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## THEY SAID IT

The Pentagon has drafted a revised doctrine for the use of nuclear weapons that envisions commanders requesting presidential approval to use them to preempt an attack by a nation or a terrorist group using weapons of mass destruction. The draft also includes the option of using nuclear arms to destroy known enemy stockpiles of nuclear, biological or chemical weapons.

The document, written by the Pentagon's Joint Chiefs staff but not yet finally approved by Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld, would update rules and procedures governing use of nuclear weapons to reflect a preemption strategy first announced by the Bush White House in December 2002. The strategy was outlined in more detail at the time in classified national security directives.

At a White House briefing that year, a spokesman said the United States would "respond with overwhelming force" to the use of weapons of mass destruction against the United States, its forces or allies, and said "all options" would be available to the president.

--Walter Pincus, "Pentagon Revises Nuclear Strike Plan,"  
*The Washington Post*, September 11, 2005.

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## CHARITY BEGINS AT HOME.

Needless to say, the hottest topic among news and opinion writers of late has been speculation on the social, economic, and political ramifications of Hurricane Katrina. This week, I thought I would throw my hat into that ring, concentrating on an angle that probably won't be addressed by anyone else because it is quite speculative and long-term in nature. Indeed, some readers might accuse me of weaving this story out of whole cloth. But the issues I am raising here are, I think, worth considering. So here goes.

The foundation of my thesis is that Hurricane Katrina will make it much less likely that America will go to war in the future; will change the way America fights wars; will change the way America treats defeated adversaries; and, if I am right about all of this, will likely add an interesting new twist to the debate that is going on at the present over the future make up of the U.S. military.

To begin at the beginning, I would note that wars are expensive and money is going to be very tight in the aftermath of Katrina for a very long time. It is important to understand when considering this that the costs of Katrina will not be limited to the \$100-\$200 billion estimate that is being kicked around for clean up, recovery, and aid to the dispossessed and displaced. Among other things, it will also include an enormous amount of increased expenditure for the “homeland security” bureaucracy.

You see, in the case of the federal government, the response to slipshod performance is always to spend a great deal more money on the errant parties, not less. This gives new meaning to Sir Lewis Morris’s oft-cited observation that “high failure overleaps the bounds of low success.” Asking those who screwed up to do a better job with the same resources or less is rarely considered when it comes to government work. This assures that the cost of Katrina will not be a one-time expenditure, but will live on forever and grow year after year in the form of layers upon layer of new bureaus, divisions, offices, agencies, and branches; hundreds of new programs and initiatives; thousands of new federal employees; and an endless stream of new government contracts with private sector firms.

I have noticed that several economic columnists have recently dragged out Bastiat’s parable about the broken window in an effort to make the case that expenditures related to Katrina should not be regarded as a plus to the overall economy since the net result will be to simply replace something that had already existed rather than to build something new. While there is a grain of truth to this in the macro economic sense, from the perspective of the guy who fixes windows, a broken window is an unvarnished plus.

And this is most assuredly the case when it comes to the camp followers of disaster, those thousands of “experts” who are already lining up for what will certainly be tens of millions of dollars worth of federal grants and contracts to “study” and “analyze” all aspects of the disaster, from the relationship between race and injury to the need for greatly expanded counter-terrorism programs to myriad

environmental issues. Mark my words, before this is over, someone in some think tank or beltway bandit operation will figure out a way to get a million bucks or so to study the effects of Katrina on that big woodpecker in Arkansas that may not even exist anymore.

Of course, this will eventually all become part of the natural Washington scene. The deficit will rise, the hurricane will be blamed, and life will go on. But my guess is that it will also prompt a fundamental and long-lasting change in the way Congress and the American people think about the government’s spending priorities.

To be more specific, it will prompt both Congress and the American people to be more concerned about meeting domestic needs and less willing to spend scarce resources on what George Washington referred to as “foreign entanglements.” And when “foreign entanglements” cannot be avoided, the bias is going to be to handle things “on the cheap” so to speak, which in simple terms could be translated into the phrase, “not the way we did it in Iraq.”

Certainly, if some nation poses a clear and present danger to America or to American interests, the President, whomever that may be, will take the necessary steps to deal with that threat, up to and including military action. But the threshold for deciding in favor of all out war over less expensive options, such as a combination of cajoling and wishful thinking, will be considerably higher than it has been in the past.

As an immediate, practical matter, this means that Iran and North Korea will have much longer leashes on which to play the nuclear confrontation game with the United States. In my opinion, this is not necessarily good for the long-term health of either country. It reminds me of that video clip that made the rounds on the Internet a year or so ago of a monkey teasing a lion, coming closer and closer each time until suddenly the monkey was cat food.

The danger is that Iran and North Korea will grow comfortable with what they see as American reluctance to engage them militarily and step too far over the line. At a time when Americans feel extremely vulnerable and are absolutely determined not to suffer another disaster of the magnitude of Katrina or September 11, they might then decide that the cost-benefit ratio favors a war over the risk of a nuclear attack within the confines of the United States. If this were to occur, the United States might decide to fight the war as cheaply as possible, which would mean pulverizing air strikes designed to totally incapacitate the enemy's ability to fight back with no regard to the cost of the post-war rebuilding effort and no intention of participating in it.

I got to thinking about this recently while reading an article that appeared in the August 27 issue of the *International Herald Tribune* entitled "Iran, America's Disastrous 'Military Option,'" and written by Amin Saikal, who is a political science professor at the Australian National University in Canberra, where he directs the Center for Arab and Islamic Studies.

According to Saikal, Iran and America are "now on a collision course;" the leaders of the former having resumed enriching uranium in defiance of warnings from Europe and the United States, and the leader of the latter having declared that "all options are open" regarding U.S. efforts to prevent the former from obtaining nuclear weapons.

After stating the obvious, which is that a military confrontation between the U.S. and Iran "could prove to be costly for all sides," Saikal argues that Iran would not be a pushover, stating among other things that the Islamic state "has a formidable military machine equipped with both medium and long-range Shihab missiles capable of carrying heavy payloads to hit American and Israeli targets as far as 2,000 kilometers away." In addition, Saikal notes, Iranian forces could make up for America's superior firepower "to some extent by their Islamist and nationalist fanaticism."

Now my purpose for citing this article is not to quarrel with Saikal's thesis, although one could be forgiven for questioning several of his assessments, including Iran's military strength when compared to that of the United States and Israel, his belief in the efficacy of fanaticism as a force multiplier, and his confidence in the enthusiasm that ordinary Iranian soldiers might bring to the task of fighting on behalf of a tyrannical government.

My purpose is to cite this article as an example of how commonplace it has become for foreign policy mavens to assume that America is committed to a certain pattern of warfare, the principal feature of which is concern for the safety and comfort of the civilian population of the enemy nation while the war is being fought and for the social, economic, and political health of the enemy nation in the post war period.

For example, Saikal discusses the possibility that if the United States decided to use force against Iran, Iran would shut down the Strait of Hormuz and thus threaten the availability of oil from the Gulf States. He notes that "Iran has a considerable military and naval power deployed to the north, with a preparedness to carry out commando actions to mine or sink a number of ships to block the strait." Then he says that "the *best way* for the United States to keep the strait open would be to land troops on the Iranian side, which would mean a ground war – something that the Iranians would welcome, but America would want to avoid, especially in light of its bitter experiences in Iraq."

Now aside from the dubious assumption that the Iranian military would "welcome" a ground war with American troops, Saikal's assertion as to the best way for the United States to keep the strait open is also subject to question. Might not an America that is strapped for funds and reluctant to commit troops to an expensive ground war decide that the best way to keep the strait open would be to reduce Iran to an unmanageable heap of rubble with massive rounds of air attacks not only on its military facilities but on its civilian infrastructure as well, from power plants to bridges to water supplies to its centers of political power. And then leave it for Allah to clean up.

I am not – repeat not – predicting that the United States would do this. In fact, I am quite sure that it would not at this particular time. I am simply saying that while the United States is likely to be very reluctant to take military action in the future, if it finds that it absolutely must go to war to protect the nation against a terrible assault by a rogue nation capable of using nuclear weapons or other weapons of mass destruction, no one should assume that it will fight the kind of war that such an enemy would “welcome.” Nor should anyone assume that it would be likely to spend billions of dollars in the post-war period making certain that the enemy nation is rebuilt under the aegis of a happy little democracy financed with U.S. dollars and protected by U.S. troops.

Two things should be remembered when considering this. The first is that demonstrating high regard for the health, comfort, and happiness of one’s enemy during and after a war is a novel concept in the history of the world. Homer tells us that when the Greeks won the Trojan War, some 3,200 year ago, they burned Troy and murdered all of its citizens save a few who escaped. Thucydides relates how the Athenians, 2,400 years ago, did somewhat the same thing to the Melians, although they didn’t kill the women and children, but kept them as slaves. And, by the way, the Melians were not even enemies of Athens but simply wanted to remain neutral in the war between Athens and Sparta. Plutarch describes how Alexander totally destroyed Thebes 2,300 years ago. Polybius describes how 2,150 years ago Scipio the Younger burned the entire city of Carthage to the ground, buried the structural remains, and covered everything in salt so that not even plants would grow there again.

And lest one think that this is “ancient history,” it should be recalled that the United States ended the war in the Pacific by dropping atomic bombs on the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, killing approximately 100,000 civilians and injuring another 100,000 or so. And this was after hundreds of American B-29s destroyed half of Tokyo in a firebombing raid that killed an estimated 100,000 civilians. It is also worth noting that in the closing days of the war in Europe,

Germany’s cities met with a similar fate, minus the atomic bombs, in which tens of thousands of civilians were killed.

Certainly, the United States helped to rebuild both Japan and Germany after the war, but only after a long, military occupation and only after the citizens of both defeated nations demonstrated an almost universal desire to be friends with the United States and to endorse democratic principles. An insurgency in either country of the kind being launched against U.S. troops in Iraq would certainly have put the kibosh on any plans for a benevolent rebuilding at America’s expense.

The second thing to consider is that the American people never signed up for the highly expensive nation building effort that is currently going on in Iraq. They were told that the war was necessary to destroy Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction and that the post-war period would be relatively cheap and easy, since the Iraqi people would hail Americans as liberators and happily join together to rebuild their nation with their own money gained from their rich oil supplies.

President Bush and Condi Rice and Lord only knows who else within the administration revisited and upgraded the democracy bit when the original plan didn’t turn out as they had expected. The American people have gone along with it, of course, largely because they have been given no choice. But it is hardly a popular exercise and it is unlikely to be cited in the future by many Americans as a project worth repeating, especially in a world where money is tight and domestic needs are overwhelming.

Thus, as I said earlier, my guess is that those nations that are unfortunate enough to find themselves at war with America at some time in the future are likely to find the war itself exceedingly unpleasant and their post-war treatment somewhat less than first class.

As I also said earlier, if I am right about this, then the on-going discussion over the make up of the U.S. military is likely to be affected. Space does not allow an in depth discussion of this, even if I had

the expertise to conduct it, which I don't. But the following thoughts from two articles in my clip file will illustrate the point I am trying to make.

Late last year, the *Wall Street Journal* ran a front-page article entitled "As Chaos Mounts In Iraq, U.S. Army Rethinks Its Future," which stated that the U.S. military is in the process of making some monumental changes in priorities, aimed at enhancing its ability to stabilize and govern enemy nations in the aftermath of war. These changes are, according to the newspaper, being made at the expense of "traditional standards, such as how well they fire their tanks."

Under this new plan, an Army unit's "readiness for war" would be judged not just on fighting skills but "by the number of foreign speakers in their ranks, their awareness of the local culture where they will fight, and their ability to train and equip local security forces." The article is filled with the language of nation-building, i.e., "for the first time, [the army] has tapped historians, anthropologists, humanitarian-aid officials and city planners to take part in the [war] games . . . this year [the army] brought in [to the war games] cultural experts to advise on what local reactions would be . . . trying to win the cooperation of locals is a huge change for the service that until recently saw war primarily as the clash of traditional armies . . ." and so on and so forth.

A hard example of the kinds of changes in procurement that would be required by this new attentiveness to nation building is contained in the following paragraph: "The service recently canceled its \$12.9 billion program for Comanche helicopters. Instead of spending the money on 121 stealthy Comanches --- designed to evade high-tech enemy radar---the Army is spending the money to buy 825 attack and cargo helicopters and planes of the sort being used daily in Iraq."

While the article didn't say so directly, the thrust of the piece is that President Bush's Pentagon clearly believes that the on-going rebuilding of Iraq in the midst of an unsettled and antagonistic indigent

population is a prototype of battles to come and that the entire U.S. military must be changed dramatically to accommodate this fact.

*Washington Post* columnist David Ignatius conveyed the same notion in a piece he wrote in May of this year entitled "A Quiet Transformation" in which he cites numerous Pentagon documents including one entitled "Transition to and from Hostilities," which he describes as a "blueprint for change across the government that would give the United States the nation-building capability it has too often lacked in Iraq."

The following paragraph provides a flavor for the piece. "In a recommendation that surely gave heartburn to Army generals who hold tight to their traditional war-fighting mission, the study stressed: 'Stabilization and reconstruction missions must become a core competency of both the Departments of Defense and State. The military services need to reshape and rebalance their forces to provide a stabilization and reconstruction capability.'"

Later Ignatius cites Thomas P.M. Barnett, "the most influential defense intellectual writing these days," as arguing that the entire U.S. military should be divided into two forces that reflect differing missions -- one designed to "win the decisive battle to stabilize and rebuild nations in the aftermath of conflict."

Now this is, of course, the kind of mission that I am suggesting might become less attractive to the American people in the years ahead if I am correct when I argue that among the results of Katrina will be very tight money for a long time to come and a long-lasting bias in Congress and among the American people in favor of domestic spending over "foreign entanglements.

If I am correct about this, there is at least one expert on military affairs who will be pleased. That person is Mark Helprin who is concerned that a time will come when America will need a large, traditional military force and won't have it. I'll close with a few quotes

from an article of his entitled “Beyond the Rim” from the December 4, 2004 *Wall Street Journal*, which explain why I believe that the issues I am raising here are worth considering.

In fact, China must be delighted (what rival would not be?) that America’s war aims in the Middle East are conditioned upon reordering the Islamic world, the most inconvertible of all divisions of mankind. Although U.S. intervention is obviously required, the nature and scope of the enterprise as stated is a gift to China worth many years of efforts . . . and when China does develop the powerful expeditionary forces that it will need to protect its far-flung interests, the U.S. will probably have successfully completed transforming its military into a force designed mainly to fight terrorism and insurgencies . . . This century will be not just the century of terrorism: terrorism will fade. It will be a naval century, with the Pacific its center, and challenges in the remotest places of the world offered not by dervishes and crazy-men but by a great power that is at last and at least America’s equal. Unfortunately, it is in our nature neither to foresee nor prepare for what lies beyond the rim.

Who knows? Maybe Katrina will help.

## THE DEBATE OVER KATRINA.

Conventional wisdom has it that the wake of Hurricane Katrina is fraught with political danger for George W. Bush. Already toting the lowest poll numbers of his presidency, Bush now faces charges that he reacted far too slowly, particularly for a president whose principal claim on the affection of the American people is his deft handling of the previous national crisis; that he was overly preoccupied with his “vacation”; that he appointed unqualified (or under-qualified) administrators to FEMA due in part to cronyism; and that “his” war in Iraq so depleted national resources that the nation was unable to attend to hurricane relief properly and will be unable to afford the necessary rebuilding effort.

Much more seriously, conventional wisdom holds that the wake of the hurricane will also be especially dangerous for the President’s party and its governing ideology. The theory behind this is that the impending Congressional investigations concerning the fact that the victims of Katrina were overwhelmingly poor and overwhelmingly black will raise questions about the wisdom of policies implemented by the President and his party over the last four-and-a-half years.

If I were a betting man, I would hold off on this “sure thing” for a while. As has happened countless times over the last four years, conventional wisdom may be badly misjudging the situation and will, over the long run, prove rather imperceptive.

For starters, the President appears poised to demonstrate once again that managing expectations is indisputably one of the principal components of political success. And though team Bush has not always done this brilliantly, it has almost always done it better than have its Democratic opponents, many of whom are prone to overreaction if not downright fits of hysterics.

What that means in this case is that when the number of dead turns out to be in the 1000-2000 range, as opposed to the expected 10,000, and when the city is open again for business before Thanksgiving, as opposed to the expected several months or years from

now, the President and his emergency management bureaucrats will come out looking fairly good, if for no other reason than the fact that things were simply horrific instead of truly cataclysmic.

In spite of the better and quicker-than-expected recovery, the President's opponents in Washington and in the press are unlikely to back down from their plan to attack him and his party on racial and class grounds, believing that they have the advantage when such matters are at the forefront of the political debate. They have been frustrated that national security and defense matters have been chief among most Americans' concerns for the better part of the Bush presidency and believe that, if nothing else, Hurricane Katrina gives them the excuse to turn the national conversation away from these issues, which generally favor Republicans and put the more "progressive" Democrats at a distinct disadvantage.

At first blush, it appears that there is cause for the president's opponents to be hopeful. In a strange, cosmic twist, almost exactly four years after the nation's entire focus shifted away from domestic concerns in reaction to the single most traumatic national event in most Americans' lifetimes, the focus appears set to shift back in response to what may prove to be the second most traumatic national event in most Americans' lifetimes.

Already, partisans and pundits from both sides appear to be reverting to the norm. Democrats and liberal columnists and analysts have spent the last couple of weeks discussing the impact of race on poverty, the impact of poverty on the lives of Americans, the necessity of both greater government spending and a greater role for activist government in society, and the deleterious effect that tax cuts "for the rich" have had on the nation's ability to deal effectively with its underclass.

By contrast, conservatives in government and the media have been preoccupied these past few days with refreshed concern about government inefficiency and the manifest failures of bloated, leaderless, and overly constrained bureaucracy. Last week, when Louisiana

Congressman Bobby Jindal wrote that "There have already been a number of instances in which an overly inhibitive bureaucracy prevented an appropriate response to the disaster," he summed up very succinctly the principal conservative reaction to the post-hurricane relief effort. In addition to Jindal, the "bureaucracy" meme has been hit upon by President Bush, various members of the administration, and a host of conservative columnists and commentators, all of whom appear to believe (or at least are prepared to argue) that the bloated bureaucratic federal emergency relief apparatus was one of the chief inhibitors of effective and timely reaction to the deadly storm.

While it is certainly clear that the political discourse has, at least temporarily, reverted to pre-9/11 territory, it is not all that clear that this reversion will be the enormous political boon for the Democrats they and their allies in the mainstream press expect it will be. Indeed, it is not particularly clear that this shift in the debate will benefit Democrats at all.

In the historically myopic Democrat/media worldview, the attacks of September 11 are the sole reason that George W. Bush and the Republican Party have done so well over the last several years. During times of war, national security trumps domestic concerns, and during this war Republicans' traditional advantage on national security matters has proven to be the Democrats' undoing. Were national security not a concern for voters – or at least not the preeminent concern – the Republican advantage would dissipate and the Democrats would reclaim their proper position as the nation's governing party. Or so the theory goes.

The problem with this theory is that it is, by and large, historically inaccurate. Though it may bring some small comfort to the Democrats to lay the blame for their electoral woes at the feet of the war on terror and the concomitant preoccupation with national security, the fact of the matter is that the long-term historical trends have been decidedly against progressive liberalism, regardless of the prominence of national security concerns.

Since 1964, Republicans have won all but three presidential contests, and a true bona fide liberal has been elected only once, and then only in a very close race against an unpopular, appointed president who took over for a man who was forced from office in the most significant scandal in the nation's history. Even during the brief hiatus from national security concerns that was the 1990s, the Democrats were able to capture the White House only by running a centrist who appropriated a great deal of the Republican playbook for himself and were unable to prevent the Republicans from capturing Congress for the first time in a half-century and holding their majority through the next five national elections. Also during the '90s, Republicans triumphed repeatedly and overwhelmingly in state-level elections, winning a majority of governorships and, more notably, taking control of a majority of state legislatures, many of which had been run exclusively by Democrats since Reconstruction.

Of course, the *coup de grace* in the ascent of the GOP in the face of lessened concern about national security was the election of George W. Bush to the presidency in 2000. Democrats may console themselves with the knowledge that their guy won the popular vote in that contest, but the fact that the race was as close as it was, despite the legacy of "peace and prosperity" bequeathed by the Democratic nominee's predecessor, speaks volumes about the electorate's reaction to the more progressive populism that replaced centrism/conservatism as the incumbent party's *de facto* presidential platform.

The problem that Democrats face in trying to make political hay from the mess left by Katrina is that there is no realistic reason for them to presume that the proposed discussions on race, class, and the role of government will be to their benefit at all. No doubt they believe in their causes and have the support of friendly media types, but there is no evidence whatsoever that the American public is going to be anywhere near as receptive. History shows that they haven't been particularly receptive to such arguments for nearly four decades now.

The early pre-attacks on President Bush and conservatism have thus far been pretty unspectacular. The ranting and raving of rabid Bush haters like Howard Dean and activist race hustlers like Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton can, of course, be dismissed out of hand. But even the more serious, studied attempts to portray the racial and class aspects of the New Orleans devastation as failings of conservatism appear rather unconvincing. It's hard to predict exactly how either party will approach these issues, but if the early results are any indication, then as this "discussion" plays out, as the liberals and progressives will strike few blows, while the conservatives will have ample opportunity to strike a few of their own in rebuttal.

Last week, *New York Times* columnist Nicholas Kristoff provided a preview of what is likely to be the sane left's tack in the debate over Hurricane Katrina: use poverty as a proxy for race and argue that poverty in this country is deadly; suggest that poverty, while intractable can, in fact, be eliminated, if the policies and governing philosophy are geared to that end; and lastly argue that conservative policies – most notably cutting taxes – are geared in the opposite direction and are therefore responsible for exacerbating and extending poverty. Kristoff put it thusly:

The wretchedness coming across our television screens from Louisiana has illuminated the way children sometimes pay with their lives, even in America, for being born to poor families. It has also underscored the Bush administration's ongoing reluctance or ineptitude in helping the poorest Americans. The scenes in New Orleans reminded me of the suffering I saw after a similar storm killed 130,000 people in Bangladesh in 1991 - except that Bangladesh's government showed more urgency in trying to save its most vulnerable citizens.

But Hurricane Katrina also underscores a much larger problem: the growing number of Americans trapped in a never-

ending cyclone of poverty . . . [T]he U.S.  
- particularly under the Bush administration  
- has systematically cut people out of the  
social fabric by redistributing wealth from  
the most vulnerable Americans to the most  
affluent.

It's not just that funds may have gone  
to Iraq rather than to the levees in New  
Orleans; it's also that money went to tax cuts  
for the wealthiest rather than vaccinations  
for children.

From a purely political standpoint, it is hard to  
imagine how Democrats will make any headway  
at all with average voters, hurricane or not, if they  
follow the blueprint set forth here by Kristoff. The  
idea that government actually redistributes wealth *to  
the rich from the poor* is one that is embraced only by  
a precious few liberal ideologues and one that most  
Americans would dismiss out of hand. The majority  
of American taxpayers would laugh out loud at any  
politician who tried to tell them that being allowed  
to *keep* more of the money that they *earn* is morally  
equivalent to *taking* money away from the poor.  
Kristoff's Orwellian abuse of the language with regard  
to wealth "redistribution" is necessary to cover the fact  
that what he is really talking about is the government  
confiscating less wealth to spend on vast and  
inefficient government aid programs. And that cover  
is necessary because Kristoff undoubtedly knows that  
confiscating less wealth is a plan for which a majority  
of Americans have expressed support time and time  
again, in both public opinion polls and voting booths.

Kristoff is also likely, in my opinion, to lose this  
argument on moral grounds, his presumption of  
progressive moral superiority notwithstanding. His  
moral scolding will not only change few minds but  
will also provide an opportunity for conservatives  
to rebut his claims. For example, Kristoff makes a  
big deal of the fact that statistics show that progress  
toward eliminating poverty was made during the  
late 1990s, but that that progress was reversed after  
President Bush took over. This, of course, is what is  
known as a *post hoc ergo propter hoc* argument; a baseless

presumption that because a rise in poverty followed  
Bush tax cuts, the cuts therefore were the cause of the  
rise.

If he bothered to ask, any demographer, sociologist,  
or economist could have told Kristoff that he  
was presuming a great deal. Poverty as a societal  
phenomenon always decreases during periods of  
economic expansion (e.g. the late 1990s) and always  
increases during recessions and slowdowns (e.g. 2001  
and 2002). To presume, as Kristoff does, that the  
tax cuts caused poverty to increase requires either  
ignorance or willful dismissal of historical data  
suggesting that causation lies elsewhere. The Bush tax  
cuts did not cause poverty rates to increase any more  
than his father's tax hikes caused them to fall.

Moreover, the argument can, has, and will be made  
that the most effective way to avoid these cycle-driven  
increases in poverty would be to keep the economy  
moving along as nicely as possible for as long as  
possible by continually removing barriers to economic  
growth, like confiscatory tax rates and overly  
complicated compliance requirements. It seems to me  
that the Republicans are in a uniquely strong position  
to advance such arguments as a counter to Kristoff  
right now due to the fairly demonstrable connection  
between the President's supply-side tax policies and  
the revival of the economy, even in the face of 9/11.

Finally, Kristoff opens up additional portions of the  
liberal canon on class to similar criticism by citing  
various statistics that he believes are devastating  
indictments of conservative governance. For example,  
he notes that "the infant mortality rate in America's  
capital is twice as high as in China's capital," and that  
"an African-American baby in Washington has less  
chance of surviving its first year than a baby born in  
urban parts of the state of Kerala in India."

Even ignoring the counter-arguments to Kristoff's  
oft-used infant mortality statistics, such as the fact  
that the United States counts premature births as live  
births while most nations do not, meaning that when  
a premie dies, only the United States has that death  
counted against it, this is a woefully weak argument  
against conservative governance.

Like New Orleans, the District of Columbia has been victimized for decades by endemic and inexorable corruption at the municipal government level, including among its police force. Like New Orleans, the District suffers from excessive crime, excessive violence, excessive murder, and excessive dissolution of the traditional family. Like New Orleans, the District has only one viable political party, which has been responsible for governance for several troubled decades. And like New Orleans, the District's governing party is the Democratic Party.

Unlike New Orleans, the District receives a federal subsidy (being that it is "the federal city") for the maintenance of its municipal functions. And so unlike New Orleans, there is little basis in the District for the claim that the city cannot serve its citizens properly because it simply does not have the tax base to do so; the District's tax base covers some 200 million-plus Americans.

There is a reason why, despite this federal subsidy, that few Congressmen, Senators, and administration officials (and that includes Bill and Hillary Clinton) send their children to public school in Washington D.C. The District's schools are among the best funded in the nation, yet are also among the worst performing, and unsurprisingly, among the most corrupt, which virtually guarantees that the city's residents who can't afford Sidwell Friends will remain mired in poverty and underachievement.

If the Democrats want to make broad arguments about the state of America's inner cities and to use those arguments to condemn conservatism, they would do well to avoid Kristoff's mistakes and not cherry-pick data pertaining to the "nation's capital." With its decades of corruption, destructive mismanagement, waste, fraud, and re-elected crack-smoking mayors – all of which has taken place under the auspices of the Democratic Party – any argument made about the District of Columbia would be too easy to rebut.

Democrats would also be well advised to stay away from the trial balloon arguments being offered by the likes of *New York Times* liberal guru Thomas Friedman, who last week argued that conservative resistance to the growth of government and tax cuts are the reasons why New Orleans flooded during the hurricane. In a particularly vituperative and shallow piece, Friedman attacked one of the icons of the small government movement, Americans for Tax Reform founder Grover Norquist, writing that "Mr. Norquist is the only person about whom I would say this: I hope he owns property around the New Orleans levee that was never properly finished because of a lack of tax dollars. I hope his basement got flooded. And I hope that he was busy drowning government in his bathtub when the levee broke and that he had to wait for a U.S. Army helicopter to get out of town."

Generally speaking, when a party in a debate is forced to resort to invective, he has lost the argument on its merits. And clearly this is the case with Friedman and his liberal/left claim that small government and tax cuts are what killed the New Orleanians. As the great William F. Buckley noted in his rejoinder to Friedman, the charge that Bush and the conservatives somehow shortchanged Louisiana or New Orleans in order to cut taxes is ludicrous in light of the evidence. "The proposition that the Federal Government under George W. Bush has been shortchanging welfare," Buckley wrote, "is in astonishing conflict with the figures. Under Bush, federal spending increases have been at the fastest rate in 30 years. Non-defense discretionary spending under Bush has grown by 35.7 percent, the highest rate of federal government growth since the presidencies of Richard Nixon and Lyndon Johnson." More importantly, over the course of the Bush presidency, Louisiana has been one of principal beneficiaries of this federal profligacy. As the *Washington Post* reported last week:

[O]ver the five years of President Bush's administration, Louisiana has received far more money for Corps civil works projects than any other state, about \$1.9 billion; California was a distant second with less than \$1.4 billion, even though its population is more than seven times as large.

Much of that Louisiana money was spent to try to keep low-lying New Orleans dry. But hundreds of millions of dollars have gone to unrelated water projects demanded by the state's congressional delegation and approved by the Corps, often after economic analyses that turned out to be inaccurate. Despite a series of independent investigations criticizing Army Corps construction projects as wasteful pork-barrel spending, Louisiana's representatives have kept bringing home the bacon.

Given all of this, Friedman's petty attack on Grover Norquist and on conservatism actually helps make the counter-argument, that the flooding of New Orleans occurred not because government is too small or because uncaring Republicans "spent" money on irresponsible tax cuts for the rich, but because government is too big and because liberalism has extended government's reach so vastly that it is no longer capable of effectively performing its primary and indisputable function of protecting its citizens. This morning, *The Wall Street Journal's* John Fund made the argument that in the wake of this disaster, government should actually cut non-essential government spending in order to facilitate essential spending on essential government functions. If the Democrats parrot Friedman, expect the Republicans to counter by parroting Fund.

In general, when the pundits, analysts, columnists, and talking heads declare that George W. Bush's presidency and legacy are "on the line," I roll my eyes and mutter to myself, "what, again?" But this time, I think things might be different. This time I think that there may, in fact, be something to the assertion that the next several weeks and months will be critical in determining the ultimate successfulness of the Bush presidency and the near-to-medium-term political fortunes of both political parties.

Democrats and Democratic-friendly journalists and editorialists appear convinced of two things: if they can shift the political discussion back to domestic issues they can finally "get" President Bush; and Hurricane Katrina gives them the opportunity they need to make such a shift. I, for one, am not quite as convinced as they are about this and, in fact, suspect that they may well be dangerously overreaching once again. There is, in my estimation, the very real possibility that the President and his ideological brethren will not only repel the domestic attacks, but, while the Democrats are preoccupied with domestic concerns, will smooth out some of the recent foreign policy bumps as well.

If the Democrats want to spend the next six weeks talking about Katrina, race, tax cuts, and how the mild-mannered and entirely inoffensive John Roberts is somehow a threat to Western Civilization because he favors smaller government, that's their prerogative. They may, however, awake one day in early November to find that the American public has not bought their case against conservatism, that John Roberts is Chief Justice of the United States, and that free Iraq has approved its constitution and taken another step down the road to democracy and defeat of the Baathist/Islamist terrorist insurgency.

Make no mistake, President Bush is struggling right now. His approval numbers are down and polls show that Americans think he may have fumbled the ball with regard to Katrina. But given the state of his political opposition, it still looks to me like he has the Democrats right where he wants them.

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