

Mark L. Melcher Publisher
melcher@thepoliticalforum.com

Stephen R. Soukup Editor
soukup@thepoliticalforum.com

THEY SAID IT

“Millions of modern people of the white civilization-that is, the civilization of Europe and America- have forgotten all about Islam. They have never come in contact with it. They take for granted that it is decaying, and that, anyway, it is just a foreign religion which will not concern them. It is, as a fact, the most formidable and persistent enemy which our civilization has had, and may at any moment become as large a menace in the future as it has been in the past . . .

“I say the suggestion that Islam may re-arise sounds fantastic but this is only because men are always powerfully affected by the immediate past:-one might say that they are blinded by it. Cultures spring from religions; ultimately the vital force which maintains any culture is its philosophy, its attitude towards the universe; the decay of a religion involves the decay of the culture corresponding to it-we see that most dearly in the breakdown of Christendom today. The bad work begun at the Reformation is bearing its final fruit in the dissolution of our ancestral doctrines-the very structure of our society is dissolving. In Islam there has been no such dissolution of ancestral doctrine-or, at any rate, nothing corresponding to the universal break-up of religion in Europe. The whole spiritual strength of Islam is still present in the masses of Syria and Anatolia, of the East Asian mountains, of Arabia, Egypt and North Africa. The final fruit of this tenacity, the second period of Islamic power, may be delayed:-but I doubt whether it can be permanently postponed . . .”

The Great Heresies, Hilaire Belloc, 1938.

EUROPE AND TERRORISM.

It is axiomatic that the initial advantage in a conflict involving violence goes to the party that hits first, and this is especially true if the second party is caught by surprise. A corollary is that this ploy will turn out badly when used against an enemy that has superior strength, skill, and determination if the initial blow is not devastating enough to destroy that enemy's will or ability to retaliate.

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor is a good example of this axiom and corollary in practice. The Japanese gained a significant short-term edge when they hit hard against an adversary that was caught unawares. But they didn't hit hard enough to destroy their enemy's will or ability to hit back, and unfortunately for them, the foe they chose turned out to be far more powerful, skilled, and determined than they had supposed.

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Subscriptions are available by contacting:

The Political Forum LLC 8563 Senedo Road, Mt. Jackson, Virginia 22842
Phone 540.477.9762 Fax 540.477.3359 melcher@thepoliticalforum.com www.thepoliticalforum.com

In my opinion, Osama bin Laden made the same mistake on September 11, 2001 when he struck the United States. He gained some advantage with his brutal, surprise attack. But he didn't hit nearly hard enough. As with the Japanese 60 years earlier, he ignored such well-known maxims of conflict management as Emerson's oft-quoted line that "when you strike at a king, you must kill him" and Sun Tsu's cautionary advise to "Know thine enemy as thyself."

Relative to this later pearl of wisdom, Osama seems to know very little about the enemy he has made. To borrow a phrase from Mrs. Browning, let me count the ways.

For starters, he underestimated the native aggressiveness of Americans. Contrary to his apparent perception, the United States is not easily cowed. In fact, it is a nation of men and women who are, by any standard, unusually big, strong, and healthy; who have a powerful sense of their own importance, which renders them belligerent when their comforts and security are threatened; and who are culturally acclimatized toward aggression and competitiveness.

From its barrooms to its boardrooms, from its athletic fields to its strip-mall-based, karate training centers for after-school adolescent care, from its red neck country culture to its inner city gang life, from its squash courts and trading pits in downtown New York to its labor union halls in Detroit and San Francisco, America is, generally speaking, a nation of highly assertive men and women who may no longer be able to cite the historic roots of the phrase "Don't Tread On Me," but who instinctively subscribe to the philosophy it represents.

In fact, the message from Vietnam was not that Americans would cut and run from a war that was going badly. It was that the American people have an extraordinary capacity for absorbing and delivering punishment and a great deal of difficulty accepting defeat.

Another mistake Osama has made is to badly underestimate America's enormous economic strength. In fact, it is hard to imagine that someone with his wealth could be naïve enough to believe that the prescription for victory over the United States is to "bleed" it into bankruptcy, yet that is the strategy he outlined in his videotape of last November. His message indicates that he was confused by the fact that Congress used the term "emergency funds" when it authorized additional money for the war in Iraq and Afghanistan, and thus he apparently believes that the tap is about to go dry. One wonders, if he sold his bonds after hearing that report.

Certainly the September 11 attacks, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the greater "war on terror," have been extremely costly, both in absolute outlays and to overall economic performance. But even when combined, they are not even close to being expensive enough to raise the specter of bankruptcy.

Even more important on the economic front, Osama seems to have underestimated the vast political influence that America's economic strength gives it across the globe. While the nations of the world may indeed be populated by large numbers of America-haters, there are few nations anywhere whose leaders don't understand that if the United States were to be economically crippled they themselves would be rendered either economically comatose or dead. As I wrote in an article shortly after the 9/11 attacks, even the most radical, anti-American Chinese general must realize that if his country is to defeat the United States someday, it will have to be after the United States helps it build an economy that can sustain the effort.

Hence, as Osama would realize if he were paying attention, the enemies of his enemy are not necessarily his friends. In fact, many of them are happily financing the war against him and his ilk by buying massive amounts of U.S. debt.

When I read of Osama's feverish hopes of bankrupting the United States, I was reminded of something I used to note during my travels to Europe, namely that there was a huge difference between those

Europeans whose experience in America consisted of having visited New York City a few times and those who had traveled to a large number of U.S. cities in states across the land. The latter group had a significantly better appreciation for the vast size and pure economic might of the United States than those who had not ventured beyond Manhattan. In short, if Osama is formulating his victory strategy around the prospects of bankrupting America, he might want to call his travel agent and book a whirlwind tour of America's 50 largest cities.

Finally, Osama and his fellow terrorists seem to have believed that the natural squabbling associated with democratic government combined with America's deep concern for the protection of civil liberties would prevent President Bush from acting decisively in response to a terrorist attack.

They were quickly proven wrong on both counts. Twenty-six days after the assaults of September 11, the United States invaded Afghanistan with near unanimous support from politicians on both sides of the aisle and from the American public. Within 45 days, both houses of Congress had passed and the President had signed the Patriot Act, which granted extensive new police powers to the federal government.

In the ensuing months, the law enforcement and intelligence gathering agencies of the federal government underwent vast organizational changes, and priorities were revamped. Heads rolled and were replaced by new ones. Billions of dollars were spent to provide better security to various public sites across America both public and private. Muslim citizens were arrested, roused, questioned, wire-tapped, deported, and recruited as informants. Bank accounts were frozen. Islamic "charities" were closed. Radical leaders of Islamic groups were deported or jailed. And with the exception of a noisy debate over whether the government should have access to the records of public libraries, there was virtually no meaningful criticism concerning the curtailment of the rights of citizens.

Of course, some efforts are being made at the present time to repeal or soften certain sections of the Patriot Act. But this is not, in my opinion, a sign that the commitment of the American people to fight terrorism has waned, but instead is a demonstration that some flexibility exists on this score based on the circumstances. And this flexibility can work both ways.

Thus, I think that militant Muslims could expect a significant shift in emphasis from liberty to security if the need arose as a result of renewed terrorist activity in the United States. And I think the shift could be quick and dramatic, depending upon the nature of the attacks, even to the point of following in Lincoln's footsteps and suspending habeas corpus should a terrorist attack involve nuclear, biological or chemical weapons. In fact, even a sustained string of attacks such as those that took place in London last week would very likely prompt Congress to grant emergency police powers to federal authorities that go well beyond what militant Islam might expect.

Regarding the latter point, it is noteworthy that there is a significant difference between European and American attitudes on this point. Whereas Europeans are determined not to sacrifice their liberties in exchange for greater security against terrorists, Americans, who are generally trustful of their government, feel that the real threat to their liberties comes not from Washington's efforts to protect them but from the terrorist themselves. Americans wonder why European concern for the liberties of resident Muslims should trump the liberty of other citizens to ride the subways without fear.

Of course, the "war on terror" is a long way from being over, and it is not just conceivable but likely that Osama and his fellow terrorists will strike some significant blows against America and American interests both at home and around the world in the years ahead. But it seems to me that a combination of courage, will, determination, unity of purpose, overwhelming military and economic strength, along with considerable legal and tactical flexibility combine to make the United States an extremely difficult enemy for terrorists.

And this brings up the subject of the day, which is my view that the Europeans are not as adequately equipped as Americans to deal with the terrorist threat, especially if it should intensify in the wake of the bombings last week in London.

In defense of this position, I would say that while Osama may have been wrong in believing that democratic processes would prevent Americans from quickly developing and uniting behind an aggressive response to a surprise terrorist strike, he may be correct in thinking that a series of brutal terrorist strikes in several European capitals would engage the democracies of Europe in a paralyzing political dispute.

A recent, lengthy *Wall Street Journal* article, authored by European reporters in Berlin, Madrid, Brussels, Rome, and Scotland, summarized what seems to be the majority opinion in Europe, as outlined in numerous other accounts in the European press, namely that there is almost universal agreement among Europeans that the “U.S. model in which civil liberties are flouted” is not acceptable, since it condones “torture and detention without trial.” And it further seems, in the words of the WSJ article, that Europeans have placed considerable hope in their ability to “freeze out radical strains [of Islamic thought] by strengthening mainstream Muslim groups.”

While these are both noble sentiments, my guess is that they result from two factors that have more to do with practicality than with principles, and which might be described as the dirty little secret of Europe’s problem with terrorism. The first of these is that the resistance to the “American way” is not really stemming from concern over civil liberties, but is instead related to a deep seated, and not illogical fear among Europeans that any direct actions against the Muslim communities in their midst, such as those taken in the United States in the aftermath of September 11, could anger the Muslims among them and incite them to acts of terrorism and just plain old civil disruptions. This is called succumbing to blackmail, and it is usually not a successful long-term strategy for dealing with a threat. The second

is a widespread understanding that there is little chance that the European legal system would allow “the American way” even the the citizens of Europe demanded it. Time and again, courts in one European nation after another have ruled against what in the United States would be considered just actions by the government to protect its citizens against tyranny and intimidation.

The result is that while there seems to be widespread agreement throughout Europe that taking on the Islamists in their midst would be dangerous even to consider, there is not only no consensus as to what they would want to do instead, but no real acceptable alternative options available should a wave of terrorism threaten the nations of Europe and their already weak economies.

This leaves an unstated menu of responses, which include plaintiff cries for help from the “good Muslims” among them and attempts to appease the terrorists themselves with promises of foreign policy concessions and domestic power sharing, which in turn would represent a death blow to Europe and a victory for terrorists everywhere. Everywhere, that is, except in the United States, where such a development would likely serve only to steel the will of the people and bolster the conviction that America alone has the ability to defeat this enemy and, in the process, to rescue its European brethren from the throes of fascism...again.

NO ONE EXPECTS THE SPANISH INQUISITION.

It seems that after every outburst of Islamist terrorism, various analysts, columnists, and pundits use the occasion to explain to the rest of us what is wrong with the American approach to Islam and how the war on terror might be more effectively prosecuted.

Some of this is brilliant. Some of it is helpful. And most of it is neither. Recently, the consensus among these analysts and advice-givers has been that there is nothing truly effective that the West can do to solve

the problem of Islamism; that it is an Islamic problem and therefore one that requires an Islamic solution; and that the West's responsibility in all of this is simply to figure out how best to encourage the world's Muslims to pursue such an Islamic solution.

Not surprisingly, this consensus became the firmly entrenched conventional wisdom among the advice givers following last week's terrorist attacks in London. And not surprisingly, *The New York Times'* Tom Friedman, who more than just about anyone in the history of opinion journalism embodies the conventional wisdom on foreign policy matters, was among the most assertive of those who argued this point. He put it thusly:

It is essential that the Muslim world wake up to the fact that it has a jihadist death cult in its midst. If it does not fight that death cult, that cancer, within its own body politic, it is going to infect Muslim-Western relations everywhere. Only the Muslim world can root out that death cult. It takes a village.

What do I mean? I mean that the greatest restraint on human behavior is never a policeman or a border guard. The greatest restraint on human behavior is what a culture and a religion deem shameful. It is what the village and its religious and political elders say is wrong or not allowed. Many people said Palestinian suicide bombing was the spontaneous reaction of frustrated Palestinian youth. But when Palestinians decided that it was in their interest to have a cease-fire with Israel, those bombings stopped cold. The village said enough was enough.

Now, although I think his is a rather over-sentimentalized description of the problem and the solution, I don't mean to pick on Tom Friedman (though he is eminently pick-onable). Nor, for that matter, do I mean to pick on any of the others who have offered similar advice. In fact, I think they are probably onto something. Like most conventional

wisdom, this idea has become "conventional" precisely because it makes a certain amount of sense. When, for example, Friedman writes that, "either the Muslim world begins to really restrain, inhibit and denounce its own extremists . . . or the West is going to do it for them," the most natural response is, "well, of course."

That said, there is a significant weakness in such advice and in the conclusions the authors draw from it. It is one thing to say that Islam must solve its own problem, but it is something else altogether to honestly and realistically assess how this might be accomplished. And it is clear from pieces like Friedman's that he has no clue as to how this process might occur, which explains his hopelessly schmaltzy and simplistic proposal to let a "village" do it.

Charles Moore of London's *Daily Telegraph* tries a little harder but he too comes up short. After arriving at the same conclusion as Friedman that the solution to this problem must come from within Islam, he proffers what can only be described as a loopy conception of the mechanism by which an internal Muslim solution may be developed.

He begins by asking why moderate Muslim leaders don't aggressively condemn terrorist acts and call for the punishment of perpetrators, and why moderate Muslims don't shun radicals and offer communal support for whistle blowers. And he answers these rhetorical questions by concluding that what the Islamic community in Britain needs is a moderate "champion" who can give voice to Islam's concerns and provide real leadership to his followers. In short, he suggests that Muslims need a "Gandhi or [a] Martin Luther King to give them the right voice."

Now this is, in a word, nuts. Whether Moore knows it or not, Gandhi and Reverend King were able to achieve positive ends without having to resort to violence for one reason, namely that they were in the right. They had legitimate and undeniable grievances that were ultimately acknowledged and supported either by the population at large or by the pertinent authorities.

Radical Islam, in contrast, has no such legitimate grievances. Unless one is willing to buy the preposterous and historically asymmetrical theories propounded by the likes of George Galloway, Robert Fisk, Michael Moore, and Ted Kennedy that terrorism is the byproduct of the war in Iraq or some other American failing, then even to pretend that radical Islam has legitimate gripes borders on the insane.

When the likes of Osama bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri, and Abu Musab al-Zarqawi list their grievances, there is no mention of self determination or the right of men to be treated as equals or anything else even remotely related to the struggle for human and civil rights. No, their complaints generally include things like the Crusades, the Andalusia (the *Reconquista*), the stationing of American troops on “holy” soil in Saudi Arabia, the existence of the state of Israel, democratic “depravity,” Judaism, Christianity, etc., etc. These are not exactly what one would call “legitimate grievances.” They are, instead, the psychotic ramblings a Millenarian cult obsessed with ancient defeats, with the export of a repressive religious legal code, and with the “reestablishment” of a mythical utopian Caliphate.

The idea that a leader in the mold of Gandhi or Martin Luther King could possibly help Muslims redress their grievances through peaceful methods is preposterous on its face. It presupposes, of course, that bin Laden et al. are not serious when they list their demands and that there are other, more legitimate and therefore more practicable reasons for radical Islamic rage. This presupposition is both desperately naïve and dangerously mistaken.

If, as we are repeatedly told by the vast array of military, governmental, academic, religious, and media experts who inundate us with written and television commentary about the war on terror, Bin Laden and the radical Islamists are not representative of most Muslims or of true Islam, then it is high time for most Muslims and for true Islam to start acting that way. What this means is that the leaders of Islam need to start treating radical Islamism as the heresy they and

the experts insist it is. And this, in turn, means that Islam needs not a Gandhi or Martin Luther King, but a Grand Inquisitor.

Ever since September 11, various commentators have suggested that Islam could benefit greatly from one or another institution found in Christianity, which might help to clear up confusion about what does and does not reflect an accurate interpretation of the Koran. Many have suggested that something like a Pope, an ultimate arbiter of religious doctrine, would be useful. Others, including yours truly, have suggested that Islam needs a scholar similar in stature and function to St. Thomas Aquinas, who not only helped to reconcile Christian theology with the modern world but also set the foundation for natural law and modern liberal democracy. In retrospect, though, it is more and more apparent that if Islam could benefit from any Christian institution, it is the Inquisition.

Now, for the record I am neither defending nor advocating anything along the lines of what most people think of when they hear the term “Inquisition,” which is, of course, the Spanish Inquisition. The Spanish Inquisition was, most historians agree, a fairly gross abuse of ecclesiastical power by Tomas de Torquemada and his patrons, Isabella of Castile and her husband Ferdinand, which resulted in the unmerited slaughter of at least 2,000 Spanish Jews, the expulsion of the Jews from Spain, and the perpetuation of anti-Semitism on the Iberian Peninsula.

All of that said, the Inquisition, as it’s more broadly defined, was and still is a valuable tool for the defense of the Catholic faith. Originally founded to combat the Catharist heresy in the late 13th and early 14th Centuries, the Medieval Inquisition eventually evolved into a more formal congregation within the Church, with the Sacred Congregation of the Universal Congregation officially established in 1542 by Pope Paul III. The Medieval Inquisition, its Roman successor, and even its modern manifestation, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (formerly headed by Josef Cardinal Ratzinger, now Pope

Benedict XVI), have all been charged with protecting the faith and defending the Church against heresy. And while Pope John Paul II correctly lamented the excesses of the early Inquisition, calling it a “painful chapter of history” characterized by, among other things, the unwarranted “use of violence in the service of truth,” there is little question that the institution as a whole has served a valuable purpose and helped to exorcise many of the heretical scourges that have threatened the Catholic Church since the late Middle Ages.

If Islam is to craft a solution to the heresy that is radical Islamism, then it can and probably should take a lesson from the Catholic Church and the Inquisition. Again, I’m not advocating the live burning of heretics or the development of new and ingenious methods by which to extract confessions of heresy. I am merely suggesting that Islam will need to establish a firm set of rules detailing what is and what is not an acceptable interpretation of the faith, develop an institution that is charged with enforcing those rules, and be prepared for the eventuality that harsh measures may be necessary in the process of carrying out that mission.

At the end of his piece last week, Friedman acknowledged that this mission has, at the very least, begun, noting that “this past week in Jordan, King Abdullah II hosted an impressive conference in Amman for moderate Muslim thinkers and clerics who want to take back their faith from those who have tried to hijack it.”

Fareed Zakaria described the same conference as a “frontal attack on Al Qaeda’s theological methods” and “a rare show of unity among the religious establishment against terrorists and their scholarly allies.” All of this is well and good, of course, but as both men admit, this is only the beginning of the process by which the heresy of radical Islamism will be eradicated.

And while it would certainly be nice if Charles Moore turned out to be right and a nonviolent leader could help to bring Islam into accord with the rest of the modern world; or if Friedman were correct that

the knowing disapproval of “village” “religious and political elders” could turn the tide against Islamism, neither is likely to be the case. The principle reason that the majority of Muslims will need to be prepared for a brutal struggle at least nominally evocative of the Inquisition is that the “heretics” in this case are well armed, have shown a propensity for violence, and enjoy the financial support of some of the wealthiest and most powerful political figures in the Islamic world.

Any attempt to eradicate or even to curb the influence the radical Islamist heresy is almost certain to spill blood and result in virtual civil war. And this is precisely the reason that the West (namely the United States and the U.K.) must play a central and aggressive role in compelling Islamic states and leaders to undertake such an effort. If taking on bin Laden and his friends were going to be easy, you could rest assured that most Islamic religious and political leaders would have opted to do so long before now. But such a confrontation is highly unlikely to be particularly easy, and most leaders have avoided the inevitable conflict specifically because they feared its brutality and believed they could redirect that brutality elsewhere. Because of bin Laden’s overreach on September 11 and because of the subsequent American and British aggressiveness in resolving the matter, redirecting the brutality is no longer an option, and Islam must now deal directly with its bin-Ladenite heresy.

Some critics of the Bush administration and its allies have suggested that the invasion of Iraq was a distraction from the real war on terror and that the resultant insurgency constitutes an unnecessary escalation of radical Islamist sentiment in the region. Both are false. Whether the Bush administration intended it to be or not (and I suspect they did), the Iraq war was a perfectly appropriate response to 9/11 and is most definitely part and parcel of the broader war on terror. Saddam’s overthrow precipitated the first clash between the radical Islamists and the rest of the Muslim world, and this, in turn, became the first step in crafting an Islamic solution to the problem. The fact of the matter is that Saddam provided the

Americans and Brits with a golden opportunity to advance the cause of the war on terror; his defiance of the U.N. granted them the authority to remove him from power and to spark the initial confrontation between Islam and its radical heretics in a setting in which they would have at least some influence.

Iraq will, over the next several months and years, continue to serve as the impetus for confrontation between the majority of Muslims and radical extremists. Even after it is stabilized, its status as a bastion of democracy is likely to spark conflict, either encouraging moderate Muslims to confront their radical despotic leaders (e.g. Saudi Arabia, Iran) or inducing radical Muslims to launch civil wars in the attempt to prevent democratic governance from spreading (e.g. Lebanon, Egypt). In both cases, the confrontation will be bloody, but heresy will ultimately be purged.

Those analysts like Thomas Friedman and Charles Moore who believe that a solution to the problem of radical Islamism must come from within the Islamic community are correct, but only to a point.

The construction of such solution will indeed be an Islamic enterprise, but it will not be simple and will be anything but nonviolent. Additionally, it will require the continuation of aggressive intervention on the part of the United States and Great Britain. It is naïve to believe that Islam will be able to eradicate its radical Millenarian heresy without considerable bloodshed.

The Medieval Inquisition may seem like a horrific analogy for what will be necessary on the Islamic side of the war on terror, but it is probably apt. If Islam intends to emulate Christianity and remain a viable, stable religion, then it must be willing to cleanse itself of its dangerous unorthodoxies, sometimes brutally, and to learn from the mistakes it makes along the way. With any luck, it will be significantly less than 500 years from now when the leaders of Islam will enjoy the luxury of being able look back at those mistakes regretfully and apologize for “the use of violence in the service of truth.”

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