

# 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

“The good want power, but to weep barren tears.  
The powerful goodness want: worse need for them.  
The wise want love; and those who love want wisdom;  
And all best things are thus confused with ill.”

--*Prometheus Unbound*, Percy Bysshe Shelley

**BUSH UNBOUND.** Psst! You wanna know a secret? Okay, here it is. The United States is going to go on the military offensive sometime soon after President Bush is reelected. Count on it. The principal target will be Iran. But Syria and North Korea will be in the sights also.

I am not talking about “increased diplomatic pressure” here. I am talking about air strikes and possibly even military incursions into Iran, along with unequivocal instructions to Syria and North Korea outlining what actions must be taken by them in order to avoid immediate military strikes by the United States. I am talking about the kind of instructions that are intended to be provocative. I am talking about big sweat beads forming on the foreheads of the Mad Mullahs in Iran and the young scions of tyranny who run Syria and North Korea.

The pundits haven't figured this out yet, of course. On both sides of the political spectrum, they are dragging out the quadrennial clichés about this being the “most important election in . . . memory . . . in the history of nation . . . in the history of the world . . . since Lincoln . . . et cetera, et cetera.” The choice of comparisons varies with how dramatic the individual wants to sound.

But no one seems to have figured out that the reason this particular election is so terribly important is that if George W. is reelected the “war against terror” will get very much hotter, very much faster than it will if John Kerry wins. Some liberal doves seem to sense this when they say they are frightened by the prospects of a second Bush term. But for the most part, these statements seem to be nothing more than political hyperbole, rather than reflections of specific concerns brought on by thought.

There are a variety of reasons for this. One is that Kerry constantly assures everyone that he is as tough and as dedicated to the security of the United States as George Bush. So people seem

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automatically to assume that this means that he would, if elected, conduct the ongoing anti-terrorism campaign and the post-war period in Iraq in much the same manner as Bush, with a few minor variations having to do with increased consultation with other nations.

But this is nonsense. For starters, Kerry's intention to seek greater multinational support for his actions, particularly among the European states, would have a moderating impact on his administration, especially in its first year. Just the fact that he believes that multilateralism should be a centerpiece of the "war on terror" is a strong indication that he would move more slowly and cautiously than President Bush. And in any case, it is difficult to imagine that the Kerry foreign policy team would be as hawkish as the trio of Cheney, Rumsfeld, and Wolfowitz.

But more importantly, those who believe that Kerry and Bush are on the same page when it comes to determining how to deal with militant Islam are, I believe, wrongly assuming that Bush has been chastened by his experience in Iraq and will, as a result, act more cautiously in the future. I think those who believe this are either badly misreading George Bush or are simply engaging in wishful thinking.

A perfect example of this appeared in a May 30 article in the *LA Times* entitled "The Preemptive-War Doctrine Has Met An Early Death In Iraq," by Ivo H. Daalder, a Senior Fellow in Foreign Policy Studies at the Brookings Institution, and James Lindsay, VP and Director of Studies at the Council on Foreign Relations.

Claiming that the doctrine of preemption has "fallen on hard times," the authors open their article by recounting the standard liberal line that the war in Iraq was a terrible mistake. This is, of course, a legitimate opinion. But they then flatly state that this mistake has "overstretched" the U.S. military so badly that it no longer has the preemption option open to it, even if the public would go along with such action, which they maintain would be a "tough sell" given that "polls show that a majority [of Americans] now believe that the war in Iraq was not worth fighting."

The authors put it this way: "The problems that have plagued the U.S. occupation [in Iraq] over the last year make it highly unlikely that preemption is a tactic that he [Bush] will employ elsewhere anytime soon."

Now there are, in my opinion, a number of problems with this analysis, the most important of which is that no one seems to have told George Bush that the loss of 900 combatants in Iraq has so weakened the U.S. military that he could not launch a strike on Iran or North Korea even if he thought it were necessary, or that he could probably not win the support of the American public if he chose to do so.

In fact, the most amusing thing about the views of these two foreign policy "experts" is that they openly acknowledge in the final sentence of their article that Bush does not know that the preemption doctrine is "for all intents and purposes, dead," because he is, according to them, not "a man given to analyzing his missteps."

Thus, we have the delightful probability that when Bush preemptively strikes again, Daalder and Lindsay will be elbowing each other in the ribs like Beavis and Butthead and laughing about how Bush is too stupid to know that he can't do what he is in fact doing. The wonder is that these

two, who clearly share the European belief that Bush is a brainless “cowboy,” nevertheless seem to think, when considering the cowboy’s future actions, that he will be as brilliant as they are and act according to their assumptions concerning the demise of the preemption option.

One wonders if these two have ever considered what would prompt a man who is too simple to analyze his own mistakes to suddenly change his mind about something he has said at every appropriate opportunity from the day he announced the preemption doctrine two years ago to the present, namely that September the 11th, 2001 taught him a lesson that he will never forget, which is that “*America must confront threats before they fully materialize.*” Indeed, I heard him say it in person last Wednesday night.

They seem to think that the answer to this question is that abject fear will prevent George Bush from facing the immense military might of either Iran or North Korea, both of which, in the words of Daalder and Lindsay “present far more daunting military challenges than Iraq did.”

This is, of course, a highly disturbing claim, given that before the recent war, Iraq was widely reported to have been a formidable military power in its own right, having what was said at the time to be the fourth largest army in the world.

Nevertheless, Daalder and Lindsay forcefully support their claim with the observation that Iran has “three times the population, far greater domestic political support and many more friends beyond its borders” than Iraq did, and that North Korea “probably has nuclear weapons and, by virtue of the fact that Seoul sits only a few dozen miles from the demilitarized zone, it effectively holds the South Korea capital hostage.”

They then follow up on these observations with the even more disturbing revelation that the United States military has been so weakened by the Iraq war that while “it is still more than capable of preventive strikes against terrorist camps or *presumed* [emphasis added] weapons factories [but not presumably *real* weapons factories], it is in no position to wage a preventive war, let alone sort out the consequences.”

Yet, once again, there is no indication from these two that George Bush is aware of either America’s alarming military weakness or the awesome military power and strategic superiority of Iran and North Korea. And given that he isn’t too bright to begin with, one wonders why these two seminal thinkers think he would be deterred by these circumstances.

In fact, I would guess that this dimwitted President is not even aware yet that the new measure of military power among military cognoscenti like Daalder and Lindsay is total population, as in Iran has “three times the population” of Iraq. Old-fashioned folks like Bush probably still measure military power in terms of airplanes, armor, technological superiority, and the number of well-trained and well-armed troops who are willing to fight. From the new Daalder/Lindsay perspective, one shudders at the prospects of a war with Bangladesh, with its 140 million people, or Nigeria with 135 million, both with twice as many citizens as the all-powerful Iran.

Nor would I suspect that Bush is aware that the Mullah’s have “far greater domestic political support” than Saddam had, especially given widespread reports of significant unhappiness within a large portion of Iranian society with the reigning theocracy there. And he certainly can’t yet

know about the military support that the Mullahs might receive from the “many more friends” that they have “beyond their borders” than Saddam had, since it is difficult to determine who these friends-of-Iran-but-not-friends-of-Saddam’s Iraq might be, or how enthusiastic they would be in launching a military effort against the United States in support of the Mullah’s.

And as for North Korea holding Seoul hostage, one can’t help but doubt that Bush has yet to hear of this frightening situation, although he does seem to be aware that this possibility could arise if North Korea is allowed to continue to develop its nuclear weapons. And given Bush’s simple mindedness, he probably feels – foolish as he is – that this possibility would be more of an excuse to preempt than a reason not to.

So I return to my original premise. I believe there is a strong likelihood that the Iraqi war has not rendered preemption dead, but has in fact made it much more likely. In fact, I simply cannot imagine that President Bush will spend his second term sitting on his hands watching as Iran and North Korea build nuclear weapons. And I cannot help but assume that if he finds that he cannot prevent these two states from becoming nuclear powers with non-military measures, then he will, to paraphrase his own words, militarily “confront the threats before they fully materialize.”

Nor can I imagine that Bush will sit back and watch quietly as Iran aggressively supports the insurgency in Iraq, thus threatening what is certainly the most important foreign policy initiative of his first term and what is likely to be the historical centerpiece of his entire presidency. I think that a better bet is that he will move and move hard against Iran following his reelection.

You see, contrary to the views of Daalder and Lindsay, President Bush does indeed have the military power to do this, and oddly enough, it is located in the right place to move quickly. And in addition to Iran’s nuclear ambitions and its direct attempts to undermine the government of a neighboring, sovereign nation, Bush has several other good reasons to do so, including the 9/11 Commission’s recent findings that Iran currently harbors senior al-Qaeda leaders and was more culpable in the 9/11 terrorist attacks than Iraq.

Finally, I would just add that contrary to the views of Messrs. Daalder and Lindsay, the checks on Bush’s use of his preemptive war doctrine have nothing to do with either America’s alleged military weakness or the mighty military power of any of its adversaries. Whether they know it or not, the United States has the raw military power, despite losing 900 combatants in Iraq, to preemptively strike the entire world if it chose to do so.

The restraints that exist against preemption are political, not military. And while these political restraints are real, they are not insurmountable, especially given the fact that George Bush will, if reelected, not have to be concerned about reelection. And interestingly, he will not even have to be concerned about the election of his Vice President, who is unlikely to seek office again when this term is up. He will be, in fact, like Shelley’s Prometheus, unbound and unbowed.

In short, if anyone thinks that George Bush will not actively strive in his second term either to win the war on terror decisively or at least to reduce significantly the enemy’s capability to threaten the United States in the future, then he has not been paying attention to this man.

**What Culture War? *This Culture War.*** Long-time readers know that Mark and I almost never comment on articles that appear on the editorial page of *The Wall Street Journal*. It is not that we don't find value in these pieces. Indeed, precisely the opposite is the usual case. But we presume that if a story is in the *Journal*, most of our readers will see it and will therefore consider our comments superfluous.

On a rare occasion, though, we see something in the *Journal* that demands comment. This happened last Thursday, when, for a variety of reasons, an article caught my attention. First, it was written by a man, Morris Fiorina, who is among the true giants in the study of American government; a man whose reputation and standing in the academic political science community are eclipsed by few others; and a man whose simple theory about the bloated federal bureaucracy being the primary culprit in the disappearance of competitive (or marginal) Congressional races is, in my opinion, one of the best, most important, and least appreciated explanations of big government's impact on the functioning (or dysfunctioning) of democracy.

Second, the premise of the piece, which is entitled "What Culture War" and based on Fiorina's new book *Culture War? The Myth of Polarized America*, is that the "culture war," which has become so much a part of the political discussion over the past decade or more, especially among conservative activists, does not really exist, at least for most Americans.

Fiorina thus dismisses one of the best known and most important truisms in the modern conservative movement, an idea about which Mark and I have written extensively over the years, namely that the left and right of American politics are locked in a grand struggle fought almost exclusively on the turf of cultural issues. Moreover, the author argues that President Bush may be making a tremendous mistake and, at the very least, is taking a "high-risk gamble" by building his campaign around this culture war, which he says is largely the creation of the media, a handful of politicians, and various politically active elites. The culture war's existence, Fiorina asserts, is simply not borne out by the available evidence. In his *Journal* piece, he put it thusly:

Observers of contemporary American politics apparently have reached a new consensus around the proposition that old disagreements about economics now pale in comparison to new divisions based on sexuality, morality, and religion, divisions so deep and bitter as to justify talk of war in describing them.

Yet research indicates otherwise: Publicly available databases show that the culture war script embraced by journalists and politicians lies somewhere between simple exaggeration and sheer nonsense. There is no culture war in the U.S. – no battle for the soul of America rages, at least none that most Americans are aware of.

Certainly, one can find a few warriors who engage in noisy skirmishes. Many of the activists in the political parties and the various cause groups do hate each other and regard themselves as combatants in a war. But their hatreds and battles are not shared by the great mass of Americans – certainly nowhere near to "80-90 percent of the country" – who are for the most part moderate in their views and tolerant in their manner.

Needless to say, I think Fiorina is wrong, or at least mostly wrong. While he almost certainly has a point that the vast majority of Americans don't openly recognize that they are engaged in a

culture war, that doesn't mean that the war isn't real or that it doesn't greatly affect the balance of power between the left and the right in this country.

Indeed, in my opinion, the culture war and its effects underpinned the political realignment that began in the late 1960s with Nixon, progressed through the election and re-election of Ronald Reagan, produced a shocking Republican takeover of Congress in 1994, and enabled the GOP to gain unified control of Washington (House, Senate, and White House) in 2000. Furthermore, I believe that the culture war burns as hot today as ever. In fact, this is one of the chief reasons that I continue to believe President Bush will win reelection, in spite of the conventional wisdom that says otherwise, Fiorina's suggestion of a "high-risk gamble" notwithstanding.

If I understand his argument correctly, Fiorina believes that the culture war does not exist simply because the vast majority of Americans is unaware of such a clash and therefore does not participate in the "battles" waged by the elites. This is, I believe, a striking misreading of the origins of the war, its manifestations, and its effects on the electorate. The culture war is not, as many political strategists and analysts apparently believe, an evenly pitched battle in which half the country has squared off against the other half. It is much subtler than that.

This war was launched full scale nearly forty years ago by a handful of leftist elites, whose goal was (and is) to raze the traditional moral and social underpinnings of U.S. society. Since at least Vietnam, the fringe elements on the political left have been attacking the values and beliefs held by the vast majority of Americans, at times quite stealthily, at others more brazenly. More often than not, it is only a small contingent of culture warriors on the right who appreciate the attacks for what they are. But occasionally, the battle takes on a higher profile, polarizing the nation.

In the process of making his argument, Fiorina addresses, albeit ever so briefly, the current hot front in the culture war, gay marriage. "To their embarrassment," Fiorina writes, noting the failure of the Federal Marriage Amendment (FMA) to gain even a majority of Senate votes, "some GOP senators learned this week that ordinary Americans view gay marriage in somewhat less apocalyptic terms than do the activists in the Republican base."

I'm not entirely sure what exactly Fiorina means by this. If he wishes to show that the culture war is purely an elite phenomenon, then this is an extremely odd place to start. For starters, 48% of the "elites" in the U.S. Senate voted two weeks ago in favor of the FMA, which would have banned gay marriage. That percentage is only marginally higher than the percentage of the general population that supports such an amendment. It is also considerably *lower* than the percentage of the population that firmly opposes gay marriage. In this case, the "elites" are hardly, making "voters appear polarized," as Fiorina appears to suggest.

More to the point, by singling out the Republican opponents of gay marriage, Fiorina is grossly misrepresenting the situation by misidentifying the source of the agitation on the issue. It is, after all, not as if GOP leaders sat down one day and just decided it might be a good idea to take the drastic step of amending the constitution simply because they are homophobes. No, in pushing the FMA, Republicans were merely attempting to forestall the imposition of culturally radical redefinition of the institution of marriage by leftist activists in contravention of both the expressed desire of the people and the democratic process.

The issue of gay marriage exploded into the public arena not because the right is anti-gay or because the country is deeply divided on the issue, but because the radical left, aided and abetted by the Supreme Court of Massachusetts, forced the explosion. Nevertheless, conservatives have been accused of “inciting” a cultural battle or, in Fiorina’s terminology, of presenting a “polarized position,” and this has been done despite the fact that conservatives’ only crime in this case was to defend the status quo, to defend the will of the people, and to defend the democratic process against the leftist culture warriors’ favorite weapons, the judicial fiat. On this particular front in the culture war, conservatives chose neither the time nor the field of battle.

The narratives associated with a great many other cultural issues follow similar paths. But perhaps the most notably similar storyline is that followed in the abortion debate. As I noted last week, a great many religious and political observers consider abortion to be one of the key factors in the redistribution of partisan affiliation that began in the 1970s. And as with gay marriage, the issue was forced on the American public by a leftist elite in contravention of both public opinion and the democratic process. Indeed, there is significant agreement among serious scholars of the issue that had the abortion question been resolved over time, with respect to both federalist prerogatives and the will of the people, it would be considerably less controversial, divisive, and politically significant an issue than it is today.

As it is, though, abortion is a serious issue that raises the hackles of a great many Americans, not just those on the traditional fringes of the respective political parties. Just as with gay marriage, conservatives are generally blamed both for stoking the embers of the debate and for adopting belligerent and uncompromising positions that make most Americans uncomfortable, again despite the fact the empirical and anecdotal evidence does not bear out such conclusions.

Last October, in a piece entitled “The Abortion Gambit,” Mark noted that “the pro-life movement . . . has made a conscious decision not to make the perfect the enemy of the good, which is appealing to the moderate, compromise-oriented center,” while the pro-choice movement has remained adamant in its support for all types of abortion, including the heinous partial-birth procedure, on demand and without restrictions, thereby revealing themselves to be radicals whose extremism is considered odious by the majority of Americans.

Fiorina’s evidence may show that most people side neither with the radical leftists nor with the radical rightists, but on the issue of abortion at least, most Americans tend to believe that the pro-life faction is more reasonable. And the plurality of those leaning toward the pro-lifers appears to be increasing. Both surveys and anecdotal evidence suggest that younger Americans are generally far more pro-life and far more offended by the radical pro-choice crowd than were their parents. In his “Public Square” column in the most recent issue of his journal *First Things*, Father Richard John Neuhaus cites some recent polling data, noting:

Recent months have seen a number of reports indicating that opposition to abortion is growing dramatically among young people. In a Gallup survey of youth aged thirteen to seventeen, only 19 percent say that abortion should be legal in all circumstances (the current regime of *Roe v. Wade*), while 72 percent say that abortion is morally wrong and should be entirely prohibited (32 percent) or permitted only in rare instances (40 percent).

There are numerous explanations for this shift toward the pro-life side in the abortion debate, starting with Mark's explanation above. *The Wall Street Journal's* OpinionJournal.com has tapped an interesting vein with its recurring discussions of what editor James Taranto calls the "Roe Effect," which suggests that the shift is demographically based and has to do with the fact that abortion supporters are, by definition, more likely than abortion opponents to have abortions and are therefore less likely to produce as many children to whom to pass on their beliefs. And indeed, pro-lifers have, on average, three children compared to one for pro-choicers. But there is a more simple explanation: children who grew up with abortion as a political reality know that they could, at least in theory, have been aborted themselves, and given this, they may find the entire practice and those who support it to be a touch barbaric. Father Neuhaus elaborates:

There is the deeply poignant but seldom mentioned factor that millions of people born in the last thirty years know that they have a brother or sister, or even brothers and sisters, who were aborted. I have often tried to imagine what I would think were I one of those children missing a sibling. "Honey," Mom explains, "we just weren't ready for another baby." I know the pro-abortion people say that a child told this is filled with warm feelings that he or she was really wanted. Maybe so, but I expect there are many more who cannot erase from their minds that Mom had their brother or sister killed. Not to mention the moral and spiritual ramifications of knowing that their existence was contingent not upon an act of nature or gift of God but solely upon their parents' decision. "Thanks for not having me killed, Mom." That touches upon the spiritually weird and murky, but I expect it has a great deal to do with the growing number of young people who view abortion with horror.

In any case, it is clear that the abortion debate, like the gay marriage debate, essentially pits the radical left against the rest of the nation. While there may have been a point not too long ago when it was the radical pro-choicers against the radical pro-lifers, that dynamic appears to have changed over the last decade or so. And while some on the left may try to deny this new reality, it is difficult to dispute honestly. Even Cokie Roberts, a traditional, liberal-left, quasi-feminist political journalist if ever there was one, felt compelled to acknowledge this point yesterday, when she declared on ABC's "This Week" that there is a "mainstream" in the abortion debate and that the liberal elites, in this case John Kerry and John Edwards, have placed themselves outside of that mainstream by opposing the ban on partial-birth abortion. As Cokie noted, the Democrats in general and John Kerry in particular have "a real problem" on abortion.

Now, I know that there are those, on the left, on the right, and in the dispassionate middle who would suggest that Republicans also have "a real problem" on abortion, and that the GOP would be better off if it nixed the culture war and put the cultural issues on the proverbial backburner. Indeed, our straw man in this exercise, the eminent Professor Fiorina suggests that the GOP in general and the Bush campaign in particular are poorly served by a strategy that focuses on the "few million Republican-leaning evangelicals who did not vote in 2000," and would likely be better off trying to attract "some modest proportion of 95 million other non-voting Americans, most of them moderates, not to mention moderate Democratic voters who could have been persuaded to back a genuinely compassionate conservative." I doubt it.

In my opinion, part of the reason that Professor Fiorina concludes that "no battle for the soul of America rages, at least none that most Americans are aware of," is because he is looking for

evidence in the wrong place. I might agree with Fiorina if I believed the culture war to be a battle between equally aggressive and equally obnoxious fringe groups on the left and right. But since I don't believe that, I think the erstwhile elusive empirical proof of the war is readily available, if one looks beyond what the American electorate says and looks instead at what it does.

Throughout most of the last three-quarters of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Democratic Party dominated American electoral politics. In 1977, in the wake of Watergate, 51% of Americans identified themselves as Democrats, well more than double the 21% who called themselves Republicans.

Slowly but surely, though, the GOP has overcome the Democratic Party's advantage. In 1968, 1972, 1980, and 1984 Republican candidates for President won landslide victories; Republicans won seven of the last 10 presidential contests; in 1994, the GOP took control of both houses of Congress, and, were it not for the faithless actions of one Vermonter and a brief 20-month Senate blip, both houses would now be in their tenth consecutive year of GOP control; and perhaps most important, as of last October, Republicans pulled into a statistical tie with Democrats in party ID (30% and 31%, respectively) for the first time since at least the late 1920s.

Some keen observers of U.S. politics suggest that this shift in voting preferences and party identification is a racial (or, more accurately, racist) phenomenon. No less an expert than Bill Clinton has argued repeatedly that Republicans took advantage of latent Southern unhappiness with the Civil Rights movement, sending "coded" racist signals to white voters, on the way to building a working majority coalition of racists, bigots, homophobes, and other general rabble.

And while such imaginative political analysis might help Democrats create the delusions necessary for them to feel better about their fall from grace and to maintain their moral superiority, it also masks their real problem. It is no mere coincidence, in my opinion, that the beginning of the shift in party ID coincided almost precisely with the mainstream Democrats' acquiescence to the radical elements within their party who saw the war in Vietnam as an opportunity to remake society without the inhibiting "drivel" of traditional values and beliefs.

Most Americans may not be aware of the fact that they are on the front lines of a culture war, but they are. Nearly 40 years ago, the radical left declared war on the values and beliefs of average Americans. And a great many of those under attack responded, albeit subconsciously, by finding a political party more accepting of traditional belief systems.

Morris Fiorina, a brilliant and revered political scientist, thinks that the risk this election season is to Republicans who believe too strongly in the significance of this culture war. I'd suggest that the risk is precisely the opposite. The danger is to Democrats, who continue to allow their party's stance on cultural issues – including now the war on terror – to be dominated by a fringe element that finds the lives and values of the majority of Americans to be revolting. vertibray

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## THE POLITICAL FORUM

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