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THEY SAID IT

Said the little boy, "Sometimes I drop my spoon."
Said the old man, "I do that too."
The little boy whispered, "I wet my pants."
"I do that too," laughed the little old man.
Said the little boy, "I often cry."
The old man nodded, "So do I."
"But worst of all," said the boy, "it seems
Grown-ups don't pay attention to me."
And he felt the warmth of a wrinkled old hand.
"I know what you mean," said the little old man.

--"The Little Boy And The Old Man," Shel Silverstein, 1981.

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THE DEMOCRATS' REVERSION TO CHILDHOOD.

We have used the phrase "descent into madness" for almost three years now to describe the increasingly odd behavior of Democrats. For two reasons, we are formally abandoning this terminology this week. First, as we noted a few weeks ago, it seems to have been picked up by a variety of political writers on both sides of the aisle. Second, and more importantly, we feel that the time is rapidly approaching when further descent will no longer be possible, the Democrats having reached the bottom, the Tom O'Bedlam regions of weirdness. In any case, we have decided to adopt a new phrase to describe the idiosyncratic ways of the present day Democratic Party, that phrase being, as noted in the title of this piece, "reversion to childhood."

This is not meant to be a mere frivolous pejorative. If that were our aim, we could come up with a host of more colorful insults. Instead, our intend is to use this expression as a means of helping to describe, to analyze, and to attempt to foresee the consequences of the most perplexing political question of the day, which, simply stated, is as follows: "Why are the Democrats incapable of taking better political advantage of the decline in popularity of the Bush White House?"

After considerable discussion and thought, we have concluded that this failure can be attributed almost entirely to the fact that the Democratic Party's approach to debating the most important issues facing the nation is distinctly childlike in nature. Instead of offering alternative solutions and approaches to the nation's most complex and pressing problems, and entering these ideas into the arena of public opinion, Democrats inevitably choose to employ a mix of what can only be described as adolescent debating techniques. These

include the equivalent of lying on one's back, kicking one's feet, and screaming; shouting nasty *ad hominem*s; spreading lies; distorting opposition positions; and making statements that are patently and deliberately nonsensical in an apparent hope of confusing the issue or of changing the subject.

Not surprisingly, this unending, uncompromising, full-scale assault on the President and his various initiatives has had a negative impact on his popularity. Theoretically, at least, this is a good thing for Democrats. In practice, however, it hasn't worked very well, because this childish strategy fails to present the public with an attractive, Democratic alternative to the President, his party, and his programs.

When considering this unorthodox method of political engagement, it is useful to contrast it with Bill Clinton's politically more successful approach to grappling with the Republicans. Rather than continuously fighting the GOP leadership over every initiative they proposed, and constantly demeaning their motives, he enthusiastically joined them in debate over virtually every issue that came up, sometimes winning and sometimes losing, but always making certain that the Democrats were in the ball game and always taking credit when something good happened. Welfare reform was a classic example of this. This was a GOP project and the Clinton administration opposed it from the start. But when Bill realized that the initiative was unstoppable, he entered the fray enthusiastically, succeeded in putting his stamp on the final result, and to this day takes credit for its passage.

We have seen the current, contrasting Democratic approach at work in many important debates since President Bush came into office. Several years ago, for example, the president noted that study after study has shown that Social Security will be bankrupt in a few decades and that something needs to be done almost immediately if this is to be avoided. He proposed a solution. Rather than using this opportunity to join in a heated debate that would highlight the superiority of the Democrats when it comes to addressing sensitive, domestic problems, the Democratic response was to assert that the president was bent on destroying Social Security and that he hated the elderly. They succeeded

in doing harm to the President's credibility on Social Security but they did nothing to enhance their own long-held position of strength on this important issue.

Later, when the President introduced a plan to provide prescription drug coverage under Medicare, Democrats, who have favored such a plan since the inception of Medicare in 1965, assumed the role of spoiler. And while they succeeded in denying President Bush any real political credit for getting the measure enacted into law, they gained little or no political kudos for themselves with the all-important elderly population, which is a staple of their political base.

Another example came during the recent fight over changes in the Patriot Act, which was about to expire. Rather than using this reauthorization requirement as an opportunity to fight for amendments to the law that would demonstrate to the public that the Democrats are more responsible and reasonable than Republicans when it comes to fine tuning the delicate balance between national security and privacy, they accused the President of seeking totalitarian power, spread lies about him and his motives, and actually tried to kill the entire effort to reauthorize the bill, which is widely understood to have been instrumental in preventing another 9/11 type attack. Once again, the Democrats succeeded in hurting the president's standing with the public, but did nothing to bolster public confidence in their own approach to national security.

But the most glaring instance of the Democrats taking a pique-filled, narcissistic, childlike, and politically unproductive approach to dealing with an important national issue has definitely been their handling of the debate over the war in Iraq.

Here we have a Republican president whose popularity has declined dramatically almost entirely because of waning public support for a war that he personally demanded be fought. He is getting no help from the mainstream media and little if any from America's allies. Members of his own party are going wobbly on him. Millions of Americans who voted for him and are nominally of the Republican persuasion are highly concerned about his leadership on the war and are

open to considering alternative approaches to the ones being taken by him. The single most important reason that many haven't yet abandoned him completely is because he makes a very good case that there is no other alternative but to "stay the course" that he has charted.

So how are the Democrats proceeding? Are they making a credible case that they are more thoughtful, more skillful, and more knowledgeable about foreign and military policy; less impetuous; more trustworthy; smarter; and more mature in their judgment? Have they suggested that because of their superior understanding of the nuances of Islam and the leadership of friendly Middle Eastern nations that they could ease America out of its military commitment to Iraq without losing the entire region to militant Islam? In short, have they offered a seemingly rational alternative to the Bush plan in Iraq for consideration by those Americans who would appear to be desperately seeking one?

Well no, they haven't. They have instead pursued an alternative course, one that is the political equivalent of lying on their back, kicking their feet, and screaming; shouting nasty *ad hominem*s; spreading lies; distorting opposing positions; and making statements that are patently and deliberately nonsensical in an apparent hope of confusing the issue or of changing the subject. In short, they have employed childlike debating tactics.

Among others things, they routinely accuse the President of being a liar; of starting the war for the benefit of his "friends in the oil business"; of fighting the war for the sole benefit of "the Jews"; of emulating Hitler; and of being a killer. They call him stupid and invoke the foreign policy wisdom of intellectually shallow Hollywood "stars" such as Susan Sarandon and George Clooney. Like adolescents who have little command of the language and limited debating skills, they routinely employ course language as a substitute for substance.

Several classic examples of the Democrats' method for engaging in the public debate over the war in Iraq were on display recently at an anti-war

concert in New York City put on by a group called bringthemhomenow.org. A highlight of that evening was said to be a song by Grammy Award winning singer Steve Earle, who opened the concert with a little ditty entitled, "F*** the FCC," the lyrics of which included such political insights as the following: "F*** the FCC, F*** the FBI, F*** the CIA, Livin' in the motherf***** USA."

This was followed by a poetry reading by Cindy Sheehan, the newest member of the Democratic Party's firmament of revered celebrities. Describing herself a "rock star", Sheehan drew extensively on techniques made popular by Coleridge and Wordsworth, offering the following brilliant, original poetic composition to great cheers from the audience.

Violence and occupation
Do not bring liberation
That's bullshit
Get off it
This war is for profit

Then she offered some deep insights into the President of the United States. Among other things, she called him a liar and asserted that his motto is, "We have to kill more people because I've already killed so many."

It is difficult to tell how many Democrats agree with these sentiments and applaud the loutish way in which they are presented. One would think that at least some would find both objectionable. Yet, I think it is safe to say that a search of the websites and the public statements of the Party's senior leadership would fail to turn up any serious criticism of the characters involved or their actions. And one can rest assured that no senior Democratic leader, including Miss Hillary herself, the Party's presumptive front-runner for the presidential slot on the ticket in 2008, would dare to suggest that the Party should rid itself of this garbage, as the Republicans did David Duke when he claimed to be a member of the GOP.

The result is that these people have become the vanguard of the Democratic Party's approach to the critical debate over the war in Iraq, which I believe

goes a long way toward explaining why the Democrats have failed to register gains in the popularity polls commensurate with the President's declines.

Some Democratic politicians and political pundits maintain that the principal problem their party is having right now is agreeing upon a set of policy positions for the upcoming mid-term elections. This, they say, is responsible for the troubles that I have outlined above.

I think this is a symptom of the Democrats' problem, not the problem itself. The critical question is why the party leaders cannot agree among themselves upon a set of principles and proposals that are in keeping with the party's fundamental liberal ideology and present them to the American public in a rational and judicious manner. And the answer is that liberal ideology has run its course. Like communism in Russia and China and socialism in Europe, American liberalism has proceeded through the various stages of vigorous youth, powerful maturity, and now is entering the final days of its existence, regressing back to childhood, soiling itself, and becoming irrelevant to the pressing matters of the day.

The dream is dead of a world in which governmental initiatives can erase the consequences of original sin, render economic truths inoperable, and ensure peace by appeasement.

Cindy Sheehan would have done greater honor to the memory of her son if she had borrowed a few lines from T.S. Eliot's "Choruses From The Rock," left the company she was keeping, and then returned home to contemplate the truth that is contained within them.

The world turns and the world changes,
But one thing does not change.
In all of my years, one thing does not change.
However you disguise it, this thing does not
change:
The perpetual struggle of Good and Evil.

WHAT THEY DON'T WANT YOU TO KNOW ABOUT IRAQ.

Over the past couple of weeks, the general focus of the coverage of the war in Iraq has shifted from the "impending civil war" to the cost of the endeavor, both human and financial, both Iraqi and American. This makes sense, of course, since the third anniversary of the beginning of the war occurred recently, and this provided the perfect opportunity for "reflection" and analysis.

It should come as no surprise that the consensus among media and academic experts is that the war is utterly irredeemable, an unmitigated failure with exorbitant costs and negligible benefits. According to their analysis, the following "facts," preclude the drawing of any other conclusion: that the war was launched under false pretenses and therefore could never have delivered the benefits originally promised; that the war has encouraged more terrorism rather than curtailing it; that it has drained the federal coffers of hundreds of billions of dollars that might have been better spent elsewhere; and worst of all, that it has meant the end of thousands of lives, all of which were "wasted" in an effort that has been fruitless at best.

Typical of the type of commentary offered on the occasion of the war's anniversary is the following, penned by Sheila Seuss Kennedy, a professor of law and public policy at the Indiana University School of Public and Environmental Affairs, and published by the *Indianapolis Star*:

Some wars, regrettably, are necessary. Iraq was not such a war. It was a war of choice, impelled by ideology and sold to Americans (wittingly or unwittingly) under false pretenses. Worse yet, it was justified by appealing to our fears -- fears of "the other," fears of terrorism, fears of impotence.

The choice to send our young people into combat in an unnecessary war of choice was reprehensible. But the incompetence with which the conflict was planned and executed was even more reprehensible . . .

In his pursuit of some grandiose “crusade,” President Bush has mortgaged our future and diverted national resources that were desperately needed here at home. Our crumbling roads, our impoverished urban school systems, our embarrassing national health care system and our neglected national parks all could have benefited from the nearly \$1 trillion his foolhardy, unnecessary and arrogant unilateralism has cost us.

What do we have to show for the young lives and money he has squandered? We are less safe than we were; Iraq was not a sanctuary for terrorists before the war, but it is now.

Needless to say, this type of analysis by the “experts” has led the general public to believe a great many things about the war that are either patently false or highly misleading. The most important of these has to do with an egregious misreading of the war’s actual costs and benefits.

Professor Kennedy’s above-noted screed provides a perfect example of this. According to her, the war has deprived the nation of untold billions of dollars, money that could have been more effectively spent on “crumbling roads, our impoverished urban school systems, our embarrassing national health care system and our neglected national parks” and the like. The problem with this statement is that it is simply not true.

Yes indeed, the war and related reconstruction efforts in Iraq have tapped the U.S. Treasury to the tune of some \$400-\$600 billion. But even if the United States had not invaded, an overwhelmingly large portion of that money would have been spent not on roads or schools or any other project within the United States. It would still have been spent in Iraq.

You see, for more than a decade prior to President Bush’s 2003 invasion, official American policy regarding Saddam Hussein was “containment.”

Like the current reconstruction, containment was astronomically costly and dangerous. But unlike the present plan, containment was formally a policy of indeterminate goals and therefore of indeterminate length. For all their complaining about how President Bush’s Iraq policy has no “exit strategy,” the policy the Democrats advocated right up until the day the invasion began was far less lucid with regard to matters of ends and withdrawal.

Last week, the inimitable Mark Steyn noted that Delaware Senator, Democratic foreign policy guru, and “beloved comic figure” Joe Biden “condescendingly explained to Bush Jr.” in the year 2002 that “there is a reason your father stopped and did not go to Baghdad.” That reason, he said, was because “he didn’t want to be there for five years.”

Of course, as Steyn noted, “that means the Americans would have been out in spring of 1996,” had Bush Sr. actually gone into Baghdad. Instead, America left Saddam alone and settled on a policy of containment. During the run-up to the recent war Democrats insisted that this was the proper policy. It ensured that Saddam was kept in a box and, we were told, was virtually cost-free. They reiterated their dedication to this “alternative strategy” during the 2004 presidential campaign.

Last month, the American Enterprise Institute examined the premises behind the supposition that the war has been outrageously costly and published its findings, comparing the actual costs associated with the current American policy to projections of the costs that would likely have been incurred had containment been maintained, as Bush’s opponents advocated. In the executive summary of the study, Steven Davis, Kevin Murphy, and Robert Topel reported the following:

Forcible regime change in Iraq has proved to be a costly undertaking. As of January 2006, it appears likely that the Iraq intervention will ultimately unfold along a path that implies present value costs for the United States in the range of 410 to 630 billion

in 2003 dollars. These figures reflect a 2 percent annual discount rate. They capture the estimated economic costs of U.S. military resources deployed in the war and postwar occupation, the value of lost lives and injuries sustained by U.S. soldiers, the lifetime medical costs of treating injured soldiers, and U.S. outlays for humanitarian assistance and postwar reconstruction . . .

Containment required the continuous engagement of a potent U.S. military force in southern Turkey, the Middle East and the Persian Gulf. The United States devoted roughly 28,000 troops, 30 naval vessels, 200 military aircraft and other equipment to Iraqi containment efforts prior to the pre-war buildup. We estimate the economic cost of these military resources to be about \$14.5 billion per year. Based on our assessment of the likely duration of a dangerous regime in Iraq, absent external intervention, this annual flow translates into an expected present value of nearly \$300 billion. Hence, containment was also a costly option for the United States, even under the favorable assumption that it would be completely effective in achieving its national security goals . . .

We also develop an integrated analysis that simultaneously captures several possible contingencies under a policy of containment. The integrated analysis focuses on three scenarios chosen to capture a range of views about the likelihood and cost of the contingencies. Factoring the contingencies into the analysis yields present value costs for the containment policy in the range of \$350 to \$700 billion. These large sums are in the same ballpark as the likely costs of the Iraq intervention seen from the vantage point of early 2006. Thus, even with the benefit of partial hindsight, it is difficult to gauge whether the Iraq intervention is more costly than containment.

Of course, Bush's critics would argue that the fiscal costs are not the only costs associated with the war. Indeed, they argue, the money spent actually pales in comparison to the cost of the lives given by so many young Americans. Certainly, no one would dispute that every death of every soldier in Iraq is a tragedy. But even so, it appears that on the question of the human toll of the war, the costs of the war have been artificially inflated. Last week, the blog Redstate.com published the following numbers and commentary regarding the death toll of American servicemen:

While every lost serviceman and servicewoman is certainly tragic and should be mourned, the actual statistics tell quite a different tale from the MSM [mainstream media] and Democratic doom-and-gloom outlook. Comparing the numbers of lost US military personnel to past years, and past presidential terms, may even be a shock to supporters of the war.

Take a look at the actual US Military Casualty figures since 1980. If you do the math, you will find quite a few surprises. First of all, let's compare numbers of US Military personnel that died during the first term of the last four presidents.

George W. Bush 5187 (2001-2004)
Bill Clinton 4302 (1993-1996)
George H.W. Bush 6223 (1989-1992)
Ronald Reagan 9163 (1981-1984)....

In 2004, more soldiers died outside of Iraq and Afghanistan than died inside these two war zones (900 in these zones, 987 outside these zones). The reason is that there are usually a fair number that die every year in training accidents, as well as a small number of illness and suicide. Yet the MSM would make you think that US soldiers are dying at a high number in these zones, and at a significantly higher number than in past years or under past presidents. This is all simply outright lies and distortion.

Now, as numerous observers have noted, the analysis provided is faulty in that it doesn't take into account the fact that under previous presidents, the military was much larger, and therefore the *rate* of deaths among soldiers (deaths per 100,000 soldiers) under the current president is still considerably higher than it was under his predecessors.

Additionally, since deaths due to accidents have declined considerably, the comparison is even more ambiguous. But in any case, the idea that this war and the one in Afghanistan have been devastating to the military is simply untenable, given the relatively small number of casualties. As Glenn Reynolds (a.k.a. Instapundit) put it: "the fact that today's death rate, in wartime, is statistically indistinguishable from earlier peacetime death rates tells us that this is hardly the sort of endless slaughter that antiwar propagandists maintain."

On the flip side of this equation, of course, is the question of the benefits of the war. Most of President Bush's most ardent critics would never concede that there are any benefits to war, regardless of the situation, since they maintain the childlike belief that "violence never solves anything" (as per the above piece).

But a great many others, who are at least marginally more responsible and reasonable, have maintained that the war has proven fruitless simply because no "Weapons of Mass Destruction" were found, insisting that the absence of WMDs is proof of the tendentiousness of the Bush claim that Iraq was part and parcel of the broader war on terror. Their claim is that given the failure to locate WMDs, the war in Iraq has actually made us less safe, encouraging terrorists unnecessarily and fomenting violence and threats where none existed before. But this too is largely a myth, conceived by the President's opponents and perpetuated by a compliant media.

Anyone paying attention knows that the claim that Saddam had nothing to do with Islamist terrorism is patently false. Saddam supported al Qaeda-connected Islamist groups within Iraq, provided funding that

enabled Palestinian suicide bombings, and had considerable contact with al Qaeda and its leaders, including Osama bin Laden. There is, after all, a reason that former White House counter-terrorism official Richard Clarke worried that an incursion into Afghanistan would cause Osama to "boogie to Baghdad."

Fortunately for President Bush, the longer the war drags on the and the more information that is gleaned from the remnants of the Saddamite regime, the more clear and undeniable the Saddam-terrorism link becomes. The slow but sure release and translation of thousands of documents left behind by Saddam and his thugs is bolstering the claims of Iraq's relevance to the War on Terror.

In fact, the trove of documents recently released show a more substantial tie between al Qaeda and the Iraqi regime than had been previously disclosed and a greater Iraqi interest in the commission of acts of terrorism against Western targets. As ABC News reported last week, the Iraqi documents most recently released "discuss Osama bin Laden, weapons of mass destruction, al Qaeda and more."

These papers have apparently caused even some well-informed Democrats to rethink their previous conclusions about Saddam and al Qaeda. For example, *The New York Sun* reported last week that former Senator, presidential hopeful, and 9/11 Commissioner Bob Kerrey has conceded that the documents are clearly changing perceptions. To wit:

[T]he former senator from Nebraska said that the new document shows that "Saddam was a significant enemy of the United States." Mr. Kerrey said he believed America's understanding of the deposed tyrant's relationship with Al Qaeda would become much deeper as more captured Iraqi documents and audiotapes are disclosed . . .

The new documents suggest that the 9/11 commission's final conclusion in 2004, that there were no "operational" ties

between Iraq and Al Qaeda, may need to be reexamined in light of the recently captured documents.

While the commission detailed some contacts between Iraq and Al Qaeda in the 1990s, in Sudan and Afghanistan, the newly declassified Iraqi documents provide more detail than the commission disclosed in its final conclusions. For example, the fact that Saddam broadcast the sermons of al-Ouda at bin Laden's request was previously unknown, as was a conversation about possible collaboration on attacks against Saudi Arabia.

"This is a very significant set of facts," former 9/11 commissioner, Mr. Kerrey said yesterday. "I personally and strongly believe you don't have to prove that Iraq was collaborating against [sic] Osama bin Laden on the September 11 attacks to prove he was an enemy and that he would collaborate with people who would do our country harm. This...should not be used to tie Saddam to attacks on September 11. It does tie him into a circle that meant to damage the United States."

The fact of the matter is that those who insist that the war in Iraq has not made Americans safer base this conclusion not on the evidence, but on their personal prejudices. Saddam Hussein was always a threat. How big a threat, no one can say for sure, but the evidence clearly supports the idea that he "meant to damage the United States." At any rate, that threat has been neutralized, complaints to the contrary from President Bush's political opponents notwithstanding.

The larger problem here is that those who would have us believe that the war in Iraq has been an unmitigated failure and that everyone, including the public, knows it are wrong. The public "knows" no such thing. Indeed, opinion polls that show support for the war flagging are, in our opinion, somewhat misleading.

For starters, the presumption among media and political analysts is that waning support necessarily translates into a belief that President Bush was too aggressive and should have been more cautious with Iraq. This is not necessarily the case. As we have written before, we suspect that a great many of those who are unhappy with the President's performance on the war are unhappy because he has not been aggressive *enough*. Moreover, public perceptions are fluid. Given the slow drumbeat of negative information filtering out of Iraq, it's unsurprising that the public would be concerned. At the same time, either some concrete signs of progress or further evidence of the necessity of the war – presented either by the President himself or in the form of the documents noted above – could quickly shift the tide of public opinion.

Certainly, President Bush has not been deterred from publicly proclaiming his resolve to continue the war on terror by the claims of "failure." And while the conventional wisdom has it that Bush's predisposition doesn't really matter, since the public at least has been deterred, we doubt this as well. Though average Americans may not be acutely aware of the actual costs and benefits of the war, we suspect they are, nevertheless, conscious of the fact that the aggregate "sacrifices" necessitated by this war have been notably less than in previous conflicts and the cumulative benefits may still prove substantial.

Three years on, President Bush's opponents are still misjudging him, misjudging the public, and misjudging the war.

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