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## THEY SAID IT

"A conservative cannot draw up a Conservative Manifesto to match the Communist Manifesto; for the true conservative does not believe that society can be properly governed by any inflexible creed of abstract doctrine. The conservative is not a fanatic. He knows that the problems of humanity are tortuously intricate and that some of these problems never will be solved at all. If he is honest, he cannot preach to the multitude that they have only to shout for his Manifesto and the terrestrial paradise is theirs. He knows that we are not made for Utopia. He abjures ideology, though he is firmly attached to principle – a distinction made by Burke in 1787. He knows that every nation and every community must apply general conservative principles in varied ways, empered by prudence. The conservative has no blueprint which will enable the social engineer to govern all men uniformly at all times."

--*Beyond Dreams of Avarice*, Russell Kirk

## REALLY BIG BROTHER

It's a lousy proposal, you know? I mean the 9/11 Commission proposal to create the position of National Intelligence Director (NID) to oversee all of the government's spy agencies. This view is in the distinct minority, of course. In fact, the groundswell of support for the idea is so great that the battle in Washington is no longer over whether to create such a position, but which congressional pooh-bahs should get their name attached to the legislation, and exactly how much power should be vested in the post.

President Bush himself joined the fray last week by issuing a series of executive orders and directives expanding the authority of the CIA director and establishing a national counter terrorism center to oversee and coordinate the operations of the 15 organizations involved in the work of gathering intelligence. This was described as an interim step toward implementing the grander plan for NID as soon as Congress gets around to authorizing it, probably sometime next year.

And Bush is not alone in his enthusiasm for the creation of an intelligence czar. In fact, comments on the limited measures he made last week, both from the Kerry camp and various senior members of Congress, seemed to center on its inadequacy when compared to the great legislative initiatives to come.

### In this Issue

*Really Big Brother*

*Republicans for Kerry?  
Give Me a Break*

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Part of my opposition to the NID idea has to do with what I would call the benefits of redundancy. As has been demonstrated countless times since the end of World War II, and specifically during the Carter and Clinton presidencies, some presidents make very bad choices when selecting individuals to head up the nation's important intelligence and law enforcement agencies, such as the FBI and the CIA.

So I can't help wondering why a commission that supposedly studied the errors and omissions leading up to the September 11 attacks would decide that it would be a good idea to concentrate all the intelligence gathering authority in the entire nation in the hands of one person, when it is all but certain that there will come a time when the individual chosen for that job will be an incompetent nitwit.

Given the nature of the task, would it not be better, I ask, to have several people, independent of each other, in charge of the delicate job of gathering and assessing intelligence information, with the hope and expectation that one of them would demonstrate some individual initiative, take a somewhat different tack from the rest, bring a little imagination to the table, and make a call that the others missed? Looking back to the dark days of the Carter administration, was it not a good thing that the only agency that Stansfield Turner could cripple was the CIA?

Now it is true that not a single person in any senior intelligence position in the Clinton administration was capable of recognizing the terrorism threat that was developing during the 1990s. So it would, of course, not have mattered if any one of them had been put in charge of all the others. But it is, I believe, important to understand that *it wouldn't have helped either*.

But my biggest concern about the NID proposal is not that a dunderhead will eventually be in charge of all intelligence gathering operations. My biggest concern is that a political hack will one day get this job, someone like Bill Clinton's hapless and ethically challenged National Security Advisor Sandy Berger or his sleazy little political confidant Bruce Lindsay.

After all, if information is power, this new position of National Intelligence Director is likely to become the most powerful job ever created in the U.S. government, with the exception of the presidency itself. So it stands to reason that any president worth his political salt will determine that loyalty is the primary qualification for the job, rather than expertise in what is known in the spy business as tradecraft.

And while this doesn't necessarily mean trouble, I fear that it could lead to trouble if and when the time comes that the White House is home to another deeply corrupt and amoral president like Bill Clinton, who demonstrated time and again that his interest in intelligence gathering was almost exclusively related to political skullduggery rather than to protecting the United States from foreign threats. I stated this concern as follows in the June 10, 2002 issue of this newsletter in an article entitled "Unintended Consequences."

I am, after all, old enough to remember that this nation once had an unscrupulous, unethical president. Indeed, it seems like only yesterday that America had a president who had a full-time private investigator named Terry Lenzner working for him, his party, and his wife, whose firm, Investigative Group International, specialized in digging up dirt on people. *Vanity Fair* described this firm in an article entitled "The President's Private Eye," as "Washington's most feared and vilified private-investigation firm." Clinton's erstwhile buddy, Dick Morris, called it "the White House secret police."

Indeed, it seems like only yesterday that this nation had a president who, shortly after taking office, accumulated over 900 confidential FBI files on Republicans, and also had former FBI General Counsel Howard Shapiro running back and forth between the Bureau and the White House like some sort of bicycle courier. When last heard from Shapiro was at a big D.C. firm where his clients included, of all people,

Terry Lenzner. As they say in Disney Land, "It's a Small World After All."

Indeed, it seems like only yesterday that this nation had a president who had a well-known pornographer named Larry Flynt running interference for him in something called an "impeachment investigation." A friend of Clinton operative James Carville, Flynt announced, during the "Monica thing," that he had evidence of sexual improprieties on six or so top Clinton critics in Congress, told the world about one, and promised to release information on any of the others who continued to attack Bill over Monica. It was a brilliant gambit, since many more than six legislators had reason to fear that they might be on his list, and many more than six suddenly became strangely silent during the subsequent impeachment proceedings. Cute. Very cute.

But this stuff isn't a joke. Information is power, as the saying goes, and, as Bill Clinton proved time and again, dirty information is real power in a town like Washington, especially when it is in the hands of a dirty politician.

I shudder to think of the kind of information that the next unethical president will have at his fingertips, when the computers begin their task of producing "continuously adaptive profiles" via "comprehensive, enterprise wide surveillance" of the myriad information that is now, and will in the future become available to "Big Brother." On that day the grim ferryman will come for the already ailing Fourth Amendment.

Now I am aware that both Congress and the White House have proposed that various oversight functions be established within all three branches of government to assure against civil liberty violations. But one could be forgiven for doubting whether any of these would

be effective against a concerted attempt to abuse the substantial powers being vested in the new NID, whose office will be right down the hall from the President's.

When the Clinton crowd went to great lengths to obtain FBI files on their political enemies, they were caught because there are formal mechanisms in place designed specifically to assure that this type of interplay between the Bureau and the White House is not easily accomplished. With an NID firmly ensconced in the White House, who has management, budgetary and need-to-know authority over all the intelligence gathering agencies, the next president who seeks this kind of information will likely find it to be a cakewalk.

In fact, it is worth noting in this context that the nature of the intelligence gathering function changed markedly with the end of the Cold War and even more so with the advent of the war on terror. No longer is the primary focus of such work on the actions of foreign governments and their agents. Today, a principal concern is with individuals, and especially individuals residing within the borders of the United States itself.

Certainly these efforts are concentrated on foreign nationals, especially those from the Muslim community. But it is the nature of terrorism, as compared to government-sponsored espionage, that virtually anyone can become a legitimate target of suspicion. And it is the nature of the new computer based technologies for spying on individuals that the old legal barriers restricting such efforts to certain citizens designated as targets by a court of law are crumbling so rapidly that virtually every citizen will eventually wind up in some corner of the web of government curiosity.

In late 2002, it was reported that the Pentagon was developing a vast new computer system called "Total Information Awareness" that would, in the words of the man in charge of the project, Admiral John Poindexter, "breakdown the stovepipes" that separate the commercial and government databases

with powerful computer programs that would help government intelligence gatherers to “become much more efficient and more clever in the ways we find new sources of data, mine information from the new and old, generate information, make it available for analysis, convert it to knowledge, and create actionable options.”

Virtually every computerized database in the nation was destined to be integrated into this vast computerized governmental information network, including credit card transactions, telephone and e-mail communications, banking and other financial dealings, travel documents and hotel receipts, medical records, Social Security and drivers license information, vast storehouses of legal records, and even library visits.

The idea was supposedly strangled in the crib shortly after it came to the attention of the public. But to my knowledge no such “exciting” new technological proposal has ever been halted for very long by the fears of those who oppose it. Indeed, the entire history of the march of technology can be summarized in the words of Robert Oppenheimer, the father of the atomic bomb, “If something is sweet, you have to go ahead with it.”

In any case, as I said in the above-mentioned article of June 10, 2002, I am not trying to make the case here that no new surveillance authority should be granted to the executive branch agencies or that some reorganization is not merited. The fight against terrorism is fundamentally a trade off between liberty and safety, and there is little question that, given the nature of this enemy and the weapons he is using, some adjustments that favor security are going to have to be made in this equation.

I am simply saying here that it is, in my opinion, a very bad idea to place all of the enormous power of the federal intelligence gathering system in the hands of a single individual, who will sit at the right hand of the president. In my opinion, that could be more dangerous to the future of America’s open society than the terrorism that this plan is designed to thwart.

Better, I think, to keep the power of this brute divided and under the oversight of individuals further down the chain of command than the president himself, who already has more power than the founding fathers imagined.

## **REPUBLICANS FOR KERRY? GIVE ME A BREAK**

It was only a matter of time, I suppose. After all, it’s one of the mainstream media’s favorite stories any time of any year, but especially so in the few weeks leading up to November in a Presidential election year. So no one should have been surprised that Friday, the final news day before the opening of the Republican National Convention in New York, witnessed the umpteenth revival of the tried and true “internecine GOP warfare” theme, with special focus this year on the “Republicans who hate Bush” sub-theme.

All on the same morning, *The Financial Times* ran a long piece about Wall Street’s Republican big shots who are leery of Bush and his policies and have therefore quit donating to and raising money for the President’s reelection campaign; the UPI newswire ran a story about a Philadelphia-area GOP delegate who became the first (and presumably the only) to publicly remove himself from this year’s convention because, he says, he can no longer stomach President Bush or the direction in which he is taking the country; and most importantly, *The Wall Street Journal* ran an op-ed contribution by Niall Ferguson, a history professor at Harvard and senior fellow at Stanford’s Hoover Institute, who argued that a second Bush term would be disastrous for conservatives who should, accordingly, support John Kerry.

Taken individually, each of these stories was merely annoying. Taken together, they demonstrate what Mark and I have been saying for years now, namely that the American political landscape is being transformed and that the Republican Party is itself changing in accordance with this transformation. Even before 9/11, the old paradigms that governed American politics for the better part of a century were

changing. Since that fateful day, the pace of change has accelerated dramatically and has, naturally, left some traditional conservatives behind, disgruntled and forlorn – including, as we have often indicated in these pages, Mark and I.

But while there are more than a few of us conservatives who are leery about the direction of the GOP and of American politics in general, only a small handful have taken their natural inclination to resist change to its illogical extreme, believing that President Bush's sometimes ineffectual attempts to traverse this changing landscape have made him unacceptable as a conservative leader. In fact, much to the chagrin of the mainstream media types who promulgate and accentuate the GOP-in-shambles theme, what these above-mentioned stories do not demonstrate, is that this changing conservative paradigm is undermining the unity in the Republican Party.

In fact, as I have written a handful of times before, both for *The Political Forum* and, during the run-up to the 2002 midterms for Lehman Brothers, the dangerous “wavering base” theory of GOP problems is largely a fabrication, invented by a handful of GOP elites in Washington and New York, who want desperately to be thought of as more important than they are, in collusion with the mainstream media, which wants desperately for these conservative elites to be right and for Bush to be in serious peril with Republicans. There are, as I've said, certainly more than a few Inside-the-Beltway types who are unhappy with the course charted by this administration, but the case that this unhappiness is widespread outside the Beltway is simply not borne out by the available data.

Indeed, two recent polls, both published last week, show that support for President Bush among actual rank-and-file Republican voters is near universal. An *L.A. Times* poll released on Thursday showed that Republicans nationwide favor Bush over Kerry 93%-3% (a difference of 90%-age points.) In contrast, Democrats support Kerry by a margin of 81%-15% (a difference of only 66 points).

A similar breakdown was found in a Mason Dixon poll released on Saturday, measuring voter sentiment in Florida, the ultimate swing state prize. According to Mason Dixon, eleven percent of Florida Democrats would be willing to vote for President Bush, while only five percent of Republicans would be willing to do the same for Kerry. Additionally, Kerry's support among Democrats lags Bush's support among Republicans by five points (82% and 87%, respectively).

If these numbers come as something of a surprise, there's a reason. For months now, the mainstream media has been contrasting what they see as GOP disunity with the “heart-warming” tale of how Democrats have put aside all their old differences and have rallied behind John Kerry, not because they particularly like him, but because they see the defeat of President Bush as a goal that supercedes all others.

The simple fact that this “unity vs. disunity” theory appears less grounded in reality than in the hopes and dreams of this nation's journalists doesn't seem to make any difference. It has been decided that this is the storyline of this election, empirical evidence to the contrary be damned.

This is not to say that the views of discontented Republicans, such as those catalogued in the above-mentioned stories, are not significant or politically interesting. It is just that their significance has nothing to do with the outcome of the upcoming election. They are interesting because they provide an insight into what the Republican Party is leaving behind as it moves into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, just as recent complaints of disgruntled labor leaders and radical black activists about the Democratic Party's indifference to their respective agendas tell the tale of the atrophying extremities of traditional liberalism.

Take, for example, the unhappy Wall Street fundraisers cited in Friday's *Financial Times* piece. According to the paper, chief among the issues that have these folks most upset with the President is the deficit. Now, it is understandable why Democrats believe that Kerry would be able to improve the nation's fiscal balance, since one of the central points in their case against

Bush, faulty as it is, is that his “tax cuts for the rich” and extravagant military spending are the primary culprits behind deficits’ reemergence.

But for a Republican to profess a belief that Kerry would be more fiscally prudent requires either gross insincerity or a huge dose of self-destructive anger at the passing of the good old days of Calvin Coolidge. Indeed, for anyone to think that any presidential candidate today is going to run successfully on a platform specifically touting plans to reduce the deficit to zero via the pathway of reduced spending is delusional. It won’t happen. As the kids would say, “That’s so yesterday.” Note that even President Reagan, a man almost universally lionized by these very same conservatives, didn’t lose a whole lot of sleep worrying about budget deficits, despite the fact that those spawned in part by his initiatives were far greater as a percentage of GDP than are President Bush’s.

And while conservatives can likely agree that Bush has not exactly been spectacular on the spending/deficit issue, certainly they should also be able to agree that circumstances would not exactly improve if Kerry is elected. As one might have expected from a Democrat with his voting record, Kerry has promised voters a federal program for virtually every problem or issue imaginable, yet has offered few specifics as to how they would be financed, except to say that he will raise taxes on “the rich.”

By his own campaign’s estimates, Kerry is promising over \$850 billion in new health care and federal education spending. He is also promising another \$350 to \$650 billion in additional expenditures on such things as aid to states, alternative energy research, and veterans’ health care. Kerry’s proposed spending binge is so grotesque, that even *The Washington Post*, not exactly a mouthpiece for the Republican Party or the Bush administration, had to concede last week that the Senator’s promises to cut the deficit are dubious at best. To whit:

Sen. John F. Kerry’s pledge to reduce record federal budget deficits is colliding with an obstacle that may be growing higher by the week: his own campaign commitments.

A *Washington Post* review of Kerry’s tax cuts and spending plans, in addition to interviews with campaign staff members and analyses by conservative and liberal experts, suggests that they could worsen the federal budget deficit by nearly as much as President Bush’s agenda [making the 2001 and 2003 tax cuts permanent]. If projected savings from unspecified cuts do not materialize, Kerry’s pledges could outstrip those of the president, whom the Democrat has repeatedly accused of unprecedented fiscal recklessness.

In case you were wondering, by the way, the principal element of the deficit-worsening “Bush agenda” to which the *Post* refers is making the 2001 and 2003 tax cuts permanent. And speaking of taxes, if the *Financial Times*’ Wall Street Republicans are not so enthusiastic about a second Bush term, perhaps they would rethink their support if they realized that taxes will go up if John Kerry is elected President . . . guaranteed.

I know a lot of Republicans console themselves with the thought that Kerry won’t be able to raise taxes because the GOP will control Congress. But the fact of the matter is that Congress will have little say in the matter. Both the capital gains and dividend tax cuts, which I reckon might have some effect on the livelihoods of these Wall Street players, are set to expire at the end of 2008 and, if Kerry is President, they will go up, and there is nothing, short of passing an extension of the cuts by a veto-proof majority, that Congress will be able to do about it.

So, is the best approach to this problem for old-line conservatives to cheer for Kerry in November? Will that bring back the good old days when conservatives were real conservatives? As I mentioned earlier, British historian Niall Ferguson seems to think so.

In fact, if I understand his argument correctly, in his estimation, the whole of American conservatism would be better served if George Bush loses in November, thereby allowing the party to regroup, recommit to their principles, and reemerge in 2008 as the true home of the ideals of Burke.

My temptation is to simply ignore this as an intentionally ridiculous and provocative argument. After all, Ferguson is a “controversialist” who has made his name and reputation in part by promulgating outrageous theories. That said, he is also a highly respected historian, who is revered by a great many conservatives both here and in Great Britain and whose views therefore deserve a certain amount of respect and consideration. So I thought I would close with some contrary thoughts on his theory, as reinforcement for my own theory that American conservatism is in the midst of an externally-imposed evolutionary process that is likely to result in it emerging at the other end as something quite different from the conservatism to which most of us have grown accustomed, somewhat like the process described by Darwin in which a fish grew wings.

For starters, Ferguson argues that the Bush administration’s “fiscal policy has been an orgy of irresponsibility” and that there is an “impending fiscal crisis” that the President will almost certainly ignore based on “the Cheney principle that ‘Deficits don’t matter.’” Far be it from me to call into question Ferguson’s economic acumen, but if I understood Fed Chairman Alan Greenspan’s testimony on Friday, there is, indeed, an “impending fiscal crisis,” but it has nothing to do with the large but ultimately manageable federal deficit, and everything to do with the looming retirement of the Baby Boomers.

Who, one could be forgiven for wondering, might be better suited to tackle this “impending crisis”: the market-friendly President whose second-term agenda will, according to early drafts of his nomination acceptance speech, focus on an “ownership agenda,” including Social Security reform; or the most liberal Senator in Congress, who is beholden to special interests, most notably organized labor, that have a

vested stake in maintaining the current retirement system, despite its manifest flaws?

Second, Ferguson presupposes that a Kerry presidency will last but one-term and that the GOP will emerge on the other side of that term the better for its time in the opposition. I don’t really think that Ferguson thought about it in these terms, but I can’t help thinking that it is a bit unseemly for one to hope for a candidate to win an election so that that candidate may himself lose four years hence, particularly given the circumstances under which these elections will take place. You see, Americans tend to remove only truly unsuccessful Presidents, and today and for the foreseeable future, success will be measured in large part by effectiveness in combating radical Islamists who seek to murder as many Americans as possible. I doubt whether Kerry can be terribly successful in battling this threat, and I therefore hope for his loss this November. And given what is at stake, I think it a bit twisted to agree that Kerry will indeed prove a failure, but nevertheless to hope for his election out of a desire to foment some ideological excellence.

As for the GOP emerging better off on the other side of the Kerry presidency, I think such expectations are far more hopeful than realistic. I’m not entirely sure whom Professor Ferguson expect to emerge as the great leader of this refreshed Republican Party, but if he has someone in mind he should share it with the rest of us. The truth of the matter is that win or lose this November, the GOP will go through some growing pains in 2008 not unlike what the Democratic Party is going through today. There is no frontrunner for the 2008 GOP presidential nomination simply because no individual has distinguished himself or proven himself capable both of placating grumbling conservatives (like Ferguson) and of patching together a coalition capable of lifting him to victory.

Moreover, as Mark and I have written dozens of times over the years, no one can say with any kind of certainty what issues will matter most four years down the road, much less how the “conservative” candidate should best approach these issues. In 2000, was there anyone anywhere who thought that the removal of

Saddam Hussien from power would be the key issue in the next presidential contest? I seriously doubt it.

As I noted above, the political paradigm is changing, the parties are changing accordingly, and the specifics of the issues that matter most are in constant flux. Conservatives used to be defined both as hawks and as believers in smaller government. But in the post-9/11 world, who is the “real” conservative: the guy who believes in keeping government in check and protecting the liberties and freedoms on which this nation was built; or the guy who believes in hunting down and eliminating America’s enemies wherever they may be, even here at home, and who concomitantly believes in harnessing all available technology in that hunt? How will all this play out four long years down the road? I don’t know the answers to these questions. And if Ferguson does, again I’d like him to share it with us.

Finally, Ferguson presupposes that the outcome of the Bush-Kerry contest is unlikely to alter American foreign policy in any significant way. Specifically, he writes: “In geopolitical terms, at least, what happens on Nov. 2 will change very little indeed.” There is a word for such a belief: asinine.

I won’t pretend that I think that Kerry’s election would mean the end of the world as we know it, or the complete collapse of American foreign policy. But I don’t believe even the Democrats would argue that Kerry’s election would mean no change in foreign policy or geopolitical events. Indeed, the Democrats tend to believe that the terrorist position is enhanced by aggressive American behavior and that that behavior should therefore be eradicated; and Bush-ite Republicans, in contrast, tend to believe that aggressive behavior is the only thing that will weaken the terrorists’ position and that their standing is actually enhanced when aggressiveness is seen as being replaced by passivity. If nothing else, then, a change in partisan control of foreign policy would almost certainly dictate a change in the aggressiveness of that policy along with all the attendant consequences.

Ferguson’s supposition that “little will change” geopolitically as a result of this election rests on the assumptions that President Bush did nothing special in the wake of 9/11, that anyone would have done the same thing in his place; and that he will therefore do nothing special in his next term. These assumptions are, in my opinion, entirely groundless and, at the very least, are unprovable.

Late in his piece, Ferguson suggests that a second Bush term would resemble the second Eisenhower term, which he appears to suggest was an abject failure that led directly to a decade of control by the Democrats. Talk about unprovable. How, for example, does Ferguson know how things would have turned out if Ike had lost and Adlai Stevenson had been elected? Ferguson notes Eisenhower’s enunciation of the Domino Theory, but dismisses it out of hand, never even contemplating the possibility that Stevenson would not have enunciated such a theory or acted accordingly and that that inaction might have changed the course of the Cold War.

Furthermore, simply declaring that Eisenhower’s “failed” second term led directly to the Democratic dominance of the 1960s does not make it so. Unless Ferguson has some models that show that all other variables – including the natural progression of the Civil Rights movement, the coming of age of the Baby Boom generation, and the global spread of “progressive” politics – can be held constant and that Eisenhower is the only variable with predictive value, I’m not buying it.

And I’m also not buying the idea that a Bush second term will necessarily prove unremarkable in terms of foreign policy but truly disastrous and influential in every other way. Both are possible, I suppose, but I doubt it.

In the end, then, I think that the idea that conservatives should want Bush to lose is just as ridiculous as the ideas that conservative concerns might be better handled if Kerry becomes President and that there is a true groundswell of anti-Bush sentiment throughout the Republican Party. None of



these things is true, of course, but it is possible that any or all of them might nevertheless impact this race.

If President Bush himself or any senior member of his campaign team begins to take too seriously this hokum about Republicans questioning the President's "worthiness," then there is the chance that the campaign might, in turn, respond by lurching to the right to "shore up the base." And while I generally don't object to politicians lurching to the right, this is not exactly the best time for Bush to do so. If the President is to overcome his slow start, he will need independents and conservative Democrats to vote for him, and any injudicious movement to the right at this point could cost him the election.

I don't really expect that to happen, in large part because the President has surrounded himself with a set of highly competent and effective campaign strategists, and more importantly, because these nattering naybobs of negativity are, as I said earlier, a pretty small and insignificant group.

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