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Forecast 2005:  
A Tough Year, But a Good One

**THEY SAID IT**

“We have seen States of considerable duration, which for ages have remained nearly as they have begun, and could hardly be said to ebb or flow. Some appear to have spent their vigour at their commencement. Some have blazed out in their glory a little before their extinction. The meridian of some has been the most splendid. Others, and they the greatest number, have fluctuated, and experienced at different periods of their existence a great variety of fortune. At the very moment when some of them seemed plunged in unfathomable abysses of disgrace and disaster, they have suddenly emerged. They have begun a new course, and opened a new reckoning; and even in the depths of their calamity, and on the very ruins of their country, have laid the foundations of a towering and durable greatness. All this has happened without any apparent previous change in the general circumstances which had brought on their distress. The death of a man at a critical juncture, his disgust, his retreat, his disgrace, have brought innumerable calamities on a whole nation. A common soldier, a child, a girl at the door of an inn, have changed the face of fortune, and almost of Nature.”

*Edmund Burke, First Letter On The Regicide Peace, 1789.*

**FORECAST 2005: A TOUGH YEAR, BUT A GOOD ONE.**

Well, it's annual forecast time again, a time to attempt to peer into the future, to do that which Jacob Burckhardt once observed is unlikely to be done well by anyone, due to “the confusion of insight by our wishes, hopes and fears; further, our ignorance of everything which we call latent forces, physical or mental, and the incalculable factor of mental contagions, which can suddenly transform the world.”

Burke had earlier noted the difficulty involved in this task, as stated in the above “They Said It” quote. For purposes of illumination, Russell Kirk explained Burke's references in the final sentence as follows: “Burke refers to the reverses of Pericles, of Coriolanus, of the elder Pitt, of the Constable of Bourbon. His common soldier is Arnold of Winkelried, who flung himself upon the Austrian spears at Sempach; his child is Hannibal, taking at the age of twelve his oath to make undying war upon Rome; his girl at the door of an inn is Joan of Arc. Chance, providence, or mere individual strong wills, Burke declares, abruptly may alter the whole apparent direction of a nation or a civilization.”

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And even further back in time, the curmudgeonly old Roman statesman, Cato the Elder, once acidly questioned the art of forecasting with the famous remark, "One wonders how one augur may pass another in the street without laughing."

So with these cautionary thoughts in mind, I will once again explain, as I have often done before, that I do not presume to be able to forecast the future accurately, but believe that the attempt is worthwhile because, as I said in last year's forecast piece, "it forces a person to think seriously about the past, the present and the future, and the result can serve as a framework from which to view and assess subsequent events as they unfold. Then, when reviewed 12 months later, the old predictions invariably provide both a healthy dose of humility and a dash of tonic for the intellect." So here goes.

**Prediction No. 1 is that there will be no terrorist incident on American soil in 2005 that is horrendous enough to alter radically the domestic and geopolitical landscape in the way that the attacks of September 11, 2001 did.**

With only the year changed, this is a verbatim copy of last year's Prediction Number 1, as is this notation, "that all of the predictions in this issue are predicated on this one being accurate, since a major domestic terrorist incident similar to or more destructive than September 11 would transform the world and in doing so render all forecasts preceding the incident null and void."

Clearly this is exactly the type of forecast that Burekhardt, Burke, and Cato had in mind when they commented upon the impossibility of seeing into the future. But it is also what I had in mind when I argued that the process, even if deeply flawed, is worthwhile because it forces one to think beyond clichés and "gut feelings," to focus on the knowable, and to draw conclusions as a means of better understanding the nature of the issue in question.

We know that the enemy is determined and relentless, that the weapons that are available to him range from crude suicide attacks to sophisticated bio, chemical, and possibly even nuclear devices that could kill thousands of people and do extensive monetary damage. We also know that if America's enemies could have staged one or more such attacks within the United States during the past three years they would have done so.

This would indicate that they lack some necessary ingredients for a concerted effort, most probably in the all-important area of having committed individuals situated in critical areas. It would also indicate that someone within the U.S. counter-terrorism community is doing something right.

We know, for example, that potential terrorists are being watched, bugged, harassed, arrested, deported, and compromised in other ways; financial assets are being seized and monitored; funding sources are being frozen and closed down; informants are being recruited in cities across the nation and around the world; potential targets are being hardened in myriad ways; terrorist leaders are being kept busy performing other tasks, such as staying alive and out of prison; and counter-terrorism organizations are growing in size and sophistication.

So are we safe from all threats? Of course not. Could another horrendous attack occur any time? Surely. But unlike active volcanoes and earthquake fault zones, where long periods of inactivity are not necessarily grounds for optimism, a quiescent period in the fight against domestic terrorism does indeed indicate that some progress is being made against the threat.

The bottom line is that the race is on to continue this progress at a pace fast enough to keep up with an equally concerted effort on the part of the enemy to get back in the game. Not surprisingly, technology is an important ingredient in the hopes and dreams of both sides. Over the long-term, I think it is unlikely

that the United States will get through the war on terror unscathed. In the short term, say the upcoming year, I think the United States will retain a significant edge over the bad guys.

**Prediction No. 2 is that President Bush is going to raise the temperature in the Middle East next year to somewhere in the area of 911 degrees Fahrenheit, and the result will be that by the end of the year the war in Iraq will have become considerably more complicated and more dangerous.**

I wore out a pair of good work boots walking around the farm contemplating all the variables involved in this prediction. Last year's forecast played a key role in the process. It turns out that my optimism concerning the formation of a "reasonably stable" government in Iraq by the end of 2004 was way off base, even when tempered with a large number of "ifs, ands, and buts," which it was.

As I mentioned a few weeks ago in an article entitled "Some Thoughts on Democracy in Iraq," the principal reason for this error was that I badly underestimated the nature and intensity of the insurgency movement that was just getting underway. Given the culture of militant Islam and the experience that Israel has had dealing with several branches of this movement over the past half century, I now wonder how I could have been so dumb. My only excuse is that I fell prey to Burckhardt's "confusion of insight" caused by my "wishes, hopes and fears." So, with that in mind, I would posit the following revision.

It is now abundantly clear that the Bush administration has opened a pretty large can of worms over there. My prediction that things are going to become more complicated and dangerous in 2005 is based on something I should have recognized last year, namely that insurgency movements are notoriously durable and that the United States will have to take the battle against this one into Syria and Iran if it is even going to slow it down.

These countries are the staging areas for the movement. They provide safe havens for its leaders and are important sources of the revenues that keep the movement alive. This reality must be addressed. So Bush will do it. I put it this way in an article last July entitled "Bush Unbound."

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."

I did not specifically include Syria in this observation, so I will do it now. In fact, I now think that Syria may be the first to feel the pressure, which will begin with diplomatic niceties but could, in a relatively short time, include air strikes on and inside the borders of either or both nations.

As for timing, I expect that shortly after the election in Iraq is completed, the new provisional government will formally ask the U.N. Security Council to demand that Syria and Iran stop supporting the insurgency movement against the legitimate government of Iraq, and formally ask the United States to join in Iraqi military efforts to protect the nation against infiltration of terrorists from Iran and Syria. It is at this point that, as per my above prediction, the geopolitical temperature in the region will begin to rise and things will begin to get more complicated and more dangerous.

It is worth noting here that Bush will have the moral high ground on this confrontation, given that the Iraqi people will, *with the formal help of the United Nations*, have elected the government there and Syria and Iran will stand accused of aiding and abetting an illegal assault against this sovereign government. My guess is that the disagreement will not go far beyond the

talking stage at the United Nations or in the world community. But the debate itself will provide the United States with a *de facto* license to take considerable liberties with both Syria and Iran, covertly and overtly, and solid ground from which to demand that the Europeans pressure their friends in Iran and Syria to back off.

On balance, therefore, I think that the war effort in Iraq will go reasonably well in 2005. America's military is doing a great job now and if past is prologue it will get better as it advances up the learning curve for this particular type of warfare in this particular country. The insurgency movement appears to be well organized, well financed, and deeply committed. But I doubt that it will get significantly stronger in the face of U.S. efforts next year in Iraq, Syria, and Iran.

Several things concerning the upcoming election are worth considering. The first is that the insurgency has provided a great many Iraqis with an enemy other than America to unite against, and the election has given them a means to express their displeasure with this elusive enemy. In addition, the insurgency's concentration on disrupting the election has given the electoral process an importance it might not have had otherwise.

It is also worth noting that the prize for winning this election is potentially very big. Iraq is not some small, poor, backward nation with few resources and little future. It is sitting on vast oil wealth right smack in the middle of arguably the most strategically important region of the world. As I put it in an article last summer, life for the leader of this nation will be pretty great.

With the full backing of the United States, he will quickly become a big player on the international stage and at the same time become fabulously wealthy. He and his family, if they are so inclined, will be able to steal millions upon millions of dollars through corrupt oil deals and an endless array of schemes to skim more millions off the top of American and

U.N. reconstruction funds. He can live in one of Saddam's palaces; travel to New York, Washington, and all the major cities of the world and be feted by government and business leaders at each stop. He and his colleagues can eventually become big swinging honchos at OPEC. He can have his own private security force that travels with him everywhere he goes. He can build a formidable national army and a police force, and in the meantime be protected by the greatest and most powerful military in the world, which will hunt down and kill the enemies of his regime at his behest. All he needs to maintain this, once it is achieved, is the continued support of the United States.

In short, I think the election will come off as planned, a new Iraqi government will begin to take shape, and the U.S. military will make significant strides toward achieving a degree of security and stability in Iraq.

The problem is that the situation will still be extremely complicated and dangerous by the end of this year, and the tensions in the region will probably be significantly greater than they are today. The new Iraqi government will not yet be fully established. The insurgency movement will still be active. The U.S. military will still be fully engaged and suffering casualties. And America's disputes with Syria and Iran will be entering the explosive stage.

And this brings me to what I think will be Bush's biggest problem during the year regarding the war in Iraq, namely the prospect of steadily declining public support for the effort as it becomes apparent that there is no end in sight for the fighting there and that the costs in blood and money are likely to rise in the next several years rather than decline.

When considering this it is necessary to understand that there are two important fronts in this war. The first one is the hot war in Iraq. This is being fought by the U.S. military with the goal of establishing a government in that country that is friendly toward the United States. The U.S. military is doing a good job on this front. The second front is the public relations war

at home. It is being fought by the Bush administration with a goal of maintaining the support of the American public for the hot war in Iraq. The Bush administration is doing a poor job on this front.

Bush has not lost this battle yet. And he won't lose it in 2005. But the stakes are too high not to be concerned about his poor showing, because if he loses this battle it won't matter that the military is performing well in the other. The war will be lost. I made this point in the November 3, 2003 issue of this newsletter in an article entitled "How Bush Could Lose The War In Iraq." The gist of it was as follows:

The Bush administration will lose the war for the hearts and minds of the public unless it stops measuring 'success' in Iraqi by how many amenities we have been able to provide the Iraqis. There most assuredly is a long-term link between this accomplishment and American security. But it is not one that is easily explained to the American people while they are mourning the daily loss of lives among their sons and daughters . . . The argument that the enemy over there killed 20 American soldiers but that that is okay because the Iraqi people now have more electricity than they had when Saddam was running the place simply won't sell. In fact, it's an insult. I believe it is safe to say that the vast majority of Americans don't give a damn whether the Iraqi people have electricity, or even candles for that matter, if the cost of providing them with this luxury is the life of a single American soldier.

In the 14 months since that article was published, the Bush crowd has placed some checks on its overwhelming propensity to babble about how good all of this has been for the Iraqi people. But they have yet to offer an alternative reason why Americans should be enthusiastic about the war effort based on something that would be good for them and for their country.

The administration makes a good case that bringing the troops home now would be a geopolitical disaster. But this is hardly a substitute for an inspiring, patriotic, and solid strategic reason for sending them there in the first place, beyond making life better for the Iraqis. Absent this, progress on the hot war front in 2005 won't be enough to prevent the year from ending on a sour note, as regards the overall effort in Iraq.

**Prediction No. 3 is that Israel will be safer and more secure by the end of 2005 than it is today.**

With only the year changed, this is a verbatim copy of one of last year's predictions, which I think held up pretty well. The following paragraph in support of this optimistic view is also borrowed from last year's piece and is, I think, still applicable.

I have never believed that Israel's enemies will ever give up their fight to eliminate the Jewish state. But I have always thought that eventually the killing will taper off as Israel's enemies grudgingly begin to appreciate the fact that they cannot drive Israel out of existence and that the cost of continuing to try is prohibitively expensive in lives and suffering.

This seems to have been the case in 2004 and my guess is that it will continue to be so in 2005. I doubt that 2005 will mark the end of the conflict, but I think that Saddam Hussein's downfall, Muammar Qadhafi's capitulation, America's on-going pressure on Syria and Iran and other radical Islamic states throughout the Middle East, Israel's relentless campaign to destroy the radical Palestinian leadership, and Yasser Arafat's death have taken a toll on the Palestinian appetite for conflict.

I also think that there is a very strong likelihood that the Bush administration will for the first time take an active and aggressive role in the peace

process between Israel and the Palestinians, if it turns out that the new Palestinian leadership can deliver on promises to curtail the violence.

I do not expect that there will be a formal peace by next December. But by that time the Palestinians could find themselves in a position where they have no other choice than to abandon the decades long war against the existence of an Israeli state. Like Chief Joseph and his motley band of native Americans, exhausted, out of resources, out of options, and no place to call home, they may have to declare, "I shall fight no more forever," and resign themselves to living out their lives in peace.

**Prediction No. 4 is American relations with Europe will begin to improve somewhat early in 2005 and be almost "back to normal" by the end of the year.**

There was a period last year when I thought that there was little chance that any real improvement in the relations between the United States and Europe would occur for a very long time. But "latent forces," and the 'incalculable factor of mental contagions,' have intervened to "transform the world," just as Burckhardt said they could. Or to put this somewhat less formally, things have changed.

I was thinking about these changes over the weekend, when Steve e-mailed me a brief story from the *Houston Chronicle* entitled "Fresh signs that Europe is ready to deal with Bush." The authors, John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldrudge, who write for the *Economist*, listed several relatively recent changes that they believe will make the Europeans more amenable to better relations with Washington. I agree with all of them. So here they are, mingled with a few comments of my own.

For starters, there was Yasir Arafat's death. Micklethwait and Wooldrudge say this about that.

No issue divides Europe and the United States more keenly than the Israeli-Palestinian dispute. For the last few years, Europeans have criticized Bush for failing to put enough pressure on Israel to get out of the occupied territories and for refusing to deal with Arafat. But since Arafat's death, Europeans and Americans have been able to find common ground: supporting Ariel Sharon's withdrawal from Gaza, putting pressure on Israel to let the Palestinians hold elections and, covertly, backing Mahmoud Abbas to become the next Palestinian leader.

Then there is Europe's growing concern about Islamic terrorism, which has been heightened recently by the murder of Theo van Gogh. According to Micklethwait and Wooldrudge, this incident has helped convince many Europeans that Americans are correct when they argue that "radical Islam is inimical to European traditions of tolerance."

I would note that as a practical matter, better relations with the United States will not have a positive impact on the looming terrorism problem in Europe. In fact, in the minds of some Europeans it could actually make matters worse by angering the already disgruntled European Muslims. But I do believe that as fear in Europe grows, Europeans are likely to become a little more sympathetic to America's determination to fight back against militant Islam. Indeed, some Europeans may possibly even warm to the idea of taking the fight to the source of the radicalism in some Middle Eastern states.

A third factor cited by Micklethwait and Wooldrudge was Russia's ham handed interference in the Ukrainian election, which awakened a lot of Europeans to the realization that their neighbor to the East is still prone to thuggish behavior and that friendly relations with the United States might prove useful someday should this be a sign of things to come. They add the following:

European bankers, who have invested a fortune in Russia, have been spooked by the state-sponsored bankruptcy of Yukos, once hailed as Russia's most Western company. These worries are magnified by the growing influence of the eight new members of the European Union from Central Europe, all of which are instinctively much more anti-Russian (and pro-American).

As the title of their article indicates, Micklethwait and Wooldrudge concentrate on reasons that Europe might want better relations with America. I would add that George Bush has reason to welcome any such overtures in the hopes of gaining some European support for the new state of Iraq and some help

in convincing Syria and Iran to back off from their support for opposition forces. Bush is also interested in European help in convincing the Iranians that they should give up their nuclear ambitions before the United States or Israel does it for them.

In closing, I would say that I expect 2005 to be a very tough year. President Bush is not one to sit on his hands. He will shake things up; force people and nations to take sides; and challenge America's enemies. If he does it well and wisely, it will be a good year. A tough one, but a good one.

Happy New Year, Everyone.

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