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THEY SAID IT

We are in a war of a peculiar nature. It is not with an ordinary community, which is hostile or friendly as passion or as interest may veer about: not with a state which makes war through wantonness, and abandons it through lassitude. We are at war with a system, which by its essence, is inimical to all other governments, and which makes peace or war, as peace and war may best contribute to their subversion. It is with an armed doctrine that we are at war. It has, by its essence, a faction of opinion, and of interest, and of enthusiasm, in every country.

--Edmund Burke, *Letters on Regicide Peace*, 1796. (*Hat tip: Iain Murray, National Review Online.*)

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THOUGHTS ON THE BUSH FOREIGN POLICY.

In May 1992, I coauthored a lengthy report on the prospects for the defense industry with Byron Callan, who was a friend and colleague of mine at Prudential Securities in those days. My contribution was a discussion of geopolitics in the post-Cold War period. Byron, who was one of the firm's defense analysts, incorporated his outlook for defense stocks with my forecast of the world ahead. I would like to offer the following paragraphs from my section of that report as an introduction to my thoughts this week.

For purposes of this piece, it is only necessary to note that with the fall of the communist government in the Soviet Union, and indeed the disintegration of the Union itself, the United States finds itself seeking a new foreign policy *raison d'être*, "containment" no longer being necessary. The fundamental question involved here is how the United States should employ its energies in this new world which contains no deadly foe.

Does the nation have a moral obligation to proselytize democracy throughout the globe? Should the United States become the world's policeman? How much force should be used if the decision is reached to police the world, and on which "beats" should the policemen concentrate? Indeed, what behavior by a foreign government is so unacceptable as to spark U.S. action?

Or, should America "come home," tend to its own problems, react only when our "national interest" is threatened? And if we adopt this policy, what exactly qualifies as our "national interest?"

The answer to these and related questions will determine the size and makeup of the U.S. military in the 1990s, and ultimately will dictate where and what kinds of wars will be fought by the United States during that period.

Six months after that piece was published, Bill Clinton won the presidency. During his eight years in the White House he made no discernable effort to find the kind of new foreign policy *raison de'etre* that I mentioned above. His first major foreign policy move was the ill-considered, "Black Hawk Down" catastrophe in Mogadishu in October 1993. His second was the Monty Python-like invasion of Haiti in September 1994. His last was his "wag the dog" missile attack on an aspirin factory in Sudan on August 20, 1998.

Indeed, it might be said that Bill took a sort of Alfred E. Neuman, "What, me worry?" approach to international relations and national defense, even to the point of virtually ignoring the threat of further terrorist violence against the United States by militant Islam that was implicit in the first World Trade Center bombing, which happened one month after he took office.

President George W. Bush was not given the luxury of taking such a cavalier, slipshod approach to the world outside America's borders. Terrorists struck the World Trade Center eight months into his presidency and, this time, they brought it down. Since that fateful day, he and his team have struggled to construct a comprehensive foreign policy that would combine a coherent view of the world and a vision of the role of the United States within this world, along with attendant military and diplomatic strategies designed to work effectively within this prescribed environment.

The first major step in this process was unveiled in June 2002 in a graduation speech to the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, where he announced the policy of "preemption," which he supported with the argument that America's future security "will require

all Americans to be forward-looking and resolute, to be ready for preemptive action when necessary to defend our liberty and to defend our lives."

He developed this concept in greater detail a few months later with the release of a 23-page document entitled, "The National Security Strategy of the United States of America," which was described as "a coherent vision of America's role in the post cold war period." Besides strongly reiterating America's commitment to the doctrine of preemption, the report tied this doctrine to a enormously ambitious policy of placing the United States in the role of protecting "basic human rights worldwide" and promoting policies that "help make the world not just safer but better." This was all based on his contention that the greatest danger to the United States comes from "failed states," and that the best way to promote American security is through efforts to "promote prosperity and reduce poverty" by encouraging Democracy and free markets worldwide.

Almost a year later, Condoleezza Rice, who was National Security Advisor at the time, put some heavy meat on this bone with a series of speeches and interviews in which she laid out what could only be described as grandiose plans to make a "generational commitment" of U.S. blood and money to the goal of "transforming" the Middle East into a group of a nation's with "democratic values." Since that time, Ms. Rice and the President have lost few opportunities to tie the war in Iraq to this greater effort to spread democracy across the Middle East, which, they maintain, is a first step in an even more ambitious plan to spread democracy across the globe.

With somewhat less public fanfare, but with no less determination, the President then proceeded to change the make up of the entire U.S. military in keeping with this view of the world. I wrote about these changes last September in an article entitled "Charity Begins At Home." The following paragraphs are from that article.

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 . . .

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.

And then, last week, Ms. Rice, now as Secretary of State, outlined the final major step in the grand remodeling of the entire foreign policy establishment around the Bush administration’s vision of the world and America’s role in it. In a speech to the Georgetown University School of Foreign Policy entitled “Transformational Diplomacy,” she outlined

plans for sweeping changes in what she called “our diplomatic posture,” in recognition of the fact that “the new front lines” of American diplomacy are the transitional countries of Africa and of Latin America and of the Middle East.

She stated that the “new challenge” for America is to “build and sustain democratic, well-governed states that will respond to the needs of their people and conduct themselves responsibly in the international system.” As a “down payment” on the State Department’s long-term commitment to this world view, she said she was moving 100 positions from Europe and Washington, D.C. to countries like China, India, Nigeria, and Lebanon, “where additional staffing will make an essential difference.” She elaborated on this as follows.

Transformational diplomacy requires us to move our diplomatic presence out of foreign capitals and to spread it more widely across countries. We must work on the front lines of domestic reform as well as in the back rooms of foreign ministries. There are nearly 200 cities worldwide with over one million people in which the United States has no formal diplomatic presence. This is where the action is today and this is where we must be. To reach citizens in bustling new population centers, we cannot always build new consulates beyond a nation’s capital.

Now I do not know enough about the inner workings of the State Department to question the bureaucratic wisdom of the moves Ms. Rice outlined. For what it is worth, I agree with her that it makes no sense to have as many U.S. diplomats in Germany, with its 82 million people, as it has in India, with its population of one billion.

But I do wonder if the greater good will be served by having the Foggy Bottom boys in the stripped pants fanning out into the remote reaches of the globe to preach the glories of modern day civilization, American style, to wide-eyed, untutored natives in the manner of our British cousins of old.

While reading her speech, I was reminded of the wisdom of Evelyn Waugh, who witnessed a similar process first hand when the British tried it in Africa during the boom days of colonialism. Among other things, he concluded that the ignorant ones in this relationship were not the natives but the hubristic Europeans who were peddling a lot of socialist claptrap to the Africans that wasn't working at home and thus had no chance of working in Africa. As a conservative, I can't help but wonder what sort of economic, social, and political nonsense these liberal ninnyes from the hallowed halls of the Georgetown School of Foreign Policy will be peddling to the unenlightened Muslims of Egypt and the Indians of Bolivia and whether it will improve their state in life or get them into more trouble than they are already in.

Which brings me to one of my biggest concerns about this first comprehensive foreign policy for the post-Cold War period. This is, simply stated, that this foreign policy paradigm contains within it the seeds of a catastrophe. These seeds may fail to germinate. God willing, they will be smothered by the successful growth of new democracies throughout the globe, nurtured by the United States and cherished by people everywhere because of the delicious fruit that they bear.

But when contemplating this delightful dream world, it is important to understand that this foreign policy is profoundly antithetical to traditional conservative views, including the concept that foreign policy should be based strictly on America's immediate security concerns and not, in the words of the brilliant sociologist Paul Nisbit, on "dangerous, grandiose concepts."

This foreign policy is as close to a modern day example of the Wilsonian dream of a world reshaped by the goodness, the will, and the wealth of the America people as any president of any party has ever come since Wilson asked Congress for a declaration of war against Germany in 1917 in order that the world "be made safe for democracy."

And it carries with it the same dangers that are inherent in all forms of utopian sloganeering, no matter how well intended. These range from the practical consequence of biting off far more than can be chewed to the more theoretical, but no less dangerous prospect of sacrificing the solid conservative virtues of prudence and humility on the altar of arrogance, pride, and the wistful and ultimately destructive mission that my old friend Claes Ryn once described as the "collective, political redemption of mankind."

I will elaborate on my concerns regarding the dangers attendant to nation building in future articles. In the meantime, I will close with a few questions intended as food for thought as this aggressive foreign policy goes forward over the next several years.

What happens when the liberals inherit this new foreign policy construct, which they surely will someday?

What pray tell would liberals do with a U.S. military that already has a large and growing contingent within it that is dedicated not to fighting wars but to the soft art of nation building and is competing directly with the warriors for scarce funds?

What would liberals do with a State Department that has already accepted the messianic concept of "transformational diplomacy" as the model of the future?

And what would liberals do with a mandate from the American public to sally forth with a grand scheme dedicated to making the entire world into a better place in America's image? Would this not be like pouring Miracle-Gro on their already overwrought desire to focus attention on benevolent sentiments rather on what Claes once described as the "more difficult improvement of self in actual human relationships?"

Just a few thoughts, mind you.

THE IRAN CRISIS: AHMADINEJAD VS. THE MULLAHS.

Over the past few weeks, international attention has turned away from Iraq, where increasing signs of coalition success appear to have dampened the mainstream press's enthusiasm for the story. All eyes are now focused on Iran, which makes sense in light of that nation's recent decision to restart overt work on its nuclear weapons program, coupled with recent comments by its President, former student revolutionary Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, which strongly suggest that Iran might actually use such weapons if it were to succeed in making them. Among the many notable pronouncements made recently by Ahmadinejad is his view that the Holocaust was a myth, that it was a myth that was ended too quickly, and that he intends to finish up where Hitler left off.

But while attention has been high and, as a result, analysis has been abundant, the issues at play in Iran remain poorly understood and poorly articulated. In my opinion, there are two principal shortcomings in most of the analyses that I have seen regarding the current "crisis" with Iran. First, most analysts still underestimate President Bush and thus misunderstand the possibility and likely outcome of an eventual military confrontation. The second, related problem stems from the fact that most analysts appear to ignore the history of the Iran-America conflict, thereby misjudging the importance of the immediate crisis by placing too much emphasis on the current actors. This artificially and unwisely limits the scope of predicted outcomes of this "nuclear showdown."

Almost without exception, most analyses of the brewing crisis play up the fact that United States is in an incredibly awkward position and suggest that the Iranians are both fully aware of this and more than willing to leverage it to their benefit. Certainly, things are indeed difficult for the United States right now. It is preoccupied in Iraq. It is concerned about Israeli fears over Iranian nukes, even more so now that the Israeli government is essentially leaderless. It has to measure carefully the duplicity of at least 40% of the United Nations' Security Council, namely Russia and China. And the American President is struggling in

the face of tepid public support for his presidency and for his handling of foreign policy matters. Moreover, given the fragile state of the energy markets, American action is constrained by potentially enormous disruptions in energy supply, both as a result of the removal of Iranian oil from the market and a potential Iranian blockade of the Strait of Hormuz.

But while this list of impediments to American military action is, indeed, long, it does not necessarily mean that the Iranians have the upper hand here or even that they believe they have the upper hand. Yes, the United States is in an awkward position. But this is no reason to presume that the Iranians intend willfully to escalate this crisis. Yet that is what most analysts appear to believe, supposing either that the United States, encumbered by irresolute allies and considerable political constraints, will back down, or that the Iranians will actually benefit from a fight with the Americans. As Stratfor analyst George Friedman put it last week, the Iranians "might welcome a (survivable) attack by Israel or the United States. It would burnish Iran's credentials as the true martyr and fighter of Islam."

This theory is, in a word, nonsense, and it's likely that the Iranians know it, even if Friedman and others who have theorized similarly do not. In my opinion, the error that most "experts" are making is in believing that U.S. military action would have to be limited and would therefore be ineffective, neither adequately crippling the Iranian nuclear program nor sufficiently deterring Iran from causing trouble again in the near future. This error is compounded by conventional wisdom, which holds that the presence of 170,000 American troops in Iraq and Afghanistan somehow actually precludes American action against Iran.

But conventional wisdom has proven wrong twice before where George W. Bush was concerned, and the last two regimes that trusted the American "experts" have long since been toppled. Love him or hate him, respect him or despise him, whatever else one may believe about George W., it is clear that he plays for keeps.

Friedman et al. appear to be laboring under the misimpression that Bill Clinton is still president and thus that “U.S. military action” means lobbing a few cruise missiles at a few empty terrorist training camps or aspirin factories. But this is simply not the way George Bush, or Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld, for that matter, play the game. Indeed, this president has something of a fixation on the concept of “regime change.” And the Iranians needn’t take my word for this, since both their neighbor to the East and their neighbor to the West can testify firsthand to the end result when Bush decides to undertake such military action.

But even if regime change were not the goal, or is simply not possible given the undeniable constraints faced by the American military, that doesn’t mean that the Iranian regime would be foolish enough to welcome an American assault or even to presume, given Bush’s track record, that such an assault would be “survivable” as Friedman termed it. Last September, in a piece entitled “Charity Begins at Home,” Mark responded to another analysis that suggested that the Iranians would welcome American military action, and he quickly dismissed the idea thusly:

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?

Mark might be wrong about this, of course. And so might I. We are just guessing, after all. But so are Friedman and the others on the opposite side of this discussion. The difference between all of us and the mullahs is that they, unlike we, can’t really afford to guess wrong. And thus it is in their rational interest to presume the worst and work backward from there.

What precisely does that mean? Well, in my estimation, that means that this current crisis will be defused when the Iranians back down. Unless they are willing to risk a devastating military attack and all that that might encompass, the mullahs will have no choice but to find a way to slowly walk, or maybe even run, away from the proverbial brink of war and thereby live to fight another day. In the grand scheme of things, the immediate confrontation is irrelevant. And though there is a sense of imminence and even panic in the West, it’s likely that a preponderance of the Iranian ruling class is not all that enthusiastic about the idea of picking a fight with the Great Satan right now.

Of course, one Iranian who does appear ready for a fight, indeed, appears ready to go to war, is President Ahmadinejad, who continues to bluster and bully as if he fully believes not only that a confrontation is unavoidable but that it will represent the start of the final battle between the Shi’ites and the enemies of God that will presage the return of the Mahdi, or the so-called 12th imam.

In his analysis cited above, Stratfor’s Friedman argues that it would be foolish simply to write off Ahmadinejad as “insane.” And while he makes a reasonable point about the dangers of dismissing clearly powerful and skilled men as mentally deranged, he ignores the fact that Ahmadinejad has some, well . . . shall we say . . . issues. If he is not crazy, then he is, at least, eschatologically obsessed, even by Iranian standards.

As everyone knows, Ahmadinejad is a onetime student radical who played a crucial role in the 1979 Islamic Revolution and whom many of the former hostages have identified as one of their captors. What isn’t so widely discussed is that he is a purported member of Iran’s infamous Hojjatieh, a secretive sect of extremists who believe it is their responsibility to hasten the return of the Mahdi by fomenting chaos. And he has even publicly declared – on American soil nonetheless – that he yearns for the return of the 12th imam and the final battle against God’s enemies, praying last September at the UN that God will “hasten the emergence of your last repository, the

Promised One, that perfect and pure human being, the one that will fill this world with justice and peace.” In short, Ahmadinejad is unquestionably one of the more militant millenarians in one of history’s most militant millenarian regimes.

As such, it is highly unlikely that Ahmadinejad will willingly back away from the fight he’s picked. And while he undoubtedly feels that he is anointed by God for this mission and therefore cannot be stopped, I suspect others in the regime feel differently. The spirit of the Revolution may remain strong among the mullahs, but I can’t help but doubt that most are ready to throw all caution to the wind and join the final battle today. Therefore, I further suspect that they will do whatever is necessary to neutralize Ahmadinejad, thereby easing tensions and staving off almost certain destruction. As for the means by which this “neutralization” will be undertaken, I can’t even begin to guess, though I suspect Ahmadinejad himself probably can.

Two weeks ago, Ahmad Kazemi, the commander of Iran’s *Pasdaran*, or Revolutionary Guards, was killed along with 12 of his “deputies and accompanying officers” in a plane crash in northwest Iran. It is, of course, entirely possible – indeed likely – that the crash was an accident, just as the official state media sources said it was. But given that the Ahmadinejad himself is a former commander of the Revolutionary Guards and that they therefore constitute one of the cornerstones of his power base, one could be forgiven for questioning the “accidental” nature of the crash.

This is particularly so in light of the fact that just three weeks prior to the plane crash, Ahmadinejad’s motorcade was ambushed and his driver and one of his bodyguards was killed in a gunfight with the attackers. Though the Iranian President was not in the car at the time and though the attack was immediately dismissed as the work of dissident Sunni Baluchis, the ambush has never been fully explained by the regime and remains shrouded in mystery.

These two incidents may well have been coincidences. Or they may have been warnings. No one outside of a small cluster of Shi’ite clerics knows for sure. But

whatever the case, if Ahmadinejad is not currently a target of the regime’s mullahs, he probably should be. More than just about anyone else in the world, he represents a grave threat to the regime’s long-term viability. The Iranians do not yet have a serviceable nuclear weapon. And the longer Mahmoud is allowed to shoot off his mouth, the less likely it becomes that they ever will have one, or the global leverage and prestige that it would bring.

The problem that Ahmadinejad has is that he has been too successful in convincing the world that he is the driving force behind this conflict. As long as he remains the public face of the Islamic Republic, the crisis will appear imminent. But his removal from the scene would almost certainly defuse tensions immediately and allow Western analysts – and many Western governments – to return to the sense of normalcy that prevailed before his ascension to the presidency.

Naturally, this would be an entirely false sense of normalcy. After all, Ahmadinejad has been president of Iran for only six months, yet the Islamic Republic has been actively seeking the destruction of the United States and the rest of the West since 1979 and has been the undisputed champion of state-sponsored terrorism over the course of that quarter century.

Before Ahmadinejad, was Khatami, who professed to moderation, but still promoted terrorism worldwide and still advocated death to Americans, Jews, and other infidels. Before Khatami was Rafsanjani, the mass murderer who played the role of “moderate” to Ahmadinejad’s radical in last year’s election. In Rafsanjani’s previous stint as president, he personally oversaw the operations that killed 19 American servicemen at the Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia and more than 80 people at the Jewish community center in Buenos Aires. He is considered the “father” of Iran’s nuclear weapons program, and is the man who foreshadowed Ahmadinejad’s nuclear blustering, once noting that “application of an atomic bomb would not leave anything in Israel but the same thing would just produce damages in the Muslim world.” Before Rafsanjani, of course, was his mentor and political

patron, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the iniquitous architect of the Iranian theocracy and head of state who allowed 52 American hostages to be held for 444 days.

What all this means, in other words, is that the Iranian hatred of and desire to destroy the United States and the West transcend both Ahmadinejad and the current crisis. Or as former Reagan national security aide Michale Ledeen put it last week:

[T]he current panicky rhetoric is yet one more distraction from the real problems, one more flight from the hard facts. For the central problem represented by the Islamic republic of Iran is terror, not technology. Iran is, and has been for decades, the driving engine of the terror war against us. Iran actively seeks our destruction, above all across her eastern and western borders, in Iraq and Afghanistan.

But since most Western observers tend not to want to be reminded of this history, Ahmadinejad is probably in some trouble. With him out of the way, the mullahs could themselves return to normalcy and could therefore continue to foster global terrorism, to sponsor the “insurgencies” in neighboring Iraq and Afghanistan, and to pursue their nuclear weapons without the “global community” breathing down their neck.

Certainly, with the immediate crisis averted, George Bush would be stripped of his rationale for going to war with Iran and would likely be unable to assemble much international support for anything more than simply scolding the Islamic Republic and asking it to play nicer in the future. And at this point, the mullahs could ask for no better outcome.

Fortunately, the Bush administration and the rest of the West could probably ask for no better result either. For all of the reasons cited above, open warfare with the Iranians would not be particularly beneficial at this point in time, no matter how hard Bush hit them. And sanctions would not be much better, since the United Nations has a recent history of failing to enforce sanctions terribly effectively and since, as Michael Ledeen notes, sanctions are almost never effective and usually end up hurting “the oppressed peoples of our tyrannical enemies” more than the regime itself.

This is not to say that the administration should do nothing about the Iranians. But since we, like countless others, have been opining about the critical need to support an Iranian insurgency movement and to undermine the regime as actively as possible for neigh on three years now, I won't bore you by going over the same ground again.

The bottom line here is that the long-term prospects for the Islamic Republic are not great. But its leaders at least have a choice. On the one hand, they can continue to escalate tensions and precipitate what will almost certainly be a bloody battle from which they will emerge badly beaten. On the other hand, they can, as I expect they will, back down and hope that the West will lose its focus. Given the fixations of most Western observers, the mullahs would be wise to opt for this second course, though, as always George Bush remains the wild card and the man on whose actions will ultimately decide the outcome of this conflict.

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