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THEY SAID IT

“Social conditions, it is true, we may expect will go on improving; we may hope that the social machinery will come gradually to run more smoothly. But unless we know something positive to the contrary, the outcome of all this progress may be nothing but a more undisturbed ennui or a more soulless sensuality. The rose-leaves may be laid on more smoothly, and yet the man that lies on them may be wearier or more degraded.”

--*Is Life Worth Living?* W.H. Mallock, 1880.

THE MADNESS OF THE AMERICAN CROWD.

Just over 100 years ago, a fellow named Sigmund Freud made quite a name for himself by asserting that everyone who is a little screwed up is screwed up because of repressed sexual desires. Now I have no idea whether this was true then, but it seems highly unlikely to me that it is true today, at least in these United States where anyone who is paying attention can see quite clearly that no one is suppressing anything, most especially not their sexual desires. In fact, as we saw during the halftime of last year's Super Bowl, the phrase “let it all hang out” seems to have, in the last couple decades, turned from a faddish expression to a national pastime.

Yet, one can also see with very little effort that there are still a great many Americans who are screwed up. So given that the weird little Austrian is no longer with us to offer a new unified theory for explaining all extant human neuroses, I thought I would try my hand at it this week.

My theory, quite simply, is that the overwhelming source of anxiety among Americans today is unrealistic expectations for the prospects of peace and the benefits of progress. These expectations are rooted in the modern day secular, liberal theology and have become so widespread among Americans that to question them is to draw expressions of wonder, not anger of the kind that occurs in reaction to politically incorrect utterances, but wonder, as in, “what in the world are you talking about?”

Now I would like to have a great story about how this brilliant insight suddenly came upon me, like Archimedes' experience in the bathtub. In fact, I considered faking a wondrous moment of sudden discovery as Louie Pasteur is said to have done on occasion. But the fact is that this observation seeped into my consciousness over a period of months as I watched hours of mundane television coverage of the recent presidential campaign.

Slowly it occurred to me that most Americans have come to believe that peace on earth is not just a desirable goal but an achievable one, and that the absence of peace on earth is therefore a sure sign that someone in Washington is doing something wrong. To them, war is failure of diplomacy, not one of the primary tools of this ancient art.

Moreover, this expectation seems to be accompanied by a related belief that the myriad physical and mental contagions that have plagued mankind since Pandora released them from her famous box are remnants of an older age, that those of us who are fortunate enough to be living today would not have to tolerate any of them if the government were doing its job. Disease, despair, malice, greed, old age, death, hatred, violence, cruelty and war are everywhere apparent. Why doesn't someone do something? Fatty hamburgers, obesity, grade school bullies, global warming, inequality, AIDS, Wal-Mart, crime, toy guns, Chinese factories making cheap underwear, high priced gasoline, pollution, foreigners, low wage jobs, crucifixes in public, and car wrecks. That damn Bush. What do we pay taxes for, anyway?

I know I am exaggerating here, but wasn't it apparent during the recent presidential campaign that everyone seems to expect the government to do something about something that the government can't do much about and would, if it attempted to do so, cause other problems that would in turn cause other individuals to want the government to do something about them? And are not an awful lot of people neurotically

agitated about the fact that their particular *bête noire* has not been relegated by now to the scrap heap of history by a combination of progress and government action?

When taken together it looks increasingly to me as though these heightened expectations constitute one of those extraordinary popular delusions that were recognized by Charles Mackay as producing madness in crowds. Moreover, these collective delusions appear to be so much a part of the American dream today that their perniciousness is not readily apparent to the casual observer. So I thought I would explore their nature and origin a bit this week, and then draw a few conclusions concerning their impact on American politics today.

For starters, the idea that peace is the norm and that war is some sort of aberration caused by the failure of political leadership is a relatively new concept in the grand scheme of human existence. My impression is that it made its first appearance on the world stage shortly after the end of World War I. For thousands of years prior to that terrible conflict, war seems to have been viewed, as it still is today in most of the world, as either a permanent and terrible element of the human condition or as a glorious enterprise that elevates those men who practice it well to great heights of nobility.

Five hundred years before the birth of Christ, Heraclitus proclaimed that war is the father and king of all. Nine hundred years later, St. Augustine argued that war was inevitable, that indeed God willed it so. He put it this way: "For God's providence constantly uses war to correct and chasten the corrupt morals of mankind." Hobbes viewed war as the natural state of man. Hegel echoed both Heraclitus and Hobbes. Voltaire famously argued that war is one of the world's three most celebrated features, the other two being famine and plague, both of which, he noted, always follow in the path of war.

To my knowledge, no individual of note, not even Christ, seems ever to have said or even implied that peace on earth is possible prior to the eschaton. That is at least until Woodrow Wilson appeared on the scene and added a modern twist to the Rousseauian concept that man's institutions, not man himself, is the root of all evil. Wilson did this by claiming that war could be eradicated from the face of the earth if the proper institutions were constructed. Hence, World War I became known as the "war to end all wars."

The tangible results of this popular delusion were the League of Nations, the Kellogg-Briand Pact, which actually made war illegal, and numerous treaties designed to limit the military power of certain nations, such as Germany, which had no intention of having their military power limited, treaty or no treaty.

All of this was not just ineffective, but also pernicious over the long term because it changed the focus of the discussion away from practical considerations about how to avoid war via a combination of diplomacy and military strength to the spinning of surreal schemes for establishing permanent peace on earth.

Eric Voegelin noted in *The New Science of Politics* that in this "dream world" where nations pledge themselves to unrealistic goals such as the abolition of war, certain "types of action which in the real world would be considered as morally insane, because of the real effects which they have, will be considered moral in the dream world, because they intended an entirely different effect."

He argued that the "gap between intended and real effect will be imputed not to the Gnostic immorality of ignoring the structure of reality but to the immorality of some other person or society that does not behave as it should behave according to the dream conception of cause and effect." In such dream world societies, he adds, "measures which are intended to establish peace increase the disturbances that will lead to war."

Voegelin did not observe that this belief in the achievability of world peace would lead to mass neuroses among Americans. His position was the

people who believed such things were already nuts. Which leads me to the second element of my new unified theory concerning the source of neuroses among Americans, namely widespread, unrealistic, dream world expectations concerning the benefits of progress.

Now the roots of this disorder are much older, deeper, and more complex than those feeding the unrealistic expectations for world peace. Indeed entire books have been written on the subject. But since I have limited space here, I will just provide a very brief background, necessarily skipping over many important people and their equally important ideas on the subject.

For starters, the modern concept of progress, namely that mankind is slowly but ever so surely progressing toward a higher and more perfect moral and social order, is relatively new in the history of human ideas, extending back to the Enlightenment.

The ancient Greeks, for example, did not even consider the idea that history was some sort of catalogue of continuing change, much less having a prescribed direction. Herodotus and Thucydides wrote their histories for the purpose of providing a record of man's deeds, not to offer any insight into the future and certainly not to document any sort of linear historical progress toward a better world. Polybius had a somewhat different view of history, in that he felt that all past events had led up to the greatness of Rome. But he seems not to have considered where this "progress" might be headed.

The general idea from ancient times through the Middle Ages was that everything was cyclical, including the rise and fall of civilizations; that men may learn from the past, but that the general direction of things was governed by providence and that providence favored mundane repetitiveness.

Giambattista Vico was the first European to develop and posit a theory of linear historical movement in his famous work, *The New Science* (from which Voegelin borrowed the name for his above-mentioned

work), published at the dawn of the Enlightenment in 1725. Simply stated, Vico theorized that human societies progress along understandable, distinct stages through which social, civil and political order develops from barbarism to civilization.. But he stopped short of developing the modern day idea of progress by arguing that the final stage in this progression was a return to barbarism. And even more importantly, in deference to the religious authorities of his day, Vico maintained that these cycles were ordained and ordered by providence.

It was Voltaire, several decades later, who took providence out of the equation, thus setting the stage for a key ingredient in the modern manifestation of the idea of progress, namely that man, not God, is the driving force behind history, and that hope for the future lay not in God's love but in man's capacity to provide for his own earthly happiness.

Now it is important to understand that in the midst of all of this Enlightenment turmoil about the meaning and direction of history, the Christian attitude toward this subject remained the same as it was when St. Augustine outlined it early in the 5th century. Simply stated, Augustine asserted that man himself cannot perfect man. He argued that the temporal ebb and flow of rulers and nations was essentially meaningless. He described the catalogue of day-to-day historical events, which he described as "profane history," as having neither direction nor meaning. Such history, he said, is that of a "*saeculum senescens*," an age that grows old. In his view, history was indeed moving steadily in one direction, but it was not moving toward a heaven on earth but toward the Christian eschaton, or the "end times," when Christ would return to Earth.

Theoretically, this traditional Christian attitude toward the importance of history could have existed side-by-side with the new historicism forever, one undisturbed by the other. But then along came Karl Marx, who managed to merge important elements of both to create a dreadful and destructive new, secular, utopian theology, which would eventually spawn such malignant ideologies as communism, socialism, fascism, and Nazism, as well as lay the ideological groundwork for modern day American liberalism.

Marx not only endorsed the Enlightenment belief in human progress, but he took it one important step further by positing the theory that this progress was leading directly toward a secularized version of the Christian eschaton. In his view, after the coming proletariat revolution everyone would be happily living in a "worker's paradise." As Karl Lowith put it in his book *Meaning In History*, "the Proletarian Communist wants the crown without the cross; he wants to triumph by earthly happiness."

Now it is normal for utopians to fashion their illusionary best of all possible worlds around their own particular, or peculiar idea of a good time. Voegelin once noted, for example, that the perfect world envisioned by the famous utopian dreamer Marie Jean Antoine Nicholas de Caritat, known to history as the Marquis de Condorcet, was one in which everyone was a French intellectual.

Marx certainly considered himself an intellectual. But his own best of all possible worlds was in keeping with his almost pathological aversion to real work, the resultant poverty, and the anger he focused on the "*schweinbund*" grocer, who was so unreasonable that he expected Marx to pay his food bill. Thus, it is no surprise that this "great economist" cherished the expectation of a world where "each" was provided for "according to his needs," and no one would need to work at any one particular job in order to feed his family. He described this Huckleberry Finn dream as follows in *The German Ideology*.

In communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, herdsman or critic . . .

Few people pay any attention today to the world that Marx thought would follow his much anticipated revolution. But it is important because it is the dream upon which leftist ideology was built. So with that in mind, here are a few lines from Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey's book *The History of Political Philosophy* describing the secular eschaton of which Marx dreamed.

The state or political order will wholly wither away, and homogeneous mankind will live socially under the rule of absolute benevolence—from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs. No longer will duty be performed incidently to the pursuit of selfish interest. The link between duty and interest, which is to say the subordination of duty to interest, will be broken for once and all by the abolition of the categories “duty” and “interest.” They will be abolished by the revision of the property relations, by the inauguration of a new economics which will bring on the full perfection of human nature via the transcendence of production for exchange . . .

Upon the dissolution of classes will necessarily ensue the end of the class struggle and the beginning of strictly human history. When that has occurred, the relations among men will have caught up with the latest great development in the mode of production; the conditions of oppression disappearing, the need for coercion will disappear as well, and the state will wither away to be replaced by the universal brotherhood of man . . . When the new breed of man is generated by the common ownership of the means of production, all the old (natural) categories of right will fall before the logic of history, and subphilosophic men will live in uncoerced and myth-free (i.e., perfectly rational) society, as only the rarest of men were thought to be able to do, but

even more emancipatedly than the rarest, who never had the benefit of the perfect environment.

Now as we all know, Marx's much anticipated worldwide revolution of the proleteriati never occurred. But the idea that “progress” would lead to a “worker's paradise” on earth and could be speeded up by violent revolution spread like a pest bacillus across Europe. As a result, revolutions, reactionary responses, new philosophies questioning God, angst, and bewilderment were highlights of the century.

By rights, Marxism should have withered away when it became apparent that the emancipation of the proleteriati would not result from Marx's revolution but from the industrial one. The world should have justly noted that “The old fool was wrong,” and left it at that. But the appeal of the idea that the world was moving toward a period of universal happiness and equality and that this progress could be effected by man's actions had sunk deep roots into European consciousness. So it became just a matter of substituting government action in the place of the proletariati revolution for the Marxist dream to live on.

The origin of this particular transition can be found in the writings of Eduard Bernstein, whose controversial book *Evolutionary Socialism*, published toward the very end of the 19th century, recognized that Marx was wrong, that there was no chance that either a worldwide class war or the collapse of capitalism was going to occur. As a result, he argued that Marxists should pursue a more practical, piecemeal movement towards a socialist state by working within a *parliamentary democratic context*. In other words, shift the battle for the worker's paradise from the streets to the halls of government.

The purists in the Marxist community hotly contested Bernstein's notions at first. But it soon became apparent that he was on to something big. Rather than a revolution, where someone might get hurt and from which everyone would emerge equal, Bernstein suggested an alternative that was much

more attractive to the movement's Pooh-Bahs. In this new "evolutionary" (as opposed to revolutionary) approach, enormous bureaucratic power of a magnitude undreamed of by the Kings and Potentates of antiquity would be vested in the hands of a few leftist "leaders." The utopian promises would remain the same. But the struggle would require that the canaille give up their personal freedoms, and many their lives, in exchange for the delightful dream of a universal equality and happiness. Forget revolution. In this new scheme of things, authoritarian government held the key to paradise.

It took a long time for this pipedream to get established on American soil, largely because the American people were then, as they are today, a religious lot. As Tocqueville noted about the United States in 1831, "there is no country in the world where the Christian religion retains a greater influence over the souls of men than in America."

But, as I indicated above, the Great Depression brought demands from the public that Washington do something dramatic, and Franklin Roosevelt responded by opening the floodgates of government and releasing the "New Deal," which was followed 30 years later by Lyndon Johnson's "Great Society."

Economists, sociologists, political scientists, and ordinary citizens can argue whether the waves upon waves of new government programs that have come into existence during the past 70 or so years have created a healthier society and a stronger economy than would have evolved if the government had taken a less aggressive approach. But that is another story. For this week, I would simply argue that there is little question that over this period the public's expectations for government grew by leaps and bounds, becoming ever larger and ever more fantastic, to the point where these expectations are today utopian in nature and, as I indicated earlier, a source of madness for a large share of the population.

Which raises the question, what happens to a democracy when the voters are sated with unreasonable expectations of their government? What happens to a democracy when every gripe

or inconvenience, real or imagined, small or large, deserved or undeserved, prompts an expectation of government action? What happens when every itch creates an expectation that it will be scratched by someone in Washington?

What happens when universal peace is viewed as a reasonable expectation during a time when America's enemies, both actual and potential, large or small, are capable of killing tens of thousands of citizens with one chemical, biological or nuclear attack on one American city; a time when there is overwhelming evidence that, due to advances in technology, the world is arguably much more dangerous than at any previous point in the history of the world?

The answer is you get a dream world government. You get "types of actions which in the real world would be considered as morally insane, because of the real effects which they have," but which are "considered moral in the dream world, because they intended an entirely different effect." You get "measures which are intended to establish peace" but which actually "increase the disturbances that will lead to war." You get wars where the initial stated purpose of destroying a deadly, self-proclaimed enemy before he has a chance to kill Americans slowly morphs into a war with the unrealistic, dream world aim of transforming the culture of an entire region of the world.

You get a multi-billion dollar government program offering a drug benefit to elderly citizens during a time when other large programs for the elderly are facing bankruptcy. You get a public that has an unhealthy obsession with politics and a resultant culture that is drowning in bile created by political disputes that would only mildly concern them in a sane world. You get surreal debates and idiotic proposals concerning questions about such important matters as immigration policy, environmental regulations, judicial appointments, foreign aid, and fiscal policy.

And finally you find yourself yearning for the good old days when the nation's neuroses were the result of repressed sexual desires.

THE NEW PROGRESSIVES VERSUS THE REACTIONARIES, REDUX.

With President Bush setting a bold domestic agenda for his second term, which includes reform of the tort system, the tax code, and old-age entitlements, there has been much discussion of late about how the GOP has become the party of reform, while the Democrats have become the party of the status quo. *National Review's* Jay Nordlinger put it this way last week:

The Republican party is definitely the reform party. All the reformist ideas come from the right — on the military, on the tax code, on the schools, on immigration, on Medicare, on tort law, on (of course) Social Security. And the Democrats are in the position of blocking, or, when they can't do that, modifying. They are, in a sense, the "conservative" party, while the Republicans are progressive.

Those who read last week's "From the Archives" piece know that this is a theme Mark and I have been noodling over for better than four-and-a-half years. Even during the campaign of 2000, we noted that Al Gore was the reactionary in the race. Rather than offering a positive agenda of his own, we pointed out that Gore merely reacted to then-Governor Bush's campaign rhetoric, calling everything the Texan proposed a "risky scheme," and rejecting even marginal changes from the status quo in any of the major policy issues that dominated the debate. And nothing has changed in the intervening four-plus years.

Part of this is just the natural evolutionary process of politics. When a party establishes itself unarguably as the dominant party and holds that position for so long and so overwhelmingly that it is able to enact a considerable measure of its agenda and to expand that agenda several times, then its natural inclination will be to defend its newly established order, even when all the evidence suggests that this new order is at best unsustainable and at worst destructive.

But part of it, as Mark and I noted four-and-a-half years ago in "The New Progressives Versus the Reactionaries," springs from the fact that the American political paradigm has, over the last decade-and-a-half, changed dramatically, with both sides losing ideological touchstones that for so long helped direct their political energy.

Without the old dividing lines of "big government vs. small government," "labor vs. capital," and "hawk vs. dove," both parties have had to feel their way a bit as they try to redefine themselves. And the Democrats, apparently having grown slothful in their half-century of political dominance, have felt their way in a much less vigorous, intellectually inquisitive, and politically honest manner than have their GOP counterparts, who while still not certain who and what they are, have at least made some effort to figure it out and have begun having the complicated internecine discussions that distill, strengthen, and advance political ideas.

The events of September 11 exacerbated this distinction between Republicans and Democrats, although you're not likely ever to hear this acknowledged in the mainstream press. The attacks on the United States provided Republicans with an issue around which to build at least a temporary paradigm, with the "war on terror" offering validation for seemingly disparate policy proposals. Some of these flowed logically from the attacks (e.g. greater defense spending) and others required a little greater explanation, but could, at least tangentially, be connected (e.g. tax cuts to strengthen the economy and to deny the enemy its stated goal of wreaking economic destruction).

But for the Democrats, in contrast, the attacks produced no such steeling of purpose. Prior to September 11, their collective views on foreign policy were, to say the least, disjointed. Afterward, they were even more so.

As on domestic policy, Democrats, as a whole, have proven intellectually and ideologically indolent, refusing even to contemplate how the attacks on American civilians on American soil, as well as

the broader war against radical Islam those attacks presaged, might have changed the foreign policy environment, much less how they should alter their policy prescriptions to meet the demands of this new environment.

Yes, a few brave Democratic souls, like Senator Joseph Lieberman and *The New Republic's* Peter Beinart, have advocated the establishment of a liberal-hawk orientation dedicated to securing the values of liberal democracy by waging war on its enemies. But by and large, the Democratic establishment has responded to the changed environment spawned by September 11 in precisely the manner it has responded to other changes in the political environment, namely by ignoring the problem and focusing what little intellectual energy it can muster to attack the opposition's proposed solutions. The Democrats have, in short, become knee-jerk reactionaries on foreign policy as well.

Now, let me acknowledge by way of a brief aside, that I know that given the conventional definition of the term "reactionary" my suggestion that the Democrats have become "foreign policy reactionaries" falls a bit short of the mark. According to *The Harper Dictionary of Modern Thought*, reactionaries are people who "not merely resist change but seek to put the clock back and return to some earlier order of society which is seen as having possessed characteristics . . . which the present is felt to lack." There is little question that the Democrats are leery of change in foreign affairs and appear bewildered by the radical foreign policy positions advanced by President Bush. Additionally, the era they appear to nostalgically recall is undoubtedly the 1990s. Their rhetoric, most especially during the campaign, portrayed the Clinton years, both domestically and internationally, as a sort of Golden Age of America.

All that said, I understand that I use the term "reactionary" primarily to indicate that the Democrats are not proscribing policy based on strongly held beliefs or firm convictions, but purely in reaction to the policies advanced by President Bush and his administration. Given the above, that's a slight distinction, perhaps, but one I thought I should nevertheless note.

In any case, as you may recall, during the presidential campaign, Democrats generally talked as if they supported the President universally in his initial response to September 11, backing the attack on the Taliban in Afghanistan, only to fall out with him when he turned his attention to Iraq. This is certainly a case of selective memory. The fact is that even before the invasion of Afghanistan had begun, the liberal skeptics proclaimed the effort hopeless. Afghanistan, they argued, had always been the graveyard of empires, and would be so again. Within days after the effort began, the word "quagmire" was bandied about relentlessly, as were comparisons to Vietnam.

Even as the presidential campaign raged, though, the Democratic ticket could not help but contradict itself, claiming to support the action while nevertheless finding fault with the tactics employed, arguing that the failure to capture Osama bin Laden was the direct and incontrovertible consequence of "outsourcing" the work of fighting in Afghanistan's dangerous mountain terrain to indigenous forces. Never mind that it was this utilization of native allies that, in part, distinguished the U.S. strategy in Afghanistan from those of previous invaders, saving America's soldiers from the mortal fate visited previously upon the Brits and Soviets. Nevertheless, the fact that Bush had employed such tactics was enough to make them suspect in the Democrats' collective estimation.

And this is hardly an isolated incident. Indeed, the Democrats' singular role in the debate over the war on terror has been to complain that somehow President Bush has screwed everything up. Yet they have never quite been able to articulate a strategy of their own.

Note that the rejuvenation of John Kerry's primary campaign began in earnest a couple of months before the Iowa caucuses, when he went on record with his brilliant assessment of the war in Iraq, telling *Rolling Stone* magazine, "I voted for what I thought was best for the country . . . Did I expect George Bush to f--- it up as badly as he did? I don't think anybody did." But with the campaign only a few weeks removed, can anyone recall what, precisely, Kerry proposed to do differently? How he planned to unf--- it up? Me neither.

But perhaps the most prominent and, frankly, distasteful reactionary attack on President Bush's prosecution of the war on terror is that which revolves around allegations that the President and his administration have sanctioned and even encouraged torture of prisoners captured both in Iraq and in the broader war on terror.

Democrats and their allies in the mainstream media have taken full advantage of the fact that the general public has understandably been repulsed by the pictures of violent and sexually deviant torture at Abu Ghraib to make their case against the administration and the entirety of its war policy. These pictures, they proclaim, undermine the entire moral justification for the war and can be linked directly to the White House, since administration memos denying captured terrorists the rights of prisoners of war and advocating aggressive interrogation techniques are responsible for "creating the atmosphere" in which such heinous maltreatment could occur.

Ignore, for the moment, that the infamous pictures were all taken *over the course of one night* and that the transgressions depicted therein were perpetrated by a mere handful of Army Reservists, the ring leader of whom was a prison guard in civilian life who had also been accused credibly of mistreating prisoners in that capacity. Ignore as well that an independent investigation conducted by former Secretary of Energy and Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger found, in the words of *The Wall Street Journal*, that "the overall rate of mistreatment in Afghanistan and Iraq appears to be far lower than in past conflicts." And finally ignore the fact that Protocol 1 of the Geneva Convention IV, the provision under which the Democrats and their allies argue that Iraqi and al-Qaeda terrorists should be granted POW protections, was proposed in 1977 and has been rejected by every American president since, and was expressly disavowed by the Reagan administration in 1987 to the cheers of folks like the editorial boards of both *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, hardly bastions of conservative thought or love for Reagan.

The bottom line is that the Democrats and liberal pundits shrieking about the civil rights and POW status for terrorists know full well that Geneva protections for terrorists would prevent American soldiers not just from interrogating prisoners using aggressive methods but from interrogating them altogether. And this, in turn, would prevent soldiers and intelligence officers from mining these potentially lucrative sources for information about potential attacks, both on soldiers in theater and American civilians.

More to the point, Democrats know that no President, Republican or Democrat, would ever accept such limits and that other presidents, most notably Franklin Roosevelt, did much worse in times of war. They understand that even one of their own, if faced with the same situation, would almost certainly do precisely as President Bush has done, knowing that to do otherwise would be foolhardy to say the least and would put American lives at risk. Note that Protocol 1 was proposed in 1977, but was not accepted by then-president, human rights and civil liberties blowhard extraordinaire Jimmy Carter. Nor, for that matter was it accepted by Clinton administration, which more than once sent American soldiers into combat situations.

The attack on President Bush and his administration's handling of terrorist prisoners is pure political theater, performed for the singular purpose of embarrassing the President and undermining his case for war. The President's Democratic critics are counting on the public not paying close enough attention to know that the depravity displayed at Abu Ghraib is wholly unrelated to the question of whether terrorist prisoners should be treated as POWs under the Geneva Convention. The degenerate prison guards from Abu Ghraib are, as of last week, being sentenced to lengthy prison terms, and in a normal world, that would put the matter to rest. But this, of course, is no normal world. It's a world where the Democrats' greatest and most urgent obligation is to oppose whatever President Bush supports or to support whatever he opposes, depending on the circumstances.

I should add at this point that the reactionary bent in Democratic foreign affairs is not restricted to policies involving the war on terror. Wherever in the world the President and his aides are conducting the business of the nation it seems there is a prominent Democrat ready to stick his or her nose in where it doesn't belong and take the position precisely opposite the administration's.

Last week, for example, Democratic stalwart and Connecticut Senator Chris Dodd led a small delegation of Senators to Venezuela on what the editorial board of *The Wall Street Journal* called "a solicitous visit." According to the *Journal*, Dodd, who traveled with two fellow Senators, Florida Democrat Bill Nelson and Rhode Island RiNO Lincoln Chafee, emerged from a meeting with Venezuelan strongman Hugo Chavez "to declare that 'this is a very, very, very important bilateral relationship' and that 'we're here to see if we can't move this in a better direction.'"

Chavez, you may recall, is not exactly on President Bush's list of closest friends. He is an unreconstructed Marxist thug who has repeatedly voiced his admiration and appreciation for fellow Marxist thug Fidel Castro; who "won" a recall referendum last year that was rife with violence, threats, intimidation, and fraud (claims to the contrary by Jimmy Carter notwithstanding); who accused the CIA of acting on orders from President Bush and orchestrating a coup against him; who has seized control of his nation's lucrative oil industry; who has waged war on the press in his country; who has similarly waged war on his political opponents; and who has packed Venezuela's Supreme Court in a way that would make FDR insane with jealousy.

Oh yeah. He has also openly sided with America's terrorist enemies; has publicly called President Bush a "pendejo" (rough translation: a--hole); has visited and coordinated efforts on oil and other policy with, among others, the mullahs of Iran; and has worked with Castro and Brazil's Lula da Silva (another Marxist) to undermine American credibility in Latin America.

Now, one should not be too terribly surprised at Dodd's choice of friends. After all, he spent the entire decade of the '80s sucking up to every left-wing dictator or would-be dictator in Latin America and undermining President Reagan's efforts to support the Contras in Nicaragua and the anti-Communist regime in El Salvador.

Indeed, with Dodd playing footsie with Latin American Marxists, John Kerry meeting with America's antagonists (e.g. Bashar Assad, Jacques Chirac) while the nation is at war and publicly badmouthing the war effort, and Jimmy Carter embracing Arab thugs who promise peace with Israel but refuse to denounce those who murder Israelis (in this case Mahmoud Abbas), one could easily get confused as to what decade this is, thinking the year 1985, not 2005.

The one difference between then and now, though, is that then the Democrats' dreadful foreign policy was driven almost exclusively by ideology, while today it is driven almost exclusively by loathing of George W. Bush. The result is the same, of course. Only the motivation differs.

The problems created by this reactionary bent are potentially manifold. For starters, at a time when the nation is facing a grave and ominous threat and is, in fact, engaged in a war against that threat, there is no large scale debate over how best to handle the problem because any input offered by the allegedly loyal opposition must immediately be discarded as irrelevant partisan cant.

Second, the Democrats reflexive opposition to anything that President Bush does has to be encouraging to the nation's enemies. They know that whatever he tries, whatever he offers, the President of the United States will immediately and unconditionally be opposed by legislators representing 4 out of 10 American citizens. This must buoy the spirits of America's adversaries, who are smart enough to know that they can never win on the battle field and must therefore hope to win in the field of public opinion.

Last, and most important, there is a very good chance (one might say a certainty) that someday a Democrat will once again be President, perhaps as soon as January 20, 2009. And if the party has not by then evolved in its foreign policy thinking beyond its current knee-jerk reactionism, then that new administration will find itself unable effectively to conduct basic foreign policy, much less conduct a global war on terror. And that could spell disaster.

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