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THEY SAID IT

“Those whom God wishes to destroy he first makes mad.”

--Euripides

“The hard left in America needs to realize a bald, cruel fact: Anyone who sees no moral distinction between Israel and the mullahs of Iran, or sees the U.S. attempt to set up a constitutional republic in Iraq as equivalent to the Syrian occupation of Lebanon, suffers from incurable moral cretinism. The more the fervent anti-war base embraces these ideas, the more they ensure that no one will trust the left with national security. Ever.”

--Columnist/blogger James Lileks, “The Exploits and Exploitation of Cindy Sheehan,” August 17, 2005.

THE STUPIDER PARTY.

It seems like ages ago, but it was just a little over a year ago this week, that the Democratic Party held its national convention in Boston and nominated home-town Senator John Kerry to be its candidate for President of the United States. The Party, you may recall, emerged from its week-long infomercial supremely confident, buoyed not only by the enthusiasm of convention delegates but by the “sober” predictions of the pundits, the overwhelming majority of whom expected Kerry to beat President Bush and Congressional Democrats to pick up at least a handful of seats in both houses.

Indeed, with super-pollster John Zogby describing the election as “John Kerry’s to lose” and election soothsayer extraordinaire Charlie Cook having predicted that “unless something happens to change the dynamics and circumstances of this race, Bush will lose,” one was hard pressed in the wake of that convention to find a single professional prognosticator who expected the President to be re-elected or for the GOP to hold its own in the battles for Congress. Yours truly accepted, of course.

In retrospect, the reasons so many of the “professionals” were wrong about the election are obvious. A handful, most notably Zogby, simply allowed their personal and political prejudices to cloud their judgment and affect their interpretation of the pertinent data. But most, including Cook, drastically underestimated the revulsion with which the American electorate would regard the Democratic platform and the candidate tasked with selling it.

Pure unadulterated hatred of one's opponent is rarely a sentiment around which a successful political campaign can be built, but even more so when the object of that hatred is the commander-in-chief of a wartime military and the man who quite ably and honorably saw the nation through one of its darkest and most unsettling periods. All of this, in combination with the Democrats' historical weakness on national security and the fact that John Kerry was, prior to his nomination, best known for undermining his fellow soldiers while they were still in combat, rendered the President's apparent weaknesses less significant than the prognosticators imagined and made it highly unlikely that John Kerry would have been elected under any circumstances. President Bush may well have been vulnerable, but his vulnerability was more than overwhelmed by his opponent's many weaknesses.

All of this is worth keeping in mind, I think, as the press prattles on about President Bush's falling approval ratings, about the public's waning support for the administration's Iraq policy, and about the portents of the Republican Party's demise in next fall's midterm elections. Some very serious and very smart political observers, including the aforementioned Charlie Cook, have already begun seriously discussing the potential for a GOP catastrophe next November, and there can be little doubt that the President's party does, indeed, have some very real problems. That said, neither the Democrats nor the prognosticators appear to have learned much of anything from last year's embarrassment.

The conventional wisdom among the political pundits is that virtually every news story these days, whether it is related to Iraq, the economy, the price of oil, or even to steroids in baseball, reflects poorly on President Bush and, by extension, on his party. And while only a fool would dispute that the Republicans are struggling a bit to find their footing, a closer examination of current events shows that the same dynamic that fooled the experts and determined last year's election is still operative.

Take, for example, the case of Cindy Sheehan. As I'm sure you're well aware by now, Mrs. Sheehan is the mother of a soldier, Army Specialist Casey Sheehan, who was killed in Iraq on April 4, 2004. Though she and her family met with the President just over a year ago and after the meeting praised Mr. Bush for his compassion and dedication to the cause of freedom, Mrs. Sheehan now has demanded a second meeting with the President, has set up camp outside the Bushes' Crawford, Texas ranch, and, in the process, has become a hero to the anti-war American left.

Mrs. Sheehan's story is tragic to say the least, but it is also incredibly disturbing on several levels. She is off the front pages for now, having left Crawford to attend to her sick mother, but her crusade says many things about the current state of American politics, just not the things the mainstream press and other Democratic sympathizers have told us it says.

The problem for all of those on the left who would have us believe that Cindy Sheehan is an American hero or the embodiment of all American mothers or a representative of the public at large who speaks with "absolute moral authority," as *New York Times* hysteric/columnist Maureen Dowd declared, is that she is also, to put it as delicately as possible, an anti-Semitic, anti-American, left-wing ideologue whose grief and political fury have turned her erstwhile sympathetic protest into the embodiment of the political left's paranoia and hatred.

As the irreplaceable Mark Steyn put it last week, Mrs. Sheehan is "at best a little unhinged by grief and at worst mentally ill." And her grief or illness has led her to some pretty strange and ugly places.

It would be nigh on impossible to list all of the unfortunate and impertinent things said by this hero of the new left, but what follows is a fairly representative sample. For starters, Mrs. Sheehan believes that "we're waging a war of terror in this country," that "the biggest terrorist in the world is George W. Bush," and that her son was "murdered by the Bush crime family." She also believes that her son "died for oil. He died to make your [President

Bush's] friends richer. He died to expand American imperialism in the Middle East." She believes that we "have to impeach George Bush down to the person who picks up the dog shit in Washington!" Not only has she argued that Osama bin Laden might not have been behind the attacks on 9/11, but that this whole war on terror thingy is the result of machinations by a sinister Jewish cabal that controls the world. With regard to this last point, among other things, she has openly declared her belief that the war is the handiwork of a "destructive neocon cabal" and accused this nation's leaders of using American soldiers to do the bidding of the Israeli government and other Jewish conspirators. To wit:

[M]y first born was murdered. Am I angry? Yes, he was killed for lies and for a PNAC [Project for the New American Century, a think tank chaired by *The Weekly Standard's* Bill Kristol] Neo-Con agenda to benefit Israel. My son joined the army to protect America, not Israel. Am I stupid? No, I know full well that my son, my family, this nation and this world were betrayed by George Bush who was influenced by the neo-con PNAC agendas after 9/11.

Finally, Sheehan is aggressively anti-American. In addition to suggesting that the American political system is "morally repugnant," she has called the United States a "fascist state" bent on world domination and murder. At a rally for terrorist-abetting lawyer Lynne Stewart, Sheehan declared:

I was raised in a country by a public school system that taught us that America was good, that America was just. America has been killing people . . . since we first stepped on this continent, we have been responsible for death and destruction. I passed on that bullshit to my son and my son enlisted. I'm going all over the country telling moms: "This country is not worth dying for."

It is pretty obvious from all of this that Mrs. Sheehan, as Steyn noted, "is having a mental breakdown in public." But her emotional state is not the issue here, at least according to her "supporters." What matters to them is what she represents.

To these supporters in the fringe anti-war left, in the more mainstream Democratic pressure groups, in the sympathetic anti-war press, and even in the Democratic Party itself, Sheehan and her protest have played an important role in "raising the consciousness" of the American people with regard to the evil being perpetrated in their name by George Bush and his cronies. To them, she represents a nation that is tired of being lied to, tired of sacrificing its young men and women, and tired of Bush and his privileged friends benefiting from the deaths of innocents and from the exploitation of the less privileged.

In their collective imagination, Sheehan embodies a sea change in the emotional condition of the nation and therefore signals the rejection of the Bush administration's foreign policy by the American public. As *New York Times'* hysteric-in-chief (and, natch, former drama critic) Frank Rich put it yesterday, "The strategy of fighting a war without shared national sacrifice has at last backfired . . . The president can keep trying to ration the photos of flag-draped caskets. But this White House no longer has any more control over the insurgency at home than it does over the one in Iraq."

As desperately as these supporters want for Cindy Sheehan to represent the vanguard of the "insurgency" against President Bush and, by extension, against the Republican Party, they are bound to be disappointed. Lagging public support for the war in Iraq notwithstanding, Sheehan is hardly a vanguard. Indeed, as this sad and painful spectacle unfolded in Texas, it became clearer and clearer that she represents something entirely different.

In reality, what Sheehan represents is the putrefaction of the American left and the insidiousness and

contagiousness of that decay. Not all Democrats – in fact, not many Democrats – actually agree with the overwhelming majority of the hateful sentiments harbored by the fringe left. The rabid anti-American, anti-Semitic, and anti-Christian attitudes of the far left are considered just as odious by most Democrats as they are by most Republicans. But like an opportunistic disease, the energy and money possessed by the hateful fringe activists have overrun the mainstream of a Democratic Party, which has been weakened by ideological feebleness and aimlessness, thereby rendering more temperate Democratic values immaterial, particularly where the war on terror is concerned.

In a sane political environment, Cindy Sheehan should actually have some of the moral authority she claims, precisely the same moral authority that all other parents who've lost children in this war have. They have all truly sacrificed for the cause. But the political left today is no sane environment. It is an environment characterized by ideological drift, by zealous and self-satisfied ignorance and prejudice, and by venomous hatred. And in such an environment, even the most sympathetic individuals and sentiments often become loathsome and offensive.

If delusional leftists like Maureen Dowd, Frank Rich, the folks at Moveon.org, and the rest of Cindy Sheehan's exploiters want to believe that the waning support for the President's policy in Iraq gives them license to embrace the vilest anti-Semitic, anti-Republican, and anti-American sentiments and to ally themselves with the likes of David Duke (another Sheehan "supporter"), more power to them. They should be prepared, however, for the likelihood that such perfidy will actually prove the GOP's salvation, reminding voters next November that a political party that cannot purge such hateful elements from its ranks simply cannot be trusted with power.

The same principle applies, by the way, to another newly minted recent Democratic hero, failed congressional candidate Paul Hackett, who early this month narrowly lost a special election to fill the House seat vacated by Rob Portman, who was named U.S.

Trade Representative. Much has been made of the fact that Democrat Hackett, who is a major in the Marine Reserves, was extremely competitive in one of the most Republican districts in one of the most Republican states and a district that Portman won easily last November. Democratic leaders, including Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee Chairman Rahm Emanuel, were ecstatic with Hackett's loss, declaring that now "there is no safe Republican district."

Even less partisan, more sober observers, including forecaster Charlie Cook, have suggested that Hackett's strong showing probably portends ill for the GOP in next year's midterms. As Cook put it over the weekend, "the results [of the special election] should be sufficient warning to Republicans that something is wrong and next year could be very bad . . . Even if the results were 75 percent meaningful for Ohio, and just 25 percent for the other 49 states, it's a bad omen."

The problem with *all* of the analysis of this contest – from the right, from the left, and from ostensibly impartial sources – is that it has centered on one question: "Why did Hackett do so well?" And while the answers to that question are interesting enough, the fact of the matter is that they are largely irrelevant. The pertinent question is one that has thus far not been asked, much less answered, and that is: "Why did Paul Hackett lose?"

Everyone simply assumes that Hackett lost because he is a Democrat who ran in a Republican district. That may well have been part of it, but I don't think that fully explains the loss. The fact of the matter is that Paul Hackett lost principally because he was a bad candidate. Actually, let me rephrase that; he was a good candidate, a very good candidate, but one who became less appealing as he was tainted by the far left's hatred and loathsomeness.

Hackett is, as I said, a major in the Marine Reserves. He is also an Iraq war veteran who, out of a sense of duty, volunteered to go to Iraq despite his opposition to the war. He was able, throughout the campaign, to make reference to his service and to run ads showing

footage of President Bush and endorsing the values of duty and service to country. He is a family man, the founder of his own law firm, and a respected member of the community. He is, in short, a dream candidate.

By contrast, his opponent, Jean Schmidt, was an unattractive candidate, to say the least. She is a former state legislator considered close to the state's admittedly corrupt and wildly unpopular Governor, Bob Taft. She was also, just prior to the election, tied to lobbying efforts on behalf of a large campaign contributor, never a good thing, but particularly in a state already reeling from countless Republican corruption scandals.

By all rights, Hackett should have crushed Schmidt, Republican district or not. But he didn't.

And the reason he didn't is because he squandered just enough of the respect afforded him because of his service by calling the President of the United States – and therefore *his commander-in-chief* – a “chickenhawk” and “the son of a bitch that lives in the White House.” Never mind the potential violation of Article 88 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice, such comments were flat out stupid. They almost certainly won Hackett few votes, since those who would appreciate them were likely to vote for him anyway, though they just as certainly cost him a few. Had Major Hackett not succumbed to the left's most pernicious malady, Bush Derangement Syndrome, it is likely that he, not Schmidt would be on his way to Washington to represent Ohio's 2nd Congressional district.

To make matters worse for Democrats, Hackett's close call is almost guaranteed to encourage the leaders of the party to try to recreate his candidacy in other districts around the country next year. Already there are reports of Democrats recruiting other Iraq war veterans to take on incumbent Republicans. And it's a virtual certainty that the veterans they recruit will, like Hackett, be opposed to the war and be unafraid to talk up their own service while bad-mouthing the commander-in-chief and his “reckless adventurism.”

Of all the dumb ideas that Democrats have come up with over the last dozen years or so – and there have been far too many to count – this may be the dumbest. It's as if they don't realize that the “proud soldier, proud anti-warrior” strategy was a dud in last year's presidential election and similarly fizzled in this year's special congressional election. Moreover it appears never to have occurred to them that this strategy was, in fact, the very reason they lost. Given their respective opponents' vulnerabilities, it is entirely possible that the Dems would have won both contests if they'd simply been able control their petulance and avoid connection with the hostility and contemptibility of the anti-war movement. Mark my word, regardless of the number of soldiers they run, if the Democratic Party honchos make opposition to the war a centerpiece of their campaign strategy next year, they will lose and lose badly.

In addition, if they exploit soldiers and employ this tired and desperate strategy in the hope of short-term gain, the Democrats will run the risk of forever squandering potential long-term gain and the most promising opportunity they have had in some time to regain respectability and thus return to power.

Soldiers returning from Iraq can and should form the foundation of the Democrats' resurgence, providing leadership, courage, and most importantly national security *bona fides* to a party that desperately lacks all three. But by embracing a shortsighted, anti-war campaign strategy, Democrats will not only fail once again to win over the public, but will also almost certainly alienate a good number of the socially liberal/militarily conservative soldiers who are proud of their service and proud of the things they've done for their country and for the Iraqis and Afghans. These soldiers could give the Democrats both a whiff of moral authority and a real opportunity to stave off political irrelevance, but not if the party insists on stubbornly maintaining the position that has proven a failure for more than three decades now, namely that American military action is, by definition, an exercise in aggression and brutality.

At this point in time, some fourteen months out from the midterm elections, it really is too early to make any sort of serious predictions about the outcomes of the various contests. As the standard prognosticators caveat goes, much can and will happen between now and November 2006, and it is therefore impossible to say with any certainty what will happen.

One thing that can be said with certainty, though, is that the Democratic Party is playing a strange, dangerous, and politically perplexing game. Despite their manifest failure as part of a political strategy and their equally obvious depravity, the party continues to flirt with the derangements of the far left, most notably anti-Semitism, anti-Americanism, and anti-Bush-ism (for lack of a better term), a fact that is reinforced by the party's most recent choices of heroes.

Right now, the ascendant and vibrant wing of the Democratic Party is the modern-day equivalent of the Know-Nothings, a political faction that proudly revels in its ignorance and prejudice. If the Democrats do, indeed, manage to confound the experts and lose again next fall, they will have no one to blame but themselves, since their failure will almost certainly be the result not of their opponents' strength, but of the mainstream's unwillingness or inability to wrest control of the party's rhetoric from these Know-Nothing fringes.

The irony here is that the experts are right and the GOP is ripe to be upset. But the current crop of Democratic leaders may be the only mix of politicians capable of making the hapless Congressional Republican poseurs look good by comparison. Who besides these Democrats could take such seemingly righteous and honorable Americans as a returning war volunteer and the grieving mother of a dead soldier and turn them into objects of derision and public trepidation? If the Republicans are indeed the stupid party, and there is ample reason to believe they still are, then there can be little question that the Howard-Dean-led Democrats are the stupider party.

TROUBLOUS WRINGING OF HANDS.

Whoa! Calm down, America! The United States is not about to "lose the war in Iraq." Nor is it about to "pull its troops out and return home." It may eventually do both. But if so, that won't happen any time soon. So relax. Don't pay any attention to all the Iraq hysteria that has been going on of late in the press and on the talk shows. In fact, turn off your television and throw away the newspapers for a while. Enjoy the final weeks of summer.

Go to the beach. Golf. Read a book. Mow the lawn already. Fix some 30-minute meals with your Rachel Ray cookbook. Take a long nap. Anything you do will be more interesting and fulfilling than immersion in the on-going extravaganza over the war in Iraq that the national press corps is hosting as a means of coping with the August heat and boredom. The war will be here when you get back. Nothing will have changed.

Personally, I think President Bush has done an absolutely abominable job of maintaining public support for the war effort, which is, in truth, his most important responsibility as Commander-in-Chief. In fact, in my opinion, his performance on this front has been a national tragedy. And he may eventually blow it by failing to keep the American people on board. I noted that this was a distinct possibility in an article I wrote almost two years ago entitled, "How Bush Could Lose The War In Iraq."

In the meantime, however, the war is going to go on. And on and on. To borrow a metaphor from the Vietnam War days, not only is there no light at the end of the tunnel, there isn't even a tunnel as yet. And speaking of Vietnam, one important difference between the war in Iraq and the Vietnam War is that the United States actually did have the option of pulling its troops out of Vietnam without causing any immediately apparent damage to its long-term security. This is not the case with Iraq. No matter what the liberal pundits might say, the United States cannot "declare victory and leave" without raising more uncharted dangers than either party is willing to assume.

In a perfect world, President Bush would be able to convince a large majority of the American people that the mission in Iraq is worthwhile by providing a coherent, practical, and achievable outline of the American goal there and explaining why this goal is important. But, of course, this is not a perfect world. So instead we get a sort of muddled amalgamation of patriotic sloganeering, vague proclamations of an important link between the war in Iraq and security at home, promises of grand offensives to come, reports of how much America is doing for the noble Iraqi people, and pictures of a buff president riding his bicycle.

So the war on the home front is likely to be messy and worrisome for quite some time. But that doesn't mean that the bad guys in Iraq are either winning or going to win. Life isn't all that great for them either, you know. Their casualty rate is high and rising. Good hiding places are becoming increasingly hard to find. The U.S. military gets tougher and more sophisticated each day. And the prospects for the eventual establishment of some sort of government in Iraq that is antagonistic toward the goals of the militant Islam are increasing with time.

In fact, even in the highly unlikely event that the still very small "get the troops out now" contingent were to win the day, there is almost no possibility that the leaders of the insurgency in Iraq would emerge victorious from the civil war that would follow. The Iraqi people may never live under a true democracy, as President Bush and Condi Rice keep hoping. But they have had enough experience with freedom in the past year or so to make it unlikely that they would willingly subject themselves to rule by a motley band of foreign religious fanatics aligned with a bunch of Baathist murderers from the Saddam era.

A week ago Sunday, the *Washington Post's* lead story was a doleful piece entitled "U.S. Lowers Sights On What Can Be Achieved In Iraq," with a subhead that read, "Administration Is Shedding 'Unreality' That Dominated Invasion, Official Says."

The article didn't live up to the headline, in that it never really provided evidence that "the administration" is considering anything of the sort. But that's not remarkable for the *Washington Post*. What was interesting, however, was the following sentence squeezed in among scores of paragraphs outlining how terrible things are in Iraq.

But Iraq, ranked among world leaders behind Saudi Arabia in proven oil reserves, is incapable of producing enough refined fuel amid a car-buying boom that has put an estimated 1 million more vehicles on the road in the postwar period. Lines for subsidized cheap gas stretch for miles every day in Baghdad.

Of course, my heart goes out to those Iraqis waiting in line to buy subsidized gasoline for their new cars. Such a pity, says I. But I also have considerable sympathy for those young Arabs whose goal in life is to return Baghdad to the days when it was the capital city of a medieval Caliphate. They'd be better off dreaming of playing professional basketball in America. Indeed, even the possibility of imposing and enforcing strict sharia law in post-war Iraq seems to me to be a stretch.

Naturally, no one can be confident predicting where this mess is headed. But if I had to guess, I would guess that in the near term the Iraqis will eventually adopt some form of constitutional government and will vote it into existence late this year or early in 2006. This will allow Iraq to claim the moral high ground in a public relations battle over whether Iran and Syria should be forced to stop insurgents from using their territories to attempt to overthrow a sovereign, elected government in Iraq. And it will also allow the U.S. military, at the request of the new Iraqi government, to begin policing the borders with considerable military force.

Of course, this new Iraqi government will be very unpopular with large contingents within each of the principal population groups within Iraqi. On the one hand, this will mean that lawlessness and terrorism

and regional conflicts will continue, along with the constant threat of civil war. On the other hand, it will provide justification for an autocratic, militaristic government that will be corrupt enough to survive for a while with American support.

Ironically, if President Bush had made it known early on that this was the best outcome that anyone could expect from his invasion of Iraq, he would be in pretty good shape right now with regards to the American public. But he got off on that democracy kick when it turned out that there were no “weapons of mass destruction” in Iraq, and he has been stuck yammering about it ever since.

Long term, who knows? Somewhere along the line the guano is going to hit the fan in the Middle East, whether it is in Iraq or Saudi Arabia or Iran or some other Muslim hotspot. At that point, all bets that are being made now on the future of Iraq will be off the table and a new game will begin.

In the meantime, Iraq is going to be a bloody hellhole. After all, the wealth and power that the winners there will eventually control is beyond dreams of avarice. The wonder isn't that people will kill each other attempting to win this prize, it is that some Americans are surprised by this. They paraphrase the dimwitted and confused Rodney King, plaintively asking why they can't all just get along.

And every day I find myself wondering at the dopey American liberals who smugly charge that “it's all about oil,” but who are really too stupid to grasp what it means to be “all about oil” in a world where oil sells for \$60 a barrel and both prices and demand are increasing daily, where armies no longer run on their stomach but on oil, and where the largest economies in the world would collapse overnight if the oil supply were to slow, much less cease.

In closing, and with all this in mind, I would note that the recent Israeli pull out of Gaza is a catastrophe waiting to happen. I mean, anyone who thinks that providing the terrorist group Hamas with a homeland won't lead to massive bloodshed at some point hasn't been paying attention for the past several decades.

The Hamas cutthroats make the Barbary Coast pirates look like a bunch of school kids, and it is highly unlikely that they will confine their activities to attacking Israel. My guess is that Gaza will instead become a nerve center for terrorist action against “the West.” And that means that somewhere down the line, Gaza will find itself in the crosshairs of either the United States or Israel or both, and this time the bloodshed is likely to extend across the Middle East.

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