

**Mark L. Melcher** Publisher  
melcher@thepoliticalforum.com

**Stephen R. Soukup** Editor  
soukup@thepoliticalforum.com

## THEY SAID IT

“The Western powers, especially the United States, still wield immense military and economic power that ‘looks formidable on paper.’ But they are unable to use that power because their populations have become ‘risk-averse.’ The Western man today has no stomach for a fight. This phenomenon is not new: All empires produce this type of man, the self-centered, materialist, and risk-averse man.”

Hassan Abbasi, Director of the Center for Security Doctrines Research of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and principal foreign policy advisor to Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, during a lecture at the Teachers Training Faculty in Karaj, Iran, September 2005.

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## MUHAMMAD STRANGELOVE.

We were intrigued by an op-ed piece that appeared in the *Wall Street Journal* last Wednesday entitled “The Last Helicopter.” It was written by Amir Taheri, a well regarded Iranian author and columnist. The thrust of the article was that the leaders of the government in Iran are convinced that the next president of the United States will cut and run from Iraq, and this will mark the West’s defeat in the coming “clash of civilizations” between the Muslim world, led by Iran, and the “Crusader-Zionist camp,” led by America.

Taheri says that this belief is based on an analysis conducted by Hassan Abbasi, whom he describes as the principal foreign policy voice for Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. To illustrate how highly regarded Abbasi is among Islamists, Taheri notes that he is “presented by his friends” as “The Dr. Kissinger of Islam.”

It is probable that the irony of this designation is lost on those scowling Iranian Islamists in their trademark dirty white shirts. But Americans who have paid attention to Abbasi’s fanatical utterances during the past few years cannot help but make the comparison with the fictional namesake of the 1964 movie *Dr. Strangelove*, who was widely believed at the time to have been modeled after none other than Dr. Kissinger. Like Abbasi, Strangelove was a delusional, arguably deranged, war mongering, fascist Presidential advisor. And like Abbasi, Strangelove was amusingly oblivious to the potentially dangerous consequences of playing around with nuclear weapons.

As a fanatical Muslim, one can presume that at least some of Abbasi's attitude on this score is related to the prospect that if his calculations are wrong the worst that can happen is that he will end up with 72 virgins at his disposal in paradise. Strangelove's calming influence was more terrestrial but no less carnal. He was comforted by the thought that in the period immediately after a nuclear war, in which most of mankind would have been annihilated, he would be a member of a group of patriots with a 10-to-1 female to male ratio, who would go underground and proceed to repopulate the human race, an idea that was greeted with enthusiasm by the wacky Russian Ambassador de Sadesky with the classic line, "I must confess, you have an astonishingly good idea there, Doctor."

In any case, according to Taheri, Abbasi's plan to win the upcoming "clash of civilizations" revolves around his theory of "the last helicopter," a reference to America's exit from Vietnam, to Jimmy Carter's disastrous attempt to free the hostages in Tehran, to President Reagan's decision to leave Lebanon in the wake of the death of 241 Marines in a suicide attack by Hezbollah, to the first President Bush's decision to call a halt to "Desert Storm" before killing Saddam, and to Bill Clinton's "Black Hawk Down" disaster in Somalia.

The images of Americans fleeing in helicopters figure prominently in Abbasi's fevered version of each of these events, and he predicts this will be the case again when the United States is defeated in Iraq and "the last helicopter" leaves that nation. According to Abbasi, this won't happen while the current President Bush is in office, since he is an "aberration," out of sync with America's spineless national character. But he is convinced that the next American president, regardless of party, will be more in keeping with the nation's tradition of cowardice, and he or she will surely abandon Iraq. According to Taheri, this belief is widely known as the "waiting Bush out" strategy and is gaining credibility throughout the Middle East "from Tehran to Damascus and from Islamabad to Rabat."

Now, as we said earlier, we were intrigued by this article. But as long-time fans of the *Wall Street Journal*, and most especially of the editorial section of that paper, we were also disappointed. Here we have an opinion piece in one of America's most influential daily newspapers. It deals with what is arguably the most important foreign policy topic of the day, namely the prospect of war with Iran. It is written by a widely respected expert on Iran. And it provides an insight into the thinking of the senior foreign policy advisor and war strategist to the President of Iran.

This may not be as important as the flight to Scotland in May 1941 by the number three official in the Nazi government, Deputy Führer Rudolph Hess. But come on, this is information pertaining to the strategic thinking of none other than the "Dr. Kissinger of Islam."

Yet, the author of this piece provides no speculation or insights whatsoever concerning the significance of this information to the future course of the conflict in question. He states his personal view that Abbasi is wrong; that the United States will not cut and run, and he notes that this view is based on his opinion that Americans realize that this would not end the war with militant Islam, but would simply encourage the jihadists to "pursue their campaign within the U.S. itself." But readers are left to wonder how it is that the "professor of strategy" at the Islamic Republic's Revolutionary Guard Corps University and the most influential foreign policy "voice" of the President of Iran could be wrong about something that is so fundamental to Iran's military planning. And more importantly, it leaves readers to wonder whether it matters that he is wrong.

So let's give some meaning to this article. Let's give it a bottom line, so to speak. Let's begin by speculating a little about Abbasi himself. Is this highly placed military strategist a fool, terribly ill informed about the nature of his enemy, or incapable of serious analysis? Is he a wily and brilliant old foreign policy hand engaged in a crafty propaganda campaign worthy of Prince Talleyrand, or is he really nothing more than a hack jingoist masquerading as an "expert?"

Taheri doesn't even speculate on this. He just says that the guy is wrong and leaves it at that. My take is that Abbasi is an ignorant, ill-informed blowhard. When "Googling" him, one finds that just two years ago he claimed that Iran had a strategy for none other than "the destruction of Anglo-Saxon civilization" and would launch this apocalyptic endeavor "as soon as the instructions arrive from Ali Khamenei." According to reports about this statement, the centerpiece for this "strategy," which presumably would destroy not only the United States but the U.K. as well, involved launching missiles on "29 sensitive sites in the U.S. and the West."

Besides being both bombastic and untruthful, Abbasi's rhetoric is also heavily laced with foolish assertions that the United States military does not present much of threat. As noted in the above "They Said It" quote, this conclusion is based on his belief that Americans are both risk averse and cowardly.

Now it is not unusual to hear such a claim made by America's enemies, particularly those in the Middle East, where bluster passes for courage and hatred substitutes for power. But it is not only dangerous but stupid for a man in Abbasi's position to take any enemy lightly, much less one that packs the extraordinary military power of the United States and that has a rather impressive history of using this power to protect its "interests abroad," which it generally maintains are rather all-encompassing.

One can assume that part of Abbasi's bravado is aimed at keeping morale high among the Iranians who will be on the front lines of the war with American if it comes to that. But it also seems likely that Abbasi actually believes what he is saying. This would explain why the Iranian government seems so confident that the United States is bluffing when it threatens to use military force against it.

Needless to say, I agree with Taheri that Abbasi is very wrong. Indeed, I think he is wrong about a great many things. For starters, there is absolutely no reason whatsoever to believe that the next president of the United States is going to abandon the Iraqi war effort. Indeed, I don't think Abbasi will have to wait until

January 2009 to find this out. Instead, in the spring of next year when the primary campaigns start, I think he will find that no serious candidate for the post of President of the United States from either party will make a pledge to "bring the boys home now" as part of his or her platform.

Yes, there is an antiwar movement that gets considerable coverage in the mainstream media, largely because of the celebrities involved and because it provides an interesting twist to the political scene. But the great majority of Americans have no more interest in an immediate pull-out from Iraq than they do for the prospect of having the Middle Eastern oil wells controlled by radical Islamic killers. For evidence of this, one need look no further than Miss Hillary's avoidance of the antiwar crowd.

Another important error that Abbasi is making is his related claim that the United States is too cowardly and risk averse to use military force against Iran. This is not just wrong but it is dangerously wrong, the kind of wrong that could lead to the deaths of thousands of people, most of whom are likely to be Abbasi's countrymen.

You see of all Abbasi's mistakes, the largest and most glaring is his apparent conclusion that his enemies do not merit the attention that a good and shrewd warrior would give them. Driven by religiously engendered arrogance, Abbasi appears to believe that Americans are unworthy of serious study; that because they are infidels and "tools of the Zionists," they can be dissed and dismissed with a selection of choice, crowd-pleasing pejoratives. So rather than learn as much about his foe as possible, Abbasi appears to be content merely to deal with superficialities. And these superficialities paint a wildly distorted picture.

During the 2004 presidential campaign, a handful of us on the right suggested that Democrats were headed for great disappointment on election evening because they had spent months listening only to those who told them what they wanted to hear and had somehow convinced themselves that what they were hearing was objective. They "cocooned" themselves away from any information that might have disturbed the version

of reality they had so carefully created for themselves. In a sense, Abbasi has spun himself and his clients into a similar cocoon. He has a theory about how Americans behave and he listens only to information that confirms his theory. As with the Democrats in '04, America's mainstream media is complicit in this cocooning, convincing the Iranians that their "news" is an objective portrayal of the thoughts, hopes, dreams, and aspirations of the American people, when, of course, it is not.

In our opinion, then, the bottom line on Amir Taheri's article in the *Wall Street Journal* is that President Bush has his work cut out for him. If he doesn't convince the political leadership of Iran, as well as the leaders of the other Muslim nations of the Middle East, as well as the Russians, the Chinese, and the Europeans, that Abbasi is dead wrong when he says that the United States is too cowardly and risk averse to honor its pledge to use military force if necessary to prevent Iran from having nuclear weapons, then the world is in for some very troubled times.

And the "last helicopter" to be seen by Hassan Abbasi, a.k.a. "The Dr. Kissinger of Islam," a.k.a. Muhammed Strangelove, is likely to be an Apache AH-64D Longbow flying low over Tehran firing Hellfire missiles at him and at anyone and anything that moves.

## THE DEBATE ON IMMIGRATION: WHO'S WINNING?

With the President's poll numbers still hovering in the thirties and the GOP natives growing restless about the party's prospects for November and beyond, the general consensus among the members of the political class is that President Bush needs desperately to shake up his administration, push out the old, tired hands, and bring in fresh blood to revitalize the team for the last three years of the second term.

The move made last week to replace White House Chief of Staff Andrew Card with OMB Director Josh Bolten was, in the estimation of these observers, merely a token gesture in this direction. The entire original team should go, they declare, most especially Deputy Chief of Staff and presidential advisor Karl Rove. Allies and critics agree that Rove has done remarkable things, but pundits and politicians alike seem to believe that, like the rest of the team, he is worn out and in serious need of a change of scenery.

We disagree. In fact, we think that the purveyors of this conventional wisdom are the ones who need a vacation. And Rove, by contrast, appears to us to be doing quite well. He is, as far as we can tell, doing what he has always done, advising the President judiciously, providing the White House's adversaries with enough rope to hang themselves, and leaving his boss in the position of looking, once again, like the only reasonable and responsible person in Washington.

At least that's the impression we were left with after watching last week's three-ring immigration circus, which featured Republicans making fools of themselves, pro-illegal immigration protestors making bigger fools of themselves, and Democrats once again adding nothing constructive to the debate. Indeed, Democrats actually exacerbated the situation by cynically attempting to profit from the other side's willingness to take seriously its democratic responsibilities and at least debate the difficult issues.

The immigration battle has clearly captured the public's attention, and it now appears likely that none of the parties involved is going to fare particularly well under this increased scrutiny, with the possible exception, thanks presumably to Karl Rove, of the President and one or two of his closest allies.

Beginning with the immigrants themselves, it would be hard to imagine any group of people doing more damage to their cause than the pro-illegal immigrant protestor groups did last week. Before the protests began, it seemed that most Americans were ambivalent about legal immigration, about illegal immigration, and about the host of tangentially related topics. Though they knew they didn't like to see the nation's immigration laws openly flouted, they knew as well that immigration is economically vital and is a fundamental and defining characteristic of the nation. Most, we presume, felt like our friend Rich Galen ([www.mullings.com](http://www.mullings.com)), who, despite decades in various capacities inside official Washington, still felt compelled to admit the following last week:

Here's what I think about the immigration issue: I don't know what I think.

I agree with the last person I hear speaking about it.

I agree with those who think there should be a guest worker program – of some sort. I know there are jobs I don't want to do. In fact NO one wants to do them, but they have to get done and they will get done . . . at minimum wage.

Which happens to be the exact wage many illegal immigrants are willing to work for.

But I also agree with those who point to the four-fold increase in illegal immigration which will certainly continue to accelerate when it becomes common knowledge that America has, effectively, turned its back on its own immigration laws.

Of course, it's tough to remain ambivalent about something like immigration when the immigrants in question act as if they believe that it is obscene for a nation like the United States to determine who can or cannot cross its borders; or that the concept of national sovereignty is itself an expression of American aggression and prejudice; or that it is preposterous to expect that immigrants to this country should show any sort of dedication to, affinity for, or appreciation of their new home.

It appears never to have occurred to the organizers of or the participants in the mass rallies last week that their cause is unlikely to be helped by such things as carrying Mexican flags, supplanting American flags with Mexican ones, carrying signs calling California (and Arizona and Texas, etc.) "stolen land," distributing posters comparing Members of Congress to Nazis, and declaring that anyone who dares to raise the issue of illegal immigration is a "white racist."

Thus, by the end of last week, it was clear that the protestors had done themselves very little good and probably a great deal of harm. Victor Davis Hanson – military historian, Hoover Institution fellow, native Californian, and occasional Cheney advisor – described the protests and the reaction thusly:

[H]ere in Central California . . . the public face of the demonstrations that we saw . . . were mostly angry and, in the case of truant high-school students, so often unfortunately characterized by Mexican chauvinism, if not overt racism of the La Raza ("the race") type. And while these public outbursts were for the present just noisy, the private counter-reactions to them, I fear, are going to grow larger and angrier still.

If many thousands of illegal aliens marched in their zeal, many more millions of Americans of all different races and backgrounds watched – and seethed. They were struck by the Orwellian incongruities – Mexican flags, chants of "Mexico,

Mexico,” and the spectacle of illegal alien residents lecturing citizen hosts on what was permissible in their own country.

If the demonstrators thought that they were bringing attention to their legitimate grievances – the sheer impossibility of deporting 11 million residents across the border or the hypocrisy of Americans de facto profiting from “illegals” who cook their food, make their beds, and cut their lawns--they seemed oblivious to the embarrassing contradictions of their own symbolism and rhetoric. Most Americans I talked to in California summed up their reactions to the marches as something like, ‘Why would anyone wave the flag of the country that they would never return to – and yet scream in anger at those with whom they wish to stay?’ Depending on the particular questions asked, polls reveal that somewhere around 60-80% of the public is vehemently opposed to illegal immigration.

Unfortunately, while the protestors in Los Angeles and elsewhere thought they were standing up for themselves and exercising their right to be heard, the manner in which they expressed themselves and the sentiments they expressed have served merely to complicate and enflame an already complicated and flammable issue.

In addition to pushing an erstwhile undecided public in an anti-immigrant direction, the protests have also emboldened the already overly nativist wing of the Republican Party. In fact, if there is a policy implication from last week’s protests, it is almost certainly that Congressman Tom Tancredo and the rest of the nativists will push even harder to enact their “enforcement-only” immigration agenda and will be even more aggressive in their denunciations of any and all who disagree with them. And this, in turn, may well be very bad news for the GOP and for the nation.

The danger to the GOP itself is obvious. The reason that immigration has been the new “third rail” of government for the last decade is because there are serious political consequences connected with alienating the country’s largest and fastest growing minority population. The Republican Party’s history of alienating immigrants is long and sordid, with the most recent chapter having been written in the 1990s by California Governor Pete Wilson, whose ham-fisted approach to immigration issues contributed in no small part to his state’s transformation from the “land of Reagan” to one of the most uniformly and intensely blue states in the country. If the Republicans attempt to address the issue on a national level as indelicately as Wilson did in California, their efforts will almost certainly have a similar effect on the Hispanic electorate across the land.

As the editorial board of the *Wall Street Journal* wrote last Friday, clumsy, excessively punitive immigration “reform,” which seems to be the preference of many “conservatives,” will do little but “make permanent enemies of millions of Hispanics.” And this would all but guarantee the Republican Party’s return to its years of wandering in the desert. Michael Barone noted in last year’s edition of his *Almanac of American Politics* that George Bush won re-election in part by winning 44% of the Hispanic vote, an unprecedented percentage for a Republican. Had he not done well among Hispanics, Bush would have lost. It’s that simple. And if the GOP manages to alienate any significant chunk of those Bush voters, future Republican candidates will assuredly not be as fortunate as Bush was. That too is simple.

Sadly, though, the GOP’s near-term electoral worries are hardly the only, or even the most significant potential negative that is likely to result from the emboldening of the nativist wing of the Republican Party. As we noted about this time last year, Colorado Congressman Tom Tancredo, who has been called “the avatar of a resurgent anti-immigration wing of the Republican Party” by *The New Republic’s* Michael Crowley, tends to paint the immigration debate in grand, “clash of civilization” terms, thereby

fashioning an “enemy” that includes not just illegal immigrants, but all immigrants, even those who share a common religious heritage with most Americans and are, indeed, part and parcel of Tancredo’s beloved “Western Civilization.” And the resurgence of this “clash of civilizations,” nativist, protectionist wing of the party could not come at a more inopportune time.

These neo-Know-Nothings in the Tancredo/Buchanan wing of the party already exposed the nation to potentially immense economic dislocation with their out-of-hand rejection of the Dubai Ports World deal last month, a rejection that stemmed in part from their conception of the “clash of civilizations” and in part from a short-sighted and opportunistic sop by some to public opinion.

Today, these same folks seem bent on exposing the nation to further economic instability by, among other things, constricting the influx of labor provided by immigrants – legal and illegal alike. And again they are doing so in part because of a provincial understanding of what constitutes Western civilization, and in part out of political opportunism. The polls show antipathy to illegal immigrants right now. But if the anti-immigration forces get their way and try to have some 12 million illegal immigrants deported, both the economy and those cherished poll numbers are likely to take a significant hit.

Of course, as foolishly as most Republicans in Congress are behaving, they have one thing going for them, that being that they are not as foolish as the Democrats. They are, at least, willing to address this issue, understanding that it is one of the more pressing and significant public policy matters of the day. The Democrats, by contrast, are content, as they always are, to let the GOP do the heavy lifting, hoping to avoid hurting themselves and to be able to step into the breach if and when Republicans stumble under their load.

Last week, we noted 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,” we continued, “Democrats inevitably choose to employ a mix of what can only be described as adolescent debating techniques.” Included among these techniques are “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.”

And lo, this is precisely what they are doing in the debate over immigration. In consequence, while there are two sides to this very important and vital debate, both sides are manned by Republicans. Indeed, the Democrats’ fear of this issue is so intense that their actions would be funny if they weren’t so politically corrupt. You see, the “Democratic alternative” is precisely the plan introduced by Republican John McCain, which is itself rather similar the plan proposed by President Bush. Yet, the Democratic leadership has decided to ignore this inconvenient fact and has proceeded to shout nasty *ad hominem*s, distort the GOP positions, and wrongly portray the GOP as being united behind a single program, which they describe as un-American, un-Christian, and overtly racist.

Between party Chairman Howard Dean’s declaration that Republicans are intent on “scape-goating Hispanics” and Hillary Clinton’s contention that the Republicans are trying to use immigration to turn the country into “a police state” and that GOP policies would criminalize “even Jesus himself,” there’s little question that the childishness of the Democrats continues unabated.

It remains to be seen whether this approach will work politically. Avoiding an issue as inflammatory as this isn’t necessarily a bad idea. And beating Republicans over the head with their own words may garner some support, especially since Republicans are not in agreement and are therefore saying contradictory

things. But Democrats run the risk that the public is going to recognize at some point that, like Gertrude Stein's Oakland, there is no there there among Democrats.

More to the point, if Democrats continue to support what amounts to a variation of the Bush plan, then Bush will get credit for any positive developments that follow. Already, the Democrats are finding it hard to claim credit for responsible action on the issue. This was evident this weekend in John Kerry's Democratic Hispanic Radio address, in which the only positive Democratic contribution to the debate that he could cite was to have made certain "that the Dream Act was included [in the Senate Judiciary-passed bill], so that young people who have spent most of their lives in the United States, who believe in our country, who have stayed out of trouble, can have a chance at a higher education." Nothing wrong with that, of course, but we doubt seriously whether anyone, either in the immigrant community or among native-born citizens, had any of their current immigration-related anxieties calmed by the Democratic effort.

In any case, the political situation plays out as follows: the Democrats are shirking their responsibilities and desperately attempting to figure out a way to use the immigration debate for crass political advantage, while Republicans are doing a great job of alienating themselves from Hispanic immigrants, and the

Hispanic immigrants in question are doing an even better job of alienating themselves from the citizens of their adopted nation.

Meanwhile, President Bush and his Senate surrogate (and successor-designate), John McCain, appear to be the only rational voices in the debate. By proposing to integrate enforcement with assimilation, the President comes down on the prudent side of both components of this issue. He appears to understand the threats posed by ongoing, high-volume illegal immigration as well as the economic and practical concerns raised by an "enforcement only" approach. While friends and foes alike look insular and opportunistic, the President appears rational and levelheaded.

We'll grant you that President Bush has had a rough few months. But the fact still remains that his rivals – both in and out of his party – have had it worse. The immigration debate is a sticky matter, which should be handled with delicacy and precision. Of course, if he can make all the other parties involved in the matter appear awkward and ham-handed, then he can't help but look delicate and precise by comparison.

The "experts" may think Karl Rove needs a rest. But as we sit here and watch the immigration debate unfold, we can't help think that what he really needs is a raise.

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