

# 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

“John Kerry, we know, is running against John Kerry: his own voting record. But there is another record that John Kerry is running against, and this has to do with his very emergence as a Democratic politician: Kerry, the proud Vietnam veteran vs. Kerry, the antiwar activist who accused his fellow Vietnam veterans of the most heinous atrocities imaginable.”

-- Mackubin Thomas Owens, Vietnam Veteran and a professor of strategy and force planning at the Naval War College.

**SOME THOUGHTS ON KERRY'S MULTILATERALISM.** In September 2002, President Bush introduced to the world a new foreign policy model to replace the old “containment” paradigm that had become obsolete more than a decade earlier at the end of the Cold War. The principal buzzword in the Bush plan was “preemption,” which reflected his contention that the threat against the United States had changed markedly in recent years as a result of new technologies coming into the hands of its enemies. Bush put it this way.

Enemies in the past needed great armies and great industrial capabilities to endanger America. Now, shadowy networks of individuals can bring great chaos and suffering to our shores for less than it costs to purchase a single tank. Terrorists are organized to penetrate open societies and to turn the power of modern technologies against us.

Thus, Bush noted, the United States would henceforth “disrupt and destroy terrorist organizations by identifying and destroying the threat before it reaches our borders.” And he added, that while the United States would “constantly strive to enlist the support of the international community” in this effort, it would nevertheless, “not hesitate to act alone, if necessary, to exercise our right of self defense by acting preemptively against such terrorists, to prevent them from doing harm against our people and our country.”

I welcomed this new “strategy” in an article entitled “A Man, A Plan, Preemption.” Among other things, I noted that I had only recently made the case that this president needed to do what his father and Bill Clinton had both failed to do, which was to “formulate a coherent vision of America’s role in the post cold war period and explain it to the world.” And voila! He did it.

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In retrospect, while I wrote what I think was a good article on this new paradigm, I didn't really realize at the time how politically astute it was for Bush to force the debate over American foreign policy into a friend/enemy structure. This is solid ground for a military hawk, and as any veteran debater knows, the manner in which the issue is framed is crucial to the outcome.

As Bush knew, even his harshest critics could not disagree with either the concept of preemption or of acting unilaterally if necessary. This was, after all, little more than the articulation of a principle that every sovereign nation that has ever existed would endorse as a practical axiom. Indeed, even Senator Kerry routinely supports the concept of preemption when he acknowledges that the President must respond immediately and without prior consultation with anyone to a "threat requiring urgent action."

Thus, as I predicted in my article at the time, the debate over Bush's new policy quickly shifted "from *whether* any nation should be preempted to *which* nations should be and under what circumstances." This has led to seemingly endless discussions over whether President Bush had reason to believe that the threat from Iraq justified the preemptive attack and whether he had enough multinational support to go ahead with it. And while this debate hasn't always gone Bush's way, it has been conducted on his turf, in that it deals with the legitimacy of a war option rather than the superiority of a peace option.

By arguing that the strike against Iraq was not justified because the threat wasn't "imminent" and that his coalition was too small and didn't include several important nations, Bush's critics concede the point that the war option is justified under certain circumstances. And thus, these critics find themselves debating, whether they like it or not, under what circumstances another such attack might be justified in the future.

Needless to say, Senator Kerry is going to attempt to frame this debate quite differently, in hopes of making it friendlier to the position of someone who represents a party with a substantial peace contingent. For starters, Kerry has already begun to argue that the "war on terror" shouldn't really be considered a "war" at all, in the true military sense. For example, in response to a question by Tom Brokaw in the candidates' debate in South Carolina last month as to whether the Europeans are correct when they charge that President Bush has exaggerated the threat of terrorism, Kerry made the following point.

The war on terror is less – it is occasionally military, and it will be, and it will continue to be for a long time. And we will need the best trained and the most well equipped and the most capable military, such as we have today. But it's *primarily an intelligence and law enforcement operation* [emphasis added] that requires cooperation around the world – the very thing this administration is worst at. And most importantly, the war on terror is also an engagement in the Middle East economically, socially, culturally, in a way that we haven't embraced, because otherwise we're inviting a clash of civilizations.

This response by Kerry was somewhat risky politically, but tactically brilliant. From his perspective, he must shift the focus of the discussion of the "war on terror" away from the concept that the United States is confronted by several highly antagonistic nations united in

a evil plot to destroy it via the use of small bands of state sponsored terrorists using obscenely deadly weapons of mass destruction.

Instead, he must try to get the public to think of the “war on terror” as being waged against a large, international criminal operation, similar to the mafia, which operates from within a group of nations that, if treated properly, have the potential for joining American efforts to fight against the terrorist in their midst, but, if antagonized by threats, will refuse to help in the battle. From this perspective, the “war on terror” does indeed become a law enforcement problem requiring extensive international cooperation and understanding, as well as considerable diplomatic work at the highest levels, which in turn requires the good offices of the United Nations.

Also from this perspective, the efficacy of launching attacks on sovereign nations becomes highly questionable, except in the direst circumstances, and certainly not something that should be the primary factor around which an entire foreign policy is formulated.

The second aspect of Kerry’s effort to change the framework of the discussion concerning the “war on terror” is his insistence on making the importance of international cooperation a key issue in any foreign policy discussion.

This is not friendly ground for President Bush. Since taking office, he has shown little respect for the authority or importance of the United Nations. And relative to the war in Iraq, he routinely dismisses complaints that he is acting unilaterally by simply providing a list of nations that have endorsed his action there. These positions are popular with conservatives, but, as Kerry understands, they can be made to seem both arrogant and dangerous to some voters if presented in the proper context.

Now, it is important when considering this issue to understand that Kerry and Bush operate under distinctly different definitions of what constitutes multilateralism, distinctions that date as far back as the first Gulf War.

From the perspective of both Presidents Bush, the requirement for multilateral consideration in their respective wars against Saddam Hussein was fulfilled when each sought and gained the support of a respectably large group of nations. The first President Bush was considerably more successful than his son in this endeavor. But the idea was the same in both cases. “The United States wishes to go to war. Here is our justification and our plan of attack. Will you support it?” When many did, the effort automatically became “multilateral,” in their respective opinions.

Kerry’s definition of multilateralism is quite different. From his perspective, simply assembling a group of nations that will agree among themselves to back a military attack on another nation does not define successful multilateralism. This explains why Kerry is unimpressed with President Bush’s list of allies in the Iraqi conflict.

When Kerry speaks, as he often does, of “a bold progressive internationalism,” he is referring to a means of avoiding war rather than justifying going to war. This is reflective of an oft-noted difference between liberals and conservatives as to the role of war in diplomacy. Conservatives,

the theory goes, believe that war is one of the principal tools of diplomacy. Liberals believe that war is the failure of diplomacy.

This explains, in part, why Kerry voted against the resolution authorizing the first President Bush to go to war to eject Iraq from Kuwait. He felt that U.N. sanctions should have been given time to work. And this can also help to explain, in part, his vote in favor of the resolution authorizing the second President Bush to attack Iraq. He was, he says, voting not for the use of force but in the hopes that the threat of force would prompt the international community to step up its efforts to convince Saddam to meet Bush's demands.

Now I know that this is a purely subjective observation on my part, but I believe that Kerry's position has a reasonable chance of playing well with a large number of Americans, who are growing tired of the war in Iraq and who, according to some polls at least, are becoming less and less concerned about the threat of terrorism. This latter point was illustrated in the following paragraphs from an article by Byron York published on February 4<sup>th</sup> on *National Review Online*.

A look at exit polls from the five states in which such polls were conducted on Tuesday suggests that few Democratic voters — especially those who voted for Edwards — care much about terrorism and national security.

Pollsters asked voters the following question: "Which ONE issue mattered most in deciding how you voted today?" Voters were given six choices: taxes, education, health care/Medicare, the war in Iraq, national security/terrorism, and the economy/jobs.

In four of the five states for which exit polls are available — Arizona, Missouri, Oklahoma, and South Carolina — Democratic voters placed national security/terrorism at the bottom of the list. Only in tiny Delaware, on the east coast and not far from Ground Zero, did Democrats place more emphasis on the issue — and even then, it was in next-to-last place.

Much will depend on whether Kerry can present his case for an intense diplomatic effort against terrorists, as opposed to threats of bold military action, in a way that doesn't portray him as unable or unwilling to act independently and aggressively with military force if necessary.

While this may sound like an easy assignment, Kerry may find that his effort will be made difficult by the radical peace contingent within his party, the members of which are not as prone as he might be to appear "reasonable" and assuring to middle-of-the-road voters about the war option. In addition, his weak voting record on military expenditures could raise questions about his commitment to a strong defense as the best path to peace. We'll see.

**SOME THOUGHTS ON KERRY'S WAR RECORD.** As anyone who is paying any attention knows, Senator and presumptive Democratic nominee John Kerry has staked his claim on the presidency in large part on his biography, or at least on that part of his biography that deals with his service in Vietnam. One has to look very hard at the candidate's campaign ads to see any mention of policy, ideology, or anything other than "service in Vietnam." And while this approach has played very well in the primary battles, his nonstop nattering about being a war hero could, I think, come back to haunt him when the race gets serious.

Now, let me acknowledge right up front that Kerry is, indeed, a war hero, and as such deserves the respect, admiration, and gratitude of every American, not just those whose lives he directly impacted in Vietnam. True heroes are hard to find (although numerous Vietnam war heroes have found a home in the Senate in recent years, including Kerry, John McCain, Congressional Medal of Honor winner Bob Kerrey, triple-amputee Max Cleland, and Chuck Hagel) and one should not underestimate the courage and poise necessary for a very young man, which is what he was at the time, to have done what Kerry did.

That said, from a strictly political standpoint, it is not unlikely that his nonstop references to Vietnam and “leadership,” which appear to have become the foundation of his campaign platform, could eventually become a little shaky, even among those voters who are likely to be most receptive to it. Already the conservative press has begun mocking Kerry’s self-aggrandizing references to his record, and it is just a matter of time before the mainstream media joins in the needling, good natured or otherwise.

Kerry is, after all, not the first Vietnam veteran to face Bush (Al Gore), nor is he the first *bona fide* war hero to challenge him (John McCain). And if McCain’s even more impressive record of valor and allegiance was not enough to beat George W. by itself, then Kerry’s will likely not be enough either. He will, at some point, need to move past Vietnam and offer other, more applicable reasons why he should be given Bush’s job.

As things stand now, the contrast between Kerry’s service record during the Vietnam years and Bush’s works in the challenger’s favor. Here you have two guys, about the same age, from similarly privileged families, who graduated from the same school while the war was raging. One heeded the call to duty, enlisted, won a silver star, a bronze star, and three purple hearts. The other had his family pull some strings and he ended up doing his service in the Texas National Guard. Clearly, Kerry shines in the comparison.

But Kerry has been unable to control himself of late and has run off at the mouth, quite possibly threatening the favorability of the comparison. Both Kerry and Democratic National Committee Chairman Terry McAuliffe have joined in the Michael Moore-driven resuscitation of the thoroughly debunked tale of Bush’s desertion of his National Guard duties when he moved to Alabama to help with a Senate campaign in 1972.

Now, after you stop laughing at the very idea of FOB extraordinaire Terry McAuliffe knocking anyone for dodging the draft, note that by hitting low and going negative, Kerry has opened himself up to return fire from both longtime foes and Bush supporters who will not hesitate to make an issue of the negative side of Kerry’s relationship to the Vietnam war.

Though Kerry has dragged out several fellow vets to appear at campaign events and in campaign ads to sing his praises, he is, to say the least, hardly universally loved by those who served in Vietnam. And his post-service conduct and affiliation with such anti-warriors as Hanoi Jane Fonda is a primary reason why. A recent piece by Mackubin Thomas Owens, one of Kerry’s fellow Vietnam Vets and a professor of strategy and force planning at the Naval War College, sums up said conduct. Owens wrote.

Kerry hooked up with an organization called Vietnam Veterans against the War (VVAW). Two events cooked up by this group went a long way toward cementing in the public mind the image of Vietnam as one big atrocity. The first of these was the January 31, 1971, “Winter Soldier Investigation,” organized by “the usual suspects” among antiwar celebrities such as Jane Fonda, Dick Gregory, and Kennedy-assassination conspiracy theorist, Mark Lane. Here, individuals purporting to be Vietnam veterans told horrible stories of atrocities in Vietnam: using prisoners for target practice, throwing them out of helicopters, cutting off the ears of dead Viet Cong soldiers, burning villages, and gang-raping women as a matter of course.

The second event was “Dewey Canyon III,” or what VVAW called a “limited incursion into the country of Congress” in April of 1971. It was during this VVAW “operation” that John Kerry first came to public attention. The group marched on Congress to deliver petitions to Congress and then to the White House. The highlight of this event occurred when veterans threw their medals and ribbons over a fence in front of the Capitol, symbolizing a rebuke to the government that they claimed had betrayed them. One of the veterans flinging medals back in the face of his government was John Kerry, although it turns out they were not his medals, but someone else’s.

Several days later Kerry testified before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. His speech, touted as a spontaneous rhetorical endeavor, was a tour de force, convincing many Americans that their country had indeed waged a merciless and immoral war in Vietnam. It was particularly powerful because Kerry did not fit the antiwar-protester mold — he was no scruffy, wide-eyed hippie. He was instead the best that America had to offer. He was, according to Burkett and Whitley, the “All-American boy, mentally twisted by being asked to do terrible things, then abandoned by his government.”

Of course, as Owens continued, “the entire Winter Soldiers Investigation was a lie.” It was a lie based on the 1970 book *Conversations With Americans* by Mark Lane, much of which was later refuted by James Reston Jr. and Neil Sheehan who, according to Owens, “demonstrated that many of Lane’s ‘eye witnesses’ either had never served in Vietnam or had not done so in the capacity they claimed.”

In any case, a large number of Vietnam Veterans believe that Kerry’s post-service actions slandered them and the nation on whose behalf they fought. While Kerry appears to believe that his Vietnam service is an unmitigated positive, it is quite possible that it will have a significant downside as well. Already folks like Owens are suggesting that Kerry should be forced either to recant or defend his defamation of his fellow American soldiers, and I expect for an organized effort on the behalf of veterans opposed to the Senator to emerge to counter his version of his Vietnam experience.

Finally, I would imagine that someone on the Bush team, though almost certainly not the President himself, will suggest strongly that Kerry’s Vietnam experience is a metaphor for his entire political career, a carefully staged production in which he tries to be on both sides of every issue, much as he has with regard to Iraq.

Owens concluded his article by noting that Kerry's much-ballyhooed speech denouncing the war in Vietnam "was not the spontaneous, emotional, from-the-heart offering that he suggested it was." Rather, it was, in the words of H. G. 'Jug' Burkett and Genna Whitley, authors of *Stolen Valor*, "carefully crafted by a speech writer for Robert Kennedy named Adam Walinsky, who also tutored him on how to present it."

No doubt someone on the Republican side will make the argument that Kerry's waffling on the Iraq war was just as carefully orchestrated and, as such, is a crass attempt to manipulate the war and the lives of American service personnel for political gain.

**BILL, HILLARY AND WHAT'S-HIS-NAME.** Over the next several weeks, we will almost certainly see a good deal of speculation on the subject of Howard Dean's spectacular collapse, which is arguably unlike any other in American political history. At some point, either Mark or I will probably take part in this analytical free-for-all. In the meantime, there is one part of the story of Dean's collapse that is, I think, fairly obvious, though you'll likely not hear or read about it from too many other sources.

Why did Dean lose? Well, he lost, at least in part, because he crossed Bill and Hillary Clinton, and like so many others before him, he found out just how politically talented and powerful that political tandem is and how successful the two of them are at vanquishing those who come between them and their dreams of political power.

Back in September, when retired General Wesley Clark entered the primary race, I speculated that his candidacy was part of an orchestrated effort on the part of the Clintons to wrestle the nomination away from Dean, who at the time looked unbeatable. Specifically, I wrote.

It is, much to the General's chagrin I'm sure, widely accepted that he is merely the Rodham Clintons' pawn in a game designed to thwart Howard Dean's efforts to make himself titular head of the Democratic Party, where they themselves are precariously perched on the loftiest of roosts. Polls over the weekend showed that Clark appears to have a legitimate chance to knock Dean out the frontrunner's spot in the now 10-deep Democratic primary contest. Nevertheless, most observers still seem to think that this is somehow more about Bill and Hillary than it is about Wesley Clark . . .

Howard Dean has been propelled into the lead in most polls in part because he has managed to tap into the anger that boils in many of the party's activists. But more importantly, his success rests on the fact that he is the only candidate thus far to raise serious money. And not only has he raised cash hand-over-fist, but he's done so without the help of either the Clintons or the traditional party machine. And thus, he has made himself a serious threat not just to Joe Lieberman and John Kerry but to Bill and Hillary's future plans as well.

Nothing bears out this contention as well as the low-profile but extremely important squabbling between Dean and the party's official leadership. Dean has made little secret of the fact that he wants Terry McAuliffe, the Clintons' longtime friend, perennial bagman, and extraordinary mortgage banker, out as the head of the Democratic National Committee, which he could certainly do as the Party's nominee.

This would mean that not only are the Clintons no longer the party's sole successful fundraisers, but that they no longer pull the levers at the Party headquarters . . .

And so Bill and Hillary have decided that they must stop Howard Dean from winning the nomination. And while it would be nice if they could do so while maintaining Hillary's viability for '08, they will, I'm convinced, do whatever it takes to stop Dean. And to stop him, they do not need for Clark actually to win the nomination. They simply need him to "muddy the waters" enough to ensure that anyone but Dean gets the nod next July in Boston.

And muddy the waters they did. No one will ever know whether the Clintons thought Clark was actually a legitimate candidate, or if they knew all along that he would be the political disaster he has become, but also knew that he would successfully dilute and divide the lunatic anti-war vote enough to allow someone else to unseat Dean. After getting a look at Clark's preposterously arrogant personal papers over the weekend, one is inclined to suspect the latter of the two, guessing that Bill had probably had about all that he could stand of his self-important and somewhat disloyal fellow Arkansan and decided to use the General's ultimate demise to his own benefit. But, we will probably never know for sure.

In any case, in Kerry, the Clintons got precisely what they wanted out of this, namely a nice, relatively normal, establishment candidate who looks formidable enough on the surface but who may well have a difficult time withstanding the scrutiny and intensity of a long, hard campaign. Moreover, they got the one such establishment candidate who is virtually guaranteed not to want to pull Hillary onto his ticket, if for no other reason than his own wife (that's pronounced Tah-ray-zuh, you Philistine) is convinced of her own uber-importance and would be unlikely to want to share the title of "nation's most important woman" with the "hired help" from Arkansas.

So now the Clintons' handpicked bagman, Terry McAuliffe, will retain his role as Chairman of the national committee through the election. Dean fan Al Gore will retain his role as the party's biggest, most recent, and most constant loser. And most important, Bill and Hillary will retain their preeminent spot in the Democratic Party's hierarchy, and will continue to be the kingmakers and the party's principal fundraisers. *American Spectator* editor-in-chief R. Emmett Tyrrell summed up this role nicely in a recent *Wall Street Journal* article. To wit:

Today the party of Roosevelt and Truman is the party of Clinton & Clinton. Bill Clinton remains a mesmerizing figure to those he does not repel. Hillary's appeal is in some ways broader than his. As a U.S. senator she has gained stature and positioned herself as a "Scoopette" Jackson, but one for the progressive *bien pensants*. She can represent the transcendent dreams of the feminists, the gay rights activists, the environmental rigorists.

Behind the scenes, Clinton servitors run the Democratic Party, beginning at the DNC with Chairman Terrence McAuliffe. Though the McCain-Feingold "campaign reform" law has left Democratic campaign committees with depleted coffers the Clintons' neo-Georgian mansion in Northwest Washington has become a money magnet, with generous lobbyists rolling up in their black Lincolns nightly to make New York's junior

senator a richly endowed political donor. Hillary also presides over a New Age political machine, starting with a host of fundraising honeypots with cute names such as HILLPAC and Hill's Angels. Long-time Clinton loyalists are directing tens of millions of dollars to organizations under their control, including a liberal radio talk-show network and a moneyed think tank just off K Street, the Center for American Progress. Clinton lieutenant Harold Ickes is directing funds to what is expected to become a \$250 million behemoth political organization called America Votes, which will rely on shared polling data, research, and mailing lists, including "Demzilla" – the data bank on voters maintained by the DNC. "It doesn't take much to figure out what the issues are and the messages you need to be helpful," the clever Mr. Ickes told one reporter.

If Dean had gone on to win the nomination, as so many of us expected, then all of this, plus Hillary's presidential ambitions, would have been threatened. As it is, though, Bill and Hillary have no worries.

In the final analysis, I suppose that I should have known that Dean's support was broad but very shallow. The most important issue this year for most Democrats is quite simply hatred of President Bush. And while Dean based his campaign on that hatred, he was never going to be the guy to bring the necessary catharsis, because he was never going to beat Bush in a general election match-up.

But more to the point, Dean got on the wrong side of the one Democrat in the last quarter century to have actually beaten a Republican in a general election. And while crossing the Clintons is certainly not the entire story behind Dean's collapse, it is just as certainly part of it. Bill and Hillary could hardly force voters to ditch Dean, but because they control so many of the behind-the-scenes levers of the party, they were able to ensure that the race stayed competitive on paper at least until Dean could shoot off his mouth and do himself in, which he inevitably did.

Whether Howard Dean actually learned the lesson here I don't know, but it was a lesson about which Newt Gingrich and a handful of other Republicans could easily have forewarned him: woe beith to he who crosses Bill Clinton.

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