

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

“Like the transformation of Europe, the transformation of the Middle East will require a commitment of many years . . . But Democracy is not easy.”

--From speech by National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice at 28th Annual Convention of the National Association of Black Journalists, August 7, 2003.

“What will follow, he said, is clear. ‘Revenge is part of our tradition,’ he said.”

--From August 11, 2003 *Washington Post* article, quoting the brother of an Iraqi man who was killed by U.S. troops for firing rocket propelled grenades at them.

OVER THE EDGE WITH CONDI. I believe that the Bush administration made the decision to go to war with Iraq during the extensive review that was launched shortly after September 11, 2001 into the nature of the terrorist threat facing America.

I believe that during this review administration officials concluded that the Middle East was a snake pit that had to be cleaned out if Americans were ever again going to be able to live free from the threat of terrorism. I believe they further concluded that this cleansing process must involve actively seeking out America's enemies, permanently taking away their hiding places, and destroying them. And I think they decided that if permanently taking away their hiding places required that the governments of the countries that contained these hiding places had to be destroyed or radically altered, then so be it.

I believe that the Bush team decided that this action had to begin soon after the war in Afghanistan was under control, and that Iraq was the best place to begin, not because it was more important strategically in the war against terrorism than any other anti-American haven, such as Iran, Syria, Yemen, and Sudan, but because a good case could be made for going after Saddam Hussein, given his defiance of several U.N. mandates.

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I don't think that the administration at the time thought too much beyond the downfall of Iraq, except in very general terms, namely that the Middle East without Saddam would be better than a Middle East with him; that a Saddam-free Iraq, with lots of financial help and moral support from its "business partners" around the world, would put pressure on the region's hardliners, most especially on the young fellah that runs Syria and on the mad Mullahs of Iran; and that getting rid of Saddam would dry up an important source of funds for the radical Palestinians, and thus might help in the Arab-Israeli peace process.

I have never believed that the primary purpose behind the war against Iraq was fear of a threat of Saddam's weapons of mass destruction. I am not accusing the administration of lying about its claim that Saddam had such weapons. I am simply reiterating something I said in the June 23 issue of this newsletter in a piece entitled "What Weapons of Mass Destruction?"

"I think it is entirely likely that the White House and the Pentagon began looking for a justification to force a 'regime change' in Iraq immediately after the September 11 attacks, settled on the weapons of mass destruction threat as a primary factor, and set about building a dossier that would support the charge . . . I think it is fair to say that virtually everyone in the White House and Pentagon was absolutely certain that Saddam did indeed have WMDs and that they would be found quickly after the war was over. So, from their perspective, there was no risk in tinkering with the evidence, if that's what it took to convince a reluctant Colin Powell, as well as Tony Blair and a handful of United Nations groupies, to support the efforts."

I have never thought that this war had anything to do with a Wilsonian-type vision of "making the world safe for democracy," or of being the "world's policeman." In fact, I have always believed that to the degree that this kind of language has been used by anyone in the Bush crowd, it was used to soften the sharp edges of an aggressive, practical strategy of retribution and threat management that was, at its heart, the antithesis of altruism.

Until last week, I believed that when President Bush said that the United States would "remain in Iraq as long as necessary and not a day more," he was reflecting a preference for the good over the perfect. To put this another way, I believed that the administration's goal in Iraq was to put a pro-American strong man in charge, help him establish an army and a police force that was strong enough to keep him in charge; and get the hell out of there and let "our tyrant" do what he had to do to keep order. I thought that Egypt was a practical prototype.

I assumed that the United States would, before it left Iraq, destroy its ability to reconstitute an offensive weapons program featuring WMDS, establish a network of well paid informants throughout the country, and set up some small bases that could be used to help "friendly forces" continue the "war against terror" in neighboring Iran and Syria.

As for the Iraqis, my view was that America's exit from Iraq would leave them better off than they were when Saddam and his lunatic kids ran the show, and give them a chance to reconcile the religious and tribal hatreds that have haunted their nation for decades without U.S. interference, which would just make the process more rancorous.

And then I read an article in the *Washington Post* a week ago Friday with the headline “U.S. Shifts Rhetoric On Its Goals In Iraq,” which tended to confirm my view that the fear of WMDs had little to do with the decision to go to war with Iraq, but completely contradicted my assumptions as to the goal of the venture and how and when it might be concluded.

The supposed point of the article, which was written by Dana Milbank and Mike Allen, was that the Bush administration had begun to substitute a different rationale for the war against Iraq in place of the old weapons of mass destruction argument. This is a tired charge, and one that I had already assumed to be true, so I was not keen on reading the piece through to the end until I came to a paragraph that quoted the views of a “Bush aide, who spoke on condition of anonymity,” as saying that the United States has “embarked on a ‘generational commitment’ to Iraq similar to its efforts to transform Germany in the decades after World War II.”

In the words of the two writers, this “senior administration official” said that this commitment was part of a “long-term strategy in which the United States would spread its values through Iraq and the Middle East much as it transformed Europe in the second half of the 20th century.” Furthermore, they said that this official noted that, “this commitment to Iraq and the Middle East would be far more expansive than the administration had described to the public and the world before the Iraq war.”

My first reaction to this article was that this “Bush aide” needed to get some rest. And then, less than a week later, the *Post* ran an op-ed piece by prominent “Bush aide” Condoleezza Rice, entitled “Transforming the Middle East,” which said exactly the same thing. In fact, she asserted that America and its “friend and allies must commit ourselves to a long-term transformation” of the Middle East region. Among other things, she said that this “task” should address what she called the “freedom deficit” in the nations of the region and promote progress toward “greater democracy, tolerance, prosperity and freedom”

This was followed by a front page piece in the *Post* the very next day entitled “U.S. Promises Democracy in Middle East,” which discussed a speech that Ms. Rice had given the day before in which she, in the words of the reporter, “made a broad pledge to spread democracy and free markets to the Middle East, promising to move beyond the recent focus on Iraq and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in an ambitious but vaguely defined project to transform a troubled region.”

This time my reaction was somewhat harsher. In fact, I came to the conclusion after reading these articles over several times, along with Ms. Rice’s actual speech on the White House website, that if Ms. Rice’s views do indeed outline what George W. Bush and his foreign policy team have in mind for the Middle East, then the United States is headed down a road toward a foreign policy disaster. An ancillary thought that came to me at the same time is that these people are insane.

Now I don’t pretend to be an expert on the Middle East or on Islam. Lord knows we have enough of them around these days. But I firmly believe that there is zero chance, in this generation or any other one, that the United States can transform the nations of the Middle East into a happy little nest of peace loving, capitalistic democracies. Indeed, given the polarizing nature of America’s presence in the Middle East, I would argue that there is less chance of this

happening under the aegis of the United States than there would be if the Bush administration kept its nose out of it.

Ms. Rice describes those who disagree with her grandiose plans to make a “generational commitment” of U.S. blood and money to the goal of “transforming” the Middle East into a group of a nation’s with “democratic values” as “condescending voices who allege that some people are not interested in freedom or aren’t ready for freedom’s responsibilities.”

She equates these people, or “voices,” with those who argued in favor of racial segregation during her childhood in Alabama. “That view was wrong in 1963 in Birmingham and it is wrong in 2003 in Baghdad and in the rest of the Middle East.”

In my opinion, this is a disgraceful charge that demeans both her and the Bush administration. For starters, there is nothing racist, or morally wrong about questioning whether it would be a good use of American resources to launch such an ambitious and expensive effort, even if one thought it could be done.

But more to the point, there is nothing racist or morally wrong with having serious doubts about the potential success of a plan to instill “democratic values” into a group of nations whose citizens subscribe to a religion that is intrinsically hostile to both capitalism and democracy, with their emphasis on such things as universal suffrage, separation of church and state, a secular legal system, the payment of interest on capital, respect for the rights of individuals *qua* individuals, and religious tolerance. And this not to mention that these societies are home to dozens of large, well organized and well financed groups of murderous zealots who are bent on assuring that Western values are kept out of their homelands.

And finally, although it might be somewhat chauvinistic to bring it up, there is nothing racist or morally wrong with questioning whether it would be in the best interests of the United States if these nations actually become democracies. What pray tell would be the U.S. position if some murderous, radical Shiite cleric is elected High Potentate of Iraq? Does America cheer? Do American oil companies cheer? Do American oil consumers cheer? Do Iraqi woman who cherish freedom cheer? Does Condi cheer? Or does she try to organize a military coup to overthrow the elected regime? If I am not mistaken, there is precedent for that in at least one other Islamic “democracy.”

I would argue that if anyone is spouting off in a “condescending,” indeed racist manner, it is the hubristic Ms. Rice, who would appear to be so certain that America’s “values” are superior to those that underlie Islamic societies that it never occurs to her that well meaning individuals from these nations might have different ideas as to what might constitute a “good” society. Lo, they might even be willing to sacrifice some of the “freedoms” that Americans “enjoy” in exchange for a less decadent, less materialistic, and less “developed” society than she wishes to provide for them out of the kindness of the Bush administration’s heart.

The fact is that whether Ms. Rice knows it or not, the view that democracy is unlikely to take root and flourish in the Middle East has nothing whatsoever in common with the segregationist arguments of the 1960s. In fact, if Ms. Rice is seriously interested in discovering the roots of the concerns that some American have about the appropriateness of democracy as the proper form of

government for fledgling nations of citizens who wish to eventually enjoy the benefits of freedom, she might try the Federalist Papers, or any number of other of America's founding documents, most of which are riddled with concerns about democracy, concerns that were, by the way, informed by the views of such learned men as Plato and Montesquieu.

Indeed, she might enroll in a freshman government course at a local community college, where she would be exposed to many reasons why America's founding fathers themselves rejected pure democracy for their fledgling nation in favor of a republic, in which the whims of the masses would be restrained by a system of checks and balances that would filter pure public opinion through various decentralized institutions, most of which would be anathema in a Muslim society where Islamic law is the single most important check on individual action.

And finally, she might step outside the frenetic circle of modern day conservatism, which is made up of a busy pastiche of the big government advocates who call themselves "compassionate conservatives," the intellectually shallow, sloganeering hotspurs who rule the airwaves of conservative radio and TV commentary, and the progressive proselytizers and dogmatic dreamers at the *The Weekly Standard*.

She might leave this circle and read and study some of the thoughts of the old line conservatives, men like Irving Babbitt, who fought the lonely but good fight against American socialism, which flourished between the two world wars; and men like Russell Kirk, Richard Weaver, Peter Vierek and, Robert Nisbet, who breathed life back into the conservative movement in the years immediately following World War II; men who shunned the term ideology as applied to conservatism, but who built the foundations upon which the ideology of modern day conservatism stands, or totters as the case may be.

Should she do that, she might stumble upon some of the following thoughts from the late, great Russell Kirk, which embody the wisdom of a brilliant and prudent conservative whose lifetime of study made him distrustful of grandiose utopian ventures, whether they be launched from the right or the left of the political spectrum.

"To expect that all the world should, and must, adopt the peculiar political institutions of the United States – which often do not work very well even at home – is to indulge the most unrealistic of visions; yet just that seems to be the hope and expectation of many Neoconservatives . . . Such naive doctrine led us into the wars in Indo-China – the notion that we could establish or prop up in Viet Nam a 'democracy' that never had existed anywhere in south-east Asia. Such foreign policies are such stuff as dreams are made of; yet they lead to the heaps of corpses of men who died in vain."

"Can we suppose that forced-draft Americanization, in the name of the abstraction 'democratic capitalism', would be much more cordially received throughout the world than forced-draft Russianization in the name of 'proletarian dictatorship'?"

"Democracy may be wholly bad, or admissible with certain reservations, or wholly desirable, according to the country, the age, and the particular conditions under which it is adopted. Burke cites Montesquieu in support of this position."

“It must be emphasized that the ends of a tolerable human community are order, and justice, and freedom. Democracy, per se, is not the end or object of human existence; it is a possible means, rather, toward those three real ends of the civil social order . . . So let us set our faces against those American neoterists who would have us establish a civil religion worshipping the great god Demos. The prevalence of Christian mores among the American people was the cause of the success of the American democracy, Tocqueville discerned nearly a century ago.”

“Most of the world never was satisfactorily democratic in the past, is distinctly undemocratic today, and has no prospect of decent democracy in the future . . . The United States cannot be forever unsettling the governments of client states, or small countries, or of allies, on the ground that they are not sufficiently democratic in obedience to the doctrines of Rousseau, or that they ‘discriminate’ against somebody or other, or that they prefer traditional economies to a full-blown abstract capitalism. One thinks of the aphorism of the late Madame Nu: ‘If you have the United States for friend, you don’t need any enemies.’ Successful foreign policy, like political success generally, is produced through the art of the possible--not through ideological rigidity. It will not do for the Department of State to repeat, like an incantation, ‘Democracy good, all other government bad.’ In short, I am saying that a quasi-religion of Democratic Capitalism cannot do duty for imagination and right reason and prescriptive wisdom, in domestic politics or in foreign relations. An ideology of Democratic Capitalism might be less malign than an ideology of Communism or National Socialism or Syndicalism or Anarchism, but it would not be much more intelligent or humane.”

Or, on the other hand, Ms. Rice might continue to hang around the Bush White House, spearhead the cause she has outlined, and become a key figure in the best selling political science book of the second half of the 21st century, *The Rise and Fall of the American Empire*.

THE WMDs ARE COMING. They’re going to find weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, you know. And soon. More accurately, I should say that they’ve probably found weapons of mass destruction already, and we’ll all know about it soon.

How do I know this, you ask? Do I have some high-placed source that the collective investigative units of *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Washington Times*, and the rest don’t have? Do I know something that Donald Rumsfeld, Colin Powell, and Condi Rice know but are not willing to share? Well, no.

But I think that if one combines all of the snippets of information that have been made public over the last few weeks, and then adds the hints offered by those who have seen classified intelligence on Saddam’s weapons programs, then one conclusion is, frankly, inescapable. To wit: the weapons are there, and the Bush/Blair coalition will soon be ready, willing, and, most importantly, able to prove it.

The first hint that there are, indeed, WMDs in Iraq, and that they have either been found or will be found shortly, came two weeks ago in the form of comments made by David Kay, a former U.N. weapons inspector and the current head of the Bush administration’s WMD search team.

On July 31, Kay was in Washington to testify before the Senate Armed Services Committee and Select Committee on Intelligence. Though Kay's testimony was secret, both Kay himself and others who heard his testimony told reporters that progress was being made. *The Washington Post's* account of Kay's comments included the following:

"We are gaining the cooperation, the active cooperation, of Iraqis who were involved in that program," David Kay told reporters . . . Describing the activities of the Iraq Survey Group, which he helps direct, he said: "We are, as we speak, involved in sensitive exploitation of sites that we are being led to by Iraqis."

Kay said "solid evidence" is being produced, but he indicated that it would not be made public "until we have full confidence it is solid proof of what we're to talk about."

And while most of what Kay knows was revealed behind closed doors, over the past couple of days, some in Washington have been suggesting that the information Kay possesses is far more definitive than most would suspect. Late last week, *National Review* Editor Rich Lowry and syndicated columnist Bob Novak independently reported that Kay and his team have, indeed, uncovered significant evidence and are planning to reveal that evidence within the next six to eight weeks. On Saturday, Novak wrote:

Former international weapons inspector David Kay, now seeking Iraqi weapons of mass destruction for the Pentagon, has privately reported successes that are planned to be revealed to the public in mid-September.

Kay has told his superiors he has found substantial evidence of biological weapons in Iraq, plus considerable missile development. He has been less successful in locating chemical weapons, and has not yet begun a substantial effort to locate progress toward nuclear arms.

Senior officials in the Bush administration believe Kay's weapons discoveries should have been revealed as they were made. However, a decision, approved by President Bush, was made to wait until more was discovered and then announce it – probably in September.

Now, it might seem easy enough to dismiss these reports as the collaborative work of partisan hacks, as both Lowry and Novak are admitted and avowed conservatives. But anyone who knows anything about the current internecine squabbles on the political right also knows that it is entirely unlikely that Lowry (an alleged "neocon") and Novak (an acknowledged "paleocon") would be working in concert, particularly on the issue of Iraq.

And if they are not working together, then either there is more than one source leaking the information about Kay's inspections or there is one source who is so intent on circulating the information that he or she has presented it to multiple outlets. And while neither scenario speaks directly to the veracity of the claim, either tends to make the reports seem at least plausible.

A second reason to believe that WMDs have either been found very recently, or will be found very soon, is that it turns out that the Iraqis did, in fact, have armaments of which we were

unaware and which were hidden extremely well. On July 31, reports began to filter out from Iraq that U.S. military search crews looking for WMDs had stumbled upon Saddam's Soviet-built air force buried in the sand. According to an early AP report:

Some of Iraqi's missing air force has turned up down below.

Search teams, some hunting for Iraq's alleged weapons of mass destruction, found dozens of fighter jets from Iraq's air force buried beneath the sands, U.S. officials say . . . Various officials differed in opinion as to whether the buried aircraft could ever fly again. Many of the planes were buried intact with minimal efforts to protect them from the sand.

Rep. Porter Goss, chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, said the discovery pointed to how far Iraqi forces went to conceal their activities. The Florida Republican was briefed on the discovery during his recent trip to Iraq.

"Our guys have found 30-something brand new aircraft buried in the sand to deny us access to them," Goss said. "These are craft we didn't know about."

Last Tuesday, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld confirmed that coalition forces had indeed found several Soviet MiG fighters. And while Secretary Rumsfeld did not corroborate the number of planes found, he did say that "It wasn't one or two."

And while the planes could hardly be called WMDs, their discovery raises an important point about the search for chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons, which has too often gone unsaid in the finger-pointing game that has engrossed Washington in the 100 days since the end of combat in Iraq, namely that these things can be very hard to find. Or, as Rumsfeld himself put it:

Something as big as an airplane that's within . . . a stone's throw of where you're functioning, and you don't know it's there because you don't run around digging into everything on a discovery process. So until you find somebody who tells you where to look, or until nature clears some sand away and exposes something over time, we're simply not going to know.

But, as we all know the absence of evidence is not evidence of absence.

A final reason to believe that the WMD story is about to blow is that several political figures not associated with the Bush administration, but who are in a position to know about Iraq's weapons, have been saying things that would indicate that they believe the WMDs exist.

Three weeks ago, for example, Bill Clinton appeared on Larry King's show and defended Bush, saying, among other things, that 1998's Desert Fox may not have taken out the weapons he *knew* Saddam had. "We might have gotten it all," he said, "we might have gotten half of it; we might have gotten none of it." He also declared that, "it is incontestable that on the day I left office, there were unaccounted-for stocks of biological and chemical weapons" in Iraq.

The next day, the collective right-wing punditry (including Mark and I) was trying to figure out why Bill would say such obviously truthful yet helpful things. Most assumed he was trying to position Hillary properly just in case she jumps in the race, which, I suppose, seems plausible.

Nevertheless, I can't help but think that Bill spoke in support of Bush simply because he knows what the facts are, even though I know that this view violates Feinberg's Law (named for its originator, our old friend Bob Feinberg), which posits that the only time one can be wrong about Washington is when one is not cynical enough. Unlike most of the high-profile Democratic hysterics, Bill has actually seen the much-maligned intelligence and, I suspect, doesn't want to look like an ass when the stuff is, at long last, uncovered.

Another man who has seen the intelligence on Iraq and who likely knows the truth is Florida Senator and Democratic presidential wannabe Bob Graham, the former chairman of the Select Committee on Intelligence and current ranking member of the Veterans Affairs committee. Like Clinton, Graham undoubtedly knows that the WMDs are there. Unlike Clinton, this has not stopped him from disparaging President Bush, which he does both vociferously and frequently.

Over the last several weeks, though, Graham has changed his tune ever so slightly. Rather than accusing the President of fabricating evidence of WMDs, as many of his fellow presidential hopefuls have done, Graham has shifted his focus to the "imminence" of the Iraqi threat. Instead of saying that Saddam had no WMDs (because he *knows* that Saddam did), Graham has taken to saying that Saddam did not have WMDs that were "***positioned in a way for imminent use***," a seemingly subtle yet extremely important modifier.

Last week, the editors of *The Wall Street Journal* took Graham and other Democrats to task for this "imminence invention," claiming that "all of this is simply an invention after the fact, and a dangerous one." The *Journal* editors suggest that such a standard of imminence is risky, in that defining the point of imminence would constitute a very difficult calculation, which could lead to disaster if done poorly. And while this is undoubtedly true, I think it misses the point. Here it is they who are not cynical enough.

You see, Graham and the others don't really care about enshrining "imminence" as the standard for U.S. action. They just want to be able to keep up their cheap, partisan attacks on Bush after the WMDs are found. Note if you will, that the others who have taken to focusing on the imminence of the threat, rather than the existence of threat are folks who, like Graham, have seen a good chunk of the intelligence.

Consider, for example, Al Gore, who last week sent up his "I Want Back Into the Race" trial balloon in a speech on Iraq to a group called "Moveon.org." In the speech, the pitiable and still unemployed former Vice President declared that two of the "false impressions" President Bush had given the country before the war were that:

Saddam ***was about to give*** the terrorists poison gas and deadly germs that he had made into weapons which they could use to kill lots of Americans . . .

[And] Saddam ***was on the verge*** of building nuclear bombs and giving them to the terrorists....(emphasis added)

Or take as another example, Teddy Kennedy, who serves on the Armed Services Committee. When Teddy emerged from the aforementioned secret hearings at which weapons inspector David Kay testified, he made his own push for “imminence” being the only criterion that matters. While others, such as Chairman John Warner (R-VA), came away from the hearing noting that “good, solid progress is being made,” Teddy came out muttering that, “It’s looking more and more like a case of mass deception. There was no *imminent* danger, and we should never have gone to war.” (again, emphasis added)

Anyway, all of this is a sign, I believe, that a significant discovery or revelation about WMDs is right around the corner.

Throughout the hunt for weapons, both President Bush and Prime Minister Tony Blair have remained steadfast in their public assertions that WMDs would, eventually, be produced. When the controversy was at its height, I wondered if this was wise, as such resoluteness could have caused them serious problems, and could very easily have cost Blair his job. It looks now as though it will turn out that they were right. In fact, I believe that there is a good chance that they will be proved so in the next several weeks. There are simply too many reasons not to think otherwise.

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