percentage of citizens say they like and trust George Bush; when the attention of most Americans is so focused on the possibility of a war in Iraq and new terrorist attacks that waitresses are now acting as Junior G-men; and when the chairman of the Democratic Party is a sleazy friend of Bill and Hillary's who has a tin ear for politics. And as though that were not bad enough, George Bush is running around raising money faster than a high-class hooker at an IMF/World Bank meeting.

Now as I said earlier, I don't pretend to know how all of this will play out in November. To paraphrase Coriolanus, the greatest warrior of his time and probably the worst politician in literature, the "dissentious rogues," whom we today call voters, are busy right now "making

scabs” by “rubbing the poor itch of their opinions.” By November these scabs should be festering well, and then we shall all learn which party will be chosen to provide relief.

Early last January, shortly before I left Lehman Brothers, I wrote a “forecast” piece for the year ahead. At that time, noting that it was “way to early to make such predictions with any confidence,” I said that I expected that the GOP would pick up eight seats in the House and four in the Senate. Today, with the election six weeks away, I think that forecast was too optimistic. But I’ll stick with the general idea, namely that Republicans will increase their numbers in the House and retake control of the Senate. So there you have it. But don’t bet on it.

ISLAM IN AMERICA. THE AMC. As regular readers of mine know, I have been interested in the terrorist threat to the United States from militant Islam for some years now through my affiliation with the “Institute for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence” as well as my long-time friendship with Steve Emerson, Executive Director of The Investigative Project, and Dan Pipes, Director of the Middle East Forum, both of whom are among the nation’s leading experts on militant Islam.

One aspect of this field of study that I find extremely interesting is the link between the surprisingly numerous organizations within the United States that represent the interests of the American Muslim community and the Islamic terrorist networks that virtually everyone now acknowledges exist here.

A large number of representatives from Islamic organizations routinely appear on television shows today, most often during the past year to protest against the government’s supposed unfair treatment of young Arab men who have been arrested in the post-9/11 terrorist sweeps.

Invariably these people present themselves as representing moderate, mainstream Islamic thought, and portray the organizations they represent in this same light. A careful look at the backgrounds of some of these individuals and their organizations, however, reveals, in many cases, that either they are not as “mainstream” as they say, or that “mainstream” of Islam in America is frighteningly radical.

So, in the interests of throwing some light on this fascinating subject, and helping readers to understand who it is they are watching or reading when these people appear on television or in print, I thought I would offer the first of a series of occasional articles on some of the more notable and publicly visible people and organizations that represent Islam in America today.

I’ll begin this week with a look at the nation’s second largest Muslim organization, the American Muslim Council, or the AMC, as it is known.

The AMC was established in 1990 and is today one of two major American Muslim groups headquartered in Washington, D.C. It is, without question, one of the most politically influential Muslim groups in America.

Its website, www.amconline.org, maintains that its principal purpose is to increase the participation of an estimated seven million American Muslims in the United States in the

political and public policy arenas, and there is no question that it has done an excellent job of pursuing this goal in the past 12 years.

The AMC's lobbyists and spokesmen routinely testify at Congressional hearings and have been frequent guests at both the Clinton and the Bush White House. Candidates from both parties in congressional, state and local elections across the nation actively seek the AMC's support, most especially in those states and districts with large Muslim populations. A good example would be Michigan, where many of the state's largest counties have sizable Muslim populations.

In addition, the group holds numerous large conferences around the country throughout the year, which include attendees from the highest ranks of the American government. Recently, for example FBI Director Robert Mueller was a speaker at the 11th annual AMC conference.

In short, AMC is a significant organization that should be taken seriously. It is fast growing and highly sophisticated, with chapters in many major metropolitan areas. It publishes position papers and actively lobbies on a host of issues dealing with everything from civil rights laws to judicial reform. It has an active and aggressive media relations program, and maintains close connections with other Muslim organizations around the world.

AMC's former Executive Director, and one of the most visible advocates for Islamists in America, is Abdurahman Alamoudi. He is a frequent guest on news and talk shows and regularly writes articles that appear in the nation's largest newspapers. It is not clear why he no longer heads the AMC. My guess is that, in the post September 11 environment, he was afraid that his openly expressed radical views might bring unwanted attention to the group, which insists that it is "mainstream" and "moderate." My guess also would be that he is still extremely active within the organization.

The AMC's current Executive Director, who is not as well known in the American media, is Eric Vickers. He is a controversial figure himself, having, over a 10-year period, been admonished, sanctioned or suspended by numerous courts due to his faulty practice of law. When he was a young man, he admits, that he was "against the cops," and even today he continues to be antagonistic toward law-enforcement, even going so far as to accuse Attorney General John Ashcroft of "using national security as a pretext" to engage in a pattern of ethnic and religious discrimination. From the perspective of the AMC, however, he has the advantage, in the post September 11 environment, of not being an Arab, but an American-born black convert to Islam.

Other prominent members of the AMC Board of Directors and their locations include:

Professor Ali Mazrui, Binghamton, NY
William Aossey, Cedar Rapids, IA
Mujahid Ramadan, Las Vegas, Nevada
Dr. Jamin Barzinji, Herndon, VA
Dr. M.A. Cheema, Milwaukee, WI
Dr. Sulayman Nyang, Silver Spring, MD
Imam Hassan Quazwini, Detroit MD

AMC's website is replete with statements about the organization's noble roll in promoting American values. In fact, AMC maintains that one of its principal goals is "to promote ethical values that enhance the quality of life for all Americans." It also maintains that because of September 11, American Muslims are now "in the position of being the conscience of America."

But there appear to be some contradictions between the values that AMC literature says that the organization supports and some of the people it honors and some of the views of its senior members. Space does not permit a comprehensive rundown on the checkered past of AMC and its principal members, but the following will provide an idea of why some observers are not comfortable with this group's contention that it promotes American interests and values.

O Many years back the U.S. government formally certified Hamas and Hezbollah to be terrorist groups. In 2000, Alamoudi told a rally of his followers outside the White House that: "We are ALL supporters of Hamas. Allahu Akhbar! ... I am also a supporter of Hezbollah."

O In January, Mr. Alamoudi participated in a Beirut conference demanding a boycott of American products. He knowingly did this along side the leaders of Hamas, Hezbollah, Islamic Jihad, and al Qaeda.

O The AMC also has direct ties to individuals who have come under scrutiny of late by the FBI. For example, Jamal Barzinji, an AMC Board Member whose Virginia house and business were raided by federal authorities in an anti-terrorism investigation earlier this year, spoke at the same conference FBI director Mueller attended.

O In December 2000, AMC's Dallas chapter gave an award to Ghassan Dahduli. Eleven months later, he was deported from the United States due to his connections with al Qaeda and Hamas.

O As far back as 1995, Alamoudi was quoted in the *Jewish Telegraph Agency*, at a press conference held with other Arab groups, as stating: "Hamas is not a terrorist organization."

O In 1994, Alamoudi moderated a Pro-Sudan Symposium after Sudan was placed on the list of countries that support or sponsor International Terrorism. The AMC then provided office space to a diplomatic operative who worked for Hassan al-Turabi, the spiritual leader in Sudan who welcomed al Qaeda into his country along with a host of other radical groups that eventually wreaked havoc throughout the Middle East and the United States, as we saw on September 11.

O The AMC has also provided office space to the Algerian Islamic Salvation Front; organized events, such as press conferences, for visiting officials of the Sudanese National Islamic Front, defined by the State Department as "terrorist;" portrayed President Clinton's meeting with Salman Rushdie as comparable to the Holocaust; and attacked the media for exposing militant Islam's repression of women and their human rights.

O Documents prove that Alamoudi participated in the largest gathering of Islamic militants ever held in the United States, in June 1991. This conference was held in Northern Virginia and was sponsored by the United Association for Studies and Research (UASR), which is considered to

be the strategic arm of Hamas operating in the United States. Also in attendance at this conference were:

Musa Abu Marzook – a high ranking official of Hamas since its inception who was extradited from the United States in 1997 for his long list of connections to terrorist operations and organizations. While living in the United States, he was able to form a Hamas wing and plot terror attacks for fifteen years. He currently resides somewhere in Syria holding down the fort, so to speak, of the political wing of Hamas.

Sami al-Arian - founded the now defunct organization known as the International Committee for Palestine (ICP) in 1991, while working as a Professor at The University of South Florida (USF). Currently, Dr. al-Arian is on paid leave while the University, the courts, the FBI and the INS decide his future at USF. . Interesting note, Dr. al-Arian's brother-in-law, Mazen al-Najjar was recently deported after spending several years in an American jail due to "visa violation."

Ramadan Abdullah Shallah – served as director of Administration for another Va.-based group known as the World and Islamic Studies Enterprise (WISE). He is a member of the Board of ICP, while also employed as an adjunct professor in Middle Eastern Studies at the University of South Florida. In October 1995, Shallah left his jobs in the United States and headed for Damascus, where he became the formal head of the Islamic Jihad.

END NOTES: One man's "freedom fighter" is another man's . . . One of the things I have always found interesting is how liberal "activists" determine who are the bad guys and who are the good guys. Examples of liberal heroes who do things that would send liberals to the barricades if one of their "enemies" did them, are legion. The long liberal love affair with the Soviet Union, one of the most murderous regimes in human history, comes to mind.

The latest example is, however, a classic. According to Davi Bernstein, writing in the *Yale Herald*, the one place where Palestinians and Jews mix despite the on-going war, is the "gay scene" in Tel Aviv. According to Bernstein, this is because the Palestinian "freedom fighters," so revered by the American left, are "conducting a vicious campaign against" homosexuals. Bernstein says the Palestinian Authority "employs special police squads to capture men who have sex with each other." The lucky ones, he says, "are forced to stand in sewage water up to their necks or lie in dark cells infested with insects; others are simply starved to death."

Indoctrination Centers or Schools? I love the following quote from Neil Boortz, Atlanta talk show host writing in www.worldnetdaily.com, in which he maintains that "public schools" are really "government schools," "owned, operated, and run by government employees, from the superintendent to the dishwasher in the cafeteria."

"The truth, though, is that these are not so much schools as they are indoctrination centers. If your child is attending a Catholic school, you should expect that your child would be taught that the Catholics pretty well have this religion thing down cold. Ditto for a Jewish School, or one operated by a Christian fundamentalist church. Question: Will a government school be any different? Why would you expect a government

employee in a government institution to tell your children that government is not necessarily the answer to every problem or critter that goes bump in the night?"

Good ol' Al. This from the *American Prowler*, quoting an unnamed Palm Beach County Florida "Democratic Operative." "How can a guy who ran for president and other offices be such a lousy people person? This is a guy who never came back to us after that debacle a couple of years ago, never thanked us for the hundreds of hours we devoted to saving his sorry ass, never called, never wrote. Then he shows up in 2002 like it all never happened. He's useless."

Healthy Duck Session? There's been a lot of talk lately about a lame duck session of Congress after the upcoming election. One thing that would make such a session interesting would be if Republican Congressman Jim Talent defeated Democratic Senator Jean Carnahan for her Missouri Senate seat. This is a special election to fill out the remainder of the term that then-Governor Mel Carnahan won in 2000 even though he had already died by Election Day. You see, the winner of this race will be sworn in immediately after November 5, without waiting until January, meaning the Senate could return to GOP control for the duration of a lame duck session, regardless of how the other races turn out. During this time, according to the weekly newspaper *Human Events*, the Senate Judiciary Committee could force floor votes on many of President Bush's judicial appointments. What fun!

Does This Make Sense? Speaking of *Human Events*, get this from a front-page story in the September 9 issue by Joseph D'Agonstino, entitled "U.S. Has Given 125,000 Visas Since 9/11 To new Visitors From the Middle East."

Even though the Justice Department has not yet implemented a planned system to ensure that foreign visitors leave the United States when their visas expire, the State Department has issued over 125,000 temporary visas allowing people from the non-Israeli Middle East to enter the U.S. since the terrorist attacks of last September 11.

In a document released to HUMAN EVENTS in April, the State Department reported that between Sept. 12, 2001, and, March 31, 2002, it had given out 51,529 visas to non-Israeli Middle Easterners. In a new document released to HUMAN EVENTS last week, the State Department reported that between April 1 and August 23 it had issued another 74,101 non-immigrant, or temporary, Visas to nationals of Middle Eastern Countries excluding Israel . . . The Justice Department does not track the vast majority of these foreign visitors while they are here, nor does the government have any way of knowing if they leave when their visa's expire.

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