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THEY SAID IT

“Democrats are ecstatic at their party’s product repositioning, with rhetoric that tried to outflank President Bush on the right in the war on terrorism and fiscal discipline. James Carville ran around the convention declaring the president ‘toast’ and the campaign ‘all over but the shouting.’ Lawrence O’Donnell, an MSNBC analyst, said most delegates didn’t believe Mr. Bush could win.”

--John Fund, *“Patriotic Liberalism: Will All the Flag Waving Work for Democrats This Year?”* *Opinion Journal.com*, August 2, 2004

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A DOSE OF OPTIMISM CONCERNING THE “WAR ON TERROR.”

For the past three years now, concern about the threat of terrorism has been a constant in the lives of a great many U.S. citizens, most especially during those times that should be enjoyable, even joyous, such as the Christmas holiday season, New Year’s Eve, and the Fourth of July; major sports events and celebrity gatherings, such as the Super Bowl, the World Series, and the Academy Awards presentations; political proceedings, such as the State of the Union speech and party conventions; and travel to holiday locations and to visit friends and relatives.

The good news is that no incidences of terrorism have occurred within the United States during this period, despite these fears and frequent warnings from official sources that the possibility of a terrorist incident is high. Like a lot of people, I have been surprised by this, having read a great deal about the vulnerability of the United States to terrorism and the determination of some groups to carry out further terrorists attacks against Americans.

I don’t have a satisfactory explanation for this good fortune, and I don’t know anyone who does, even though I know quite a few people who know a great deal about the counter terrorism business. Nevertheless, I thought I would speculate a little on the subject this week, for it is an important issue not only for the future of the nation but also for the future course of the financial markets.

For starters, I think it is safe to say that this moratorium has nothing to do with the kindness and consideration of America’s terrorist enemies. If they could have killed tens of thousand Americans during the past three years, or done great damage to the U.S. economy, they certainly would have done so. Indeed,

there are several instances on record where such attempts have failed, and I have little doubt that there are others that were not made public.

Now, it is possible that this is due to nothing more than a combination of incompetence, ignorance, and a shortage of volunteers for such dangerous work. But while I don't doubt that all three of these have acted as hindrances to the terrorist community, I think that most of the credit for the safety of America in the past three years must be given to President Bush's aggressive, unrelenting, multi-front response to the September 11 atrocities.

On the home front, for example, there would seem to be little question that the passage of the Patriot Act and the assertive use of its provisions by the Justice Department, the FBI, and other law enforcement agencies across the land have had a chilling impact on all but the most dedicated and militant Islamic killers.

From the highly publicized arrest of six rather ordinary young Muslims in Buffalo, New York, who are now either doing or facing long periods of hard time in an American prison for enjoying a few weeks of fun in a terrorist training camp in Afghanistan, to the arrest, incarceration, and deportation of hundreds of other Muslims for everything from minor immigration infractions to involvement in suspicious activities, the word is out in the Muslim communities everywhere that consorting with America's enemies is a risky business.

This is apparent from even a cursory reading of the leading Muslim web sites, which used to be filled with radical anti-American rhetoric and kind words for known international terrorists and are now replete with "sincere" statements condemning international terrorists and terrorism.

I placed the word "sincere" in parentheses because I have many doubts about the motives and activities of the leaders of some of the principal Muslim organizations in America, having followed the activities of these groups for a long

time. Nevertheless, even if they are not sincere, by significantly toning down the content of their web sites, they are abandoning one of their formerly most effective propaganda mechanisms for the spreading of hatred and anti-American thought among the U.S. Muslim community.

Part of the success of this effort can be attributed to the wonders of modern technology, which is providing, among other things, highly sophisticated electronic surveillance capabilities. But just as important is the development since September 11 of a broad and vital network within Islamic communities across the nation of both paid informants and, probably more importantly, Muslims who sincerely despise what the radicals within their midst are doing to the worldwide reputation of their religion and their culture, and who sincerely appreciate the benefits of living in a free, open, and democratic society.

And whether one describes the efforts that are behind this networking as "harassment" or "good police work," there is little question that it is producing results, both in the form of catching some certifiable bad guys and of keeping others from becoming bad guys by forcing them to consider the trade off between the good life in America and the prospect of long prison terms or deportation to grim homelands with high unemployment and oppressive governments.

The tough talk and the frequent celebrations of American losses in Afghanistan and Iraq go on, of course, but the price of aiding those who are actively engaged in terrorist activities has gone up significantly along with the chance of being caught.

Even the big-shot, high-profile, well-connected Muslim activists, who for years spouted their anti-American beliefs publicly and dared the law enforcement community to do anything about it, are running scared in the wake of the arrests and incarceration of such once untouchable figures as University of South Florida Professor Sami al-Arian, who stands accused of being the leader of Islamic Jihad's U.S. operations, and Abdul Rahman

al-Amoudi, a well-known founder of the American Muslim Council, who was caught up in a broad, post-9/11 investigation of Muslim charities that support terrorism abroad.

The on-going military actions in Afghanistan and Iraq are not as directly responsible for the tranquility at home during the past three years as the aggressive application of the Patriot Act. But there are, in my opinion, three separate and distinct connections between homeland security and these high profile military efforts.

The first has to do with the fact that the intense, institutionalized hatred of America and the West among elements of the Islamic world does not originate within the United States but in the Middle East, where racial, ethnic, and religious hatred is endemic and has become as important an export of the region as oil. So any hatred eradication program must begin there, for as any farmer knows, you don't eliminate the flies by killing the maggots, you must bury or burn the dead cat in which maggots grow.

The second is that the ingredients and technology that are required to produce nuclear, biological and chemical weapons of terror are much more likely to be acquired by future terrorists from rogue nations in the Middle East, such as Iran and Syria, than from within the United States. So any serious effort to protect the United States from such devastating attacks must include an effort to change regimes in these and other nations that support terrorism.

And finally, by successfully bringing down the Taliban government in Afghanistan and the Baathist government in Iraq, President Bush went a long way toward dispelling the belief, which had gained considerable currency in the Muslim community in the past two decades, that the United States lacks the will to fight a prolonged war. And by doing this, he is reducing the effectiveness of one of the principal recruiting tools of the enemy, which is to maintain that victory is assured by American cowardice.

Of course, I am not saying that the threat of domestic terrorism is over or has even decreased. There is no way to know this. I am simply saying that the fact there has been no terrorist attack by militant Islam on American soil in the past three years can logically be viewed as a sign that America's counter terrorism response is working.

Others believe differently, of course. For example, in a recent column for *The Wall Street Journal*, author Mark Helprin complained that the entire American response to the September 11 attacks and to the threat of terrorism has been totally inadequate and that only a mobilization such as that employed for World War II would suffice. Other critics commonly site the numerous areas where the nation is still extremely vulnerable. Some concentrate on actual physical facilities, such as public buildings, transportation and information networks, and centers of commerce, and complain that they are not adequately protected, or in some case protected at all. Others note the terrible destructive power of various weapons of mass destruction and despair over the inability to protect against their use.

Surely all of these people are correct to worry. The danger is paramount. But Helprin's complaints are about what could have been if only America had had a more aggressive president in the wake of September 11, and what isn't going to be because it doesn't. As for the others, their complaints are almost always accompanied by the non-helpful recognition that it is simply not possible to protect everything against every threat.

But none of this is of much help in addressing questions concerning why there have been no terrorist attacks since September 11 and assessing the likelihood of future attacks. Regarding these crucial questions, I would argue that by focusing on the terrorists and potential terrorists themselves, both here and abroad, rather than on trying physically to protect every potential target, which is impossible, the Bush administration seems to have made things somewhat safer, if not totally safe. And not only does this seem

to be working, I think there is a reasonable chance that this system can and will be made better and more efficient in the future.

As I have noted numerous times in these pages, this “war on terror” is not likely to end anytime soon. But I think it is possible over time to make the option of becoming a terrorist seem less attractive. After the September 11 attacks, Muslims around the world were celebrating in the streets and lining up to fight Americans. Today, the United States is fighting back, and while it may be too soon for the enemy to realize that their cause is lost, their losses are mounting and their celebrations are over smaller and smaller victories that are coming at higher and higher cost. At a minimum, new recruits today certainly recognize that the risks are very high and that victory is much less likely.

In the meantime, I believe that conducting a major terrorist attack within the United States has been rendered much more difficult than it was just a few short years ago, which, it should go without saying, is a very good thing.

POST-ELECTION DEMOCRATS. WILL THE “STAB IN THE BACK” BE BACK?

Most Americans who know the name Paul von Hindenberg undoubtedly recall only that he was the feeble, 85-year-old President of the Weimar Republic who, in January 1933, at the urging of Franz von Papen, appointed Adolf Hitler Chancellor of Germany and thereby facilitated the tyrant’s rise to power, leading eventually to World War II and the slaughter of millions of innocents in the death camps.

Yet, history records that General Field Marshall von Hindenburg, who was the commander-in-chief of the German armed forces at the end of World War I and who was also, despite his nation’s ignominious defeat at Allied hands, widely respected in Weimar Germany as a great military leader, played another crucial and highly destructive role in enabling the Nazis’ rise to

power and the destruction of the fledgling Weimar Republic. This role is less well known, but likely was equally important, since it set the early stage for Hitler’s rise to power by laying the foundation of hatred and paranoia upon which the murderous dictator built his political empire during the crucial inter-bellum period

On November 18, 1919, the investigative committee of the new Republic’s constitutional assembly heard testimony from Hindenburg regarding the final days of the war and the causes of the German defeat. Instead of shouldering the blame himself or passing the buck to the recently deposed Kaiser, Hindenburg fashioned an explanation that not only exculpated him and his army, but played upon his fellow Germans’ bewilderment at and insecurities about the series of events that had led to their nation’s defeat.

The tale he told became known as the “Stab in the Back Legend” (or *Dolchstoßlegende*), for it portrayed Hindenburg’s army as brilliant, successful, and virtually unbeatable, and laid blame for the war loss at the feet of a host of criminal conspirators who had betrayed the army and the German people. At the time of surrender, Hindenburg insisted, Germany’s enemies harbored “boundless astonishment . . . at their victory,” and a (presumably apocryphal) “English general” told him that clearly “the German army was stabbed in the back.”

By testifying thusly, Hindenburg not only provided a name to the wild conspiracy theories about the war’s end, which were already prevalent throughout military circles, but gave them considerable legitimacy in the eyes of his countrymen. Many Germans had come to believe Hindenburg’s assertions that his army was invincible, and his repeated and preposterous insistence that Germany was never defeated on the field of battle simply served to feed the confusion and fear that were already widespread.

Before long, a good many Germans would come to blame everyone for their humiliation except those who deserved it. They blamed and therefore despised the

liberal democrats, the communists, the “insufficiently patriotic” Germans, and most notably, Jews. And out of this blame and loathing grew the hatred that both fueled Hitler’s rise and made it possible for him to carry out his murderous agenda.

I mention this today because I have been thinking a great deal about what is going to happen after this November’s election, if, as Mark and I have predicted all year, George W. Bush wins. And I have come to the conclusion that some foreshadowing can be found in the German experience at the end of World War I.

The post-election finger-pointing on the part of the Democrats will start out following a pretty typical, unremarkable trajectory. At first, Democrats will engage in their time-honored tradition of blaming the candidate for the loss, never once stopping to consider the fact that the party’s leaders pitched the candidate as a “responsible” alternative to the nutty Howard Dean, or that primary voters settled on him specifically because they thought he was more “electable” than anyone else who wanted the job.

But unlike previous elections, this year the “blame game” is unlikely to end with the candidate. And I am inclined to believe that just as in post-war Germany, inflated expectations and shocking defeat will combine to allow the situation to become very ugly very fast in Democratic circles. This year, large swaths of the Democratic Party, led by significant national figures, will be angry, confused, and downright incredulous at the loss. And they will, like the inter-Bellum Germans, indulge in wild conspiracy mongering, blaming their defeat on their own host of “November criminals.”

Now, I am not predicting that the entire Democratic Party will literally follow in the Germans’ footsteps, descending into madness and despair and eventually concluding that “international Jewry” stabbed them in the back, although one might be forgiven for entertaining such speculation, given the mainstream left’s flirtation with and unwillingness to condemn various virulent anti-Semitic factions that populate its radical fringes.

But I do believe that come November 3rd, the proverbial lid is almost certain to come off the Democratic Party. Like the Germans circa 1918, the Democrats are unprepared for defeat and a good many are likely to react by concocting wild theories about how victory was “stolen” from them.

It is fortunate in this regard that some prominent Democrats have looked at recent polls and have therefore begun to try to manage expectations. But a few observations concerning this process are worth considering. For starters, the desire to defeat the President and the belief in the righteousness of this cause are likely to be too powerful for expectations management to be terribly effective in quelling post-election enmity. Second, many of these same people who are attempting to manage expectations are responsible for the heightened expectations in the first place.

Recall that two of John Kerry’s newest advisors, James Carville and Stanley Greenberg, ran around Boston just seven weeks ago giggling like school girls, declaring that President Bush was “toast” and that the Democrats had a very good shot at picking up not just the White House, but the House and Senate as well. And finally, as the example of Carville and Greenberg attests, these same people are prominent among the nuts who will be inventing the conspiracy theories.

Anyone who doubts that the modern Democratic Party is predisposed to such fits of paranoia has simply not paid close enough attention to the political debate in this nation over the past couple of decades in general and over the last four years in particular.

Since Nixon, Democrats have been explaining Republican success, particularly in the South, as the effect of residual racism and secret GOP strategies to exploit that racism through “code words,” veiled references, hush-hush proposals, winks, nods, and, presumably, secret handshakes. Rather than even consider such plausible explanations as resentment over the Democratic Party’s anti-military bent, or irritation with the party’s hostility to religion and

traditional religious moral codes, Democrats choose instead to content themselves with the belief that there is a surreptitious pact between the Republicans and the “Bubbas,” which not only perpetuates Southern repression of minorities, but extends that repression to all corners of the nation through the damnable electoral college.

Of course, that conspiracy is pretty tame compared to those that surfaced in the wake of the debacle in Florida four years ago. Regarding the 2000 election, Republicans have been accused of everything from using Florida state police to suppress minority turnout to packing the Supreme Court with Bush flunkies (after eight years of a Democratic president, nonetheless) to plotting with the manufacturers of the voting machines used in the state to ensure a Bush victory.

And all of this, in turn, is pretty tame compared to what we can expect this November, when the Democrats once again find themselves on the losing end of an election they believed they were destined to win. The Democrats have spent considerable time and energy over the past couple of years convincing themselves that Bush is an “illegitimate” president; that he is not liked by the American people; that his “war on terror” policies are universally unpopular; that they are the morally superior party in the debate over the war, taxes, health care (insert your own issue here); and that any opponent can beat this “moron” from Texas. Any discrepancy between these tenets of Bush hatred and the reality of this November’s election results is certain to spark paranoid rantings.

For starters, if the election is close, I think that there is little doubt that the Democrats will contest the results, or some portions of them, in the courts, claiming that the GOP once again conspired with a variety of criminals to “steal” the election from the rightful victors. In fact, lawyers have already been dispatched to various locations throughout the country with express instructions to challenge any narrow Bush victory. We were given a glimpse of the sort of arguments that will underpin these tirades this past July, when Princeton economist, *New York*

Times columnist, and all-around nutbag Paul Krugman declared that Republicans already have in place the instruments by which they will purloin votes in hotly contested states, like Florida (natch). Krugman wrote:

This year, Florida again hired a private company - Accenture, which recently got a homeland security contract worth up to \$10 billion - to prepare a felon list. Remembering 2000, journalists sought copies. State officials stonewalled, but a judge eventually ordered the list released.

The Miami Herald quickly discovered that 2,100 citizens who had been granted clemency, restoring their voting rights, were nonetheless on the banned-voter list. Then *The Sarasota Herald-Tribune* discovered that only 61 of more than 47,000 supposed felons were Hispanic. So the list would have wrongly disenfranchised many legitimate African-American voters, while wrongly enfranchising many Hispanic felons. It escaped nobody’s attention that in Florida, Hispanic voters tend to support Republicans.

After first denying any systematic problem, state officials declared it an innocent mistake. They told Accenture to match a list of registered voters to a list of felons, flagging anyone whose name, date of birth and race was the same on both lists. They didn’t realize, they said, that this would automatically miss felons who identified themselves as Hispanic because that category exists on voter rolls but not in state criminal records.

But employees of a company that prepared earlier felon lists say that they repeatedly warned state election officials about that very problem.

Let's not be coy. Jeb Bush says he won't allow an independent examination of voting machines because he has "every confidence" in his handpicked election officials. Yet those officials have a history of slipshod performance on other matters related to voting and somehow their errors always end up favoring Republicans. Why should anyone trust their verdict on the integrity of voting machines, when another convenient mistake could deliver a Republican victory in a high-stakes national election?

Close or not, other Democrats are almost certain to fume about how President Bush manipulated the war on terror or the war in Iraq or some other aspect of national security to secure his re-election. Here again we have seen previews of this particular rant for most of the Bush presidency. If past conspiracy mongering gives any hint of what is to come, then on November 3rd, newly re-elected Congresswoman Cynthia McKinney will declare that 9/11 was all part of a Carlyle Group plot to get Bush reelected; Michael Moore will take up the cause and make a movie about it; Dan Rather will discover memos detailing how the plan was initially conceived by the Knights Templar 700 years ago and was typed up on Jacques deMolay's "ancient" Commodore 64 computer; and the Chairman of the Democratic Party will call the whole idea "interesting" and "deserving of further investigation."

In short, a good many prominent Democrats will advance their party's "descent into madness," about which Mark and I have written extensively over the past couple of years.

The temptation for Republicans will be to look upon this eruption of paranoia and madness as a good thing, since it is likely, at least in the short term, to lead to a continued deterioration of the Democratic Party's national standing but unlikely to lead to any sort of a political crisis.

The problem is that despite the short term benefit that some Republicans may see, such deterioration will almost certainly carry considerable costs. The two party system functions best when both parties are competitive and coherent, and Republicans should hope that Democrats learn from a loss rather than continue to deny that such defeats reflect poorly on their leadership and their agenda.

More to the immediate point, a prolonged post-election fight, both in the law courts and in the court of public opinion, over the legitimacy of George Bush's second term is hardly what this nation needs while in the midst of a war with a serious and determined enemy. Certainly such a challenge will prove detrimental to the war effort and may carry negative implications for the economic situation at home as well.

In the end, then, we are hoping for a decisive victory by President Bush, rather than the squeaker the collective punditry has told us to expect. We are also, surprisingly enough, hoping for a quick takeover (re-takeover?) of the Democratic Party's machinery (and its press organs) by Bill and Hillary.

They have proven their ability to transform the Democratic agenda before, and may therefore be the only national party leaders able to recognize that if they are to halt their Party's decades' long descent into irrationality, then Democrats will need to abandon their irrational hatred of President Bush, stop their fantasizing and conspiracy mongering about an imaginary "stab in the back," and begin the hard work of refashioning their agenda so that it will appeal to a plurality of American voters who seek strength, confidence, and consistency in this dangerous and vital period in our nation's history.

END NOTES.

Campaign Note #1

In last week's piece, I noted that one of the Kerry campaign's new hires was a "second choice." Kerry hired former Clinton White House spokesman Joe Lockhart to help run his press operation after he was unable to convince Lockhart's former boss and predecessor as Clinton spokesman, Mike McCurry, to take the job. Well, over the last few days, Kerry must have polished up his appeal, because as of late last week, McCurry too is on board and is expected to handle day-to-day press relations while traveling with the candidate.

This is, without question, good news for Kerry. As I noted last week, McCurry is exceptional at what he does and will almost certainly bring a sense of calm and order to a campaign that of late has been characterized by panic and disarray.

It is important to remember, as another old Clinton hand, Dick Morris, is fond of pointing out, that people vote for candidates, not campaign consultants. That said, the addition of Mike McCurry by the Kerry team can only help at a time when help is desperately needed.

Campaign Note #2.

Speaking of new additions to the campaign, Team Kerry announced last week that the candidate's fellow Senator from Massachusetts, the inimitable Ted Kennedy will, from now until election day, campaign on Kerry's behalf. This is, in my opinion, almost bad enough news for Kerry to offset the aforementioned addition of Mike McCurry. At this point in the campaign, the last thing Kerry needs is for undecided voters to be confronted with the out-of-their-minds wing of the Democratic Party. Kennedy has been one of President Bush's most aggressive and most preposterous critics, and if Kerry intends to make Iraq an issue going into the election, then Kennedy's words will almost certainly come back to haunt him.

Moreover, the Kennedy name no longer appears to convey the majesty it once did, at least not when preceded by "Ted." Twenty-four years ago, this guy was unable to beat or even seriously challenge the hapless Jimmy Carter, and he has only grown more radically liberal since. Additionally, the Senator's self-indulgent past may finally be catching up with him; the *Wilkes-Barre (PA) Times Leader* reported last week that one of Kennedy's first campaign stops, a rally in Nanticoke, PA, "fizzled" recently. As the paper noted:

Although no reason has been given for the cancellation, it's possible that Kennedy's ties to the area still haunt him. Kennedy became forever entwined with the Wyoming Valley on July 18, 1969, when the car he was driving plunged off Dike Bridge into a pond on Chappaquiddick Island, Mass. His passenger, 28-year-old Mary Jo Kopechne, a Forty Fort native and Democratic campaign worker, drowned. [Forty Fort is nine-miles from Nanticoke.]

Those memories stick with area residents, said one source. "I think people who were Kerry supporters told the campaign that they were crazy to bring Kennedy here. If he comes, it's going to be a negative, black mark for Kerry."

When reporting on this story in his OpinionJournal column "Best of the Web," James Taranto added that "Kopechne could not be reached for comment."

Campaign Note #3

Since the Democratic National Convention in Boston nearly two months ago, Vice Presidential nominee John Edwards has been virtually invisible. Democrats argued at the time of Edwards' selection that the choice was brilliant, as it would add charisma and Southern charm to a candidacy that desperately needed both. It also appears to have added a serious liability that Democrats dismissed out of hand when it was first mentioned by Republican critics of the North Carolina Senator this spring.

The Wall Street Journal's Daniel Henninger noted last Friday that the cost of health insurance has become perhaps the most important domestic issue in the campaign over the past several weeks. And he is hardly the only one to have observed this trend. If health costs continue to be an important issue heading into November, then the choice of Edwards over, say, Dick Gephardt, may actually prove damaging to the Democratic ticket. Recall that the trial lawyer's roughly \$40 million fortune was built in large part on the type of junk science medical malpractice cases that have contributed significantly to skyrocketing malpractice insurance costs and, in turn, to rapidly rising health care costs.

The Democrats like to think that Dick Cheney's previous job as the head of Halliburton gives them a huge club with which to beat the Republican ticket. It appears more and more, though, that the Republicans have, in Edwards' career as an ambulance chaser, found their own club.

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