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## THEY SAID IT

In the 1930's, the leaders of Great Britain and France tried their best to avoid a confrontation with Nazi Germany. By the time the confrontation took place, it was on Hitler's terms, with German power ascendant.

It seems that the same dynamic is at work relative to Iran. A fanatical, bullying regime is using a combination of threats and grievance-mongering. Western leaders shrink from confrontation, even though delay seems likely to worsen our position. One could argue that the more that America fears a confrontation with Iran, the more likely we are to have our worst fears realized. It will cost less in terms of American lives if we deal with Iran forcefully and soon rather than cautiously and late.

--Arnold Kling, "Fear of Confrontation," *TCSDaily*, April 4, 2006.

## GIRDING FOR BATTLE.

To hear the mainstream press and other Bush critics tell it, the President and his advisors are getting ready to expand the conflict in the Middle East beyond Iraq and into Iran. Moreover, as they tell the story, such an expansion would constitute a desperate move on the administration's part; one that would be largely unjustified given the dynamics at play in the region and the limited extent of Iranian ambitions; one that would be exceptionally difficult to sell to the American public, particularly given the President's poor poll numbers and struggles in Iraq; and most important, one that would almost certainly make the world a more dangerous and hostile place.

Regarding this last point concerning the troubles that could result from confronting the Mullahs, the page one, top-of-the-fold story in last Sunday's *Washington Post* was entitled "Attacking Iran May Trigger Terrorism." It was written by Dana Priest, one of the paper's top military and foreign affairs reporters, and opened with the following paragraphs:

As tensions increase between the United States and Iran, U.S. intelligence and terrorism experts say they believe Iran would respond to U.S. military strikes on its nuclear sites by deploying its intelligence operatives and Hezbollah teams to carry out terrorist attacks worldwide.

Iran would mount attacks against U.S. targets inside Iraq, where Iranian intelligence agents are already plentiful, predicted these experts. There is also a growing consensus that Iran's agents would target civilians in the United States, Europe and elsewhere, they said.

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U.S. officials would not discuss what evidence they have indicating Iran would undertake terrorist action, but the matter “is consuming a lot of time” throughout the U.S. intelligence apparatus, one senior official said. “It’s a huge issue,” another said.

The natural reaction to this assessment might be simply to dismiss it as yet another version of the same old doom-mongering that has been the purview of the mainstream press, the academic left, the foreign policy establishment, and the Democratic Party since shortly after September 11. Don’t you dare attack the Taliban in Afghanistan, they warned, lest you enrage the “Arab Street” and trigger a global terrorist campaign. Don’t challenge Saddam, unless you want to see his chemical and biological weapons unleashed on American soldiers by the Saddam Fedayeen and on American cities by Iraqi-sponsored terrorists. Don’t go near a mosque; don’t attack during Ramadan; don’t support Israel’s strategy of targeted assassination of Hamas leaders, unless you want . . . well, you get the picture.

Like the left-wing economic doomsayers who have been auguring the collapse of the post-Keynesian economy for a quarter century, correctly predicting ten of the last three recessions, those who oppose the Bush foreign policy have been warning for nearly five years now that the wages of fighting back will be a new and even more deadly round of terrorist attacks. But in spite of this dreadful record of forecasting the eruption of the “Arab Street,” those who insist that American action is the proximate cause of terrorism and of Muslim anger are as impervious as ever to both reason and experience.

But this is no mere coincidence. The supposition that terrorism will necessarily follow in the wake of American assertiveness is indicative of the pathology that has fostered the current wartime political climate. This is a pathology that has led many on both the political left and the political right to embrace policy prescriptions that would be disastrous not merely to their own political ambitions, but to the nation as a whole – indeed to all of Western Civilization.

To start with, the doomsayers have the causation of Iranian terrorism backward. The idea that the Iranian response to American intervention would be to unleash terror presupposes that Iranian terror has ever been “leashed,” which in the nearly 27 years of the Islamic Republic, it has never been. When now-President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and his fellow student-terrorists overthrew the Shah, overran sovereign American territory (the U.S. embassy), and took innocent civilians prisoner, holding them for well over a year, they declared war on the United States. And in the nearly three decades since, they have never undeclared that war, even though only one side has been fighting it openly.

In a recent piece on NATO, *National Journal’s* James Kitfield wrote that “in the past year, a radical ideologue has risen to power in Tehran . . .” Not to pick on Kitfield, but that phrase would only make sense if it were written sometime in 1980. The ideologue to whom Kitfield refers, President Ahmadinejad, may be a little more dedicated to the public expression of his religious millenarianism than previous Iranian presidents, but he is no more of a radical than the Mullahs who have held the reins of power in the Republic since its inception.

Certainly he is no more so than Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, who both founded the Islamic Republic and built its terrorist infrastructure. The presumption that Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld, Rice et al. might provoke Iranian terrorism creates something of a time-space problem, since the Iranian terrorism that murdered 241 Marines in Beirut took place some 18 years before Bush and company arrived in Washington, and the Iranian-sponsored murder of 19 American servicemen in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia took place on Bill Clinton’s watch.

By ignoring the history and the longevity of the Iranian crusade against the Great Satan, Bush administration critics are able to justify their pacifism on the grounds that it is the morally responsible course of action. If the United States acts, death and destruction, at home and abroad, will be the result, they warn. But if America simply does nothing and

if George, Dick, Don, and Condi behave themselves, then everything will be okay and the immediate crisis will pass. This is utter and complete nonsense, both morally and practically. And it is dangerous nonsense as well.

The fact of the matter is that the Iranian proclivity for terrorism is not a reason that war against the Mullahs should be avoided. Indeed, it is precisely the reason why it should be pursued and pursued vigorously. In a recent column for *TCSDaily*, Arnold Kling noted that “large segments of American society no longer have the ability to confront real evil.” But it’s actually worse than that. Large segments of American society no longer have the ability even to *recognize* real evil.

So allow us to clarify the matter this way. Any regime that would respond to a military confrontation with the wanton mass slaughter of innocent civilians is evil. Period. Such a regime should not be allowed to survive. Certainly, it should not be allowed to develop and deploy nuclear weapons. And since there appears to be unanimity that this is precisely what the Iranians would do, then there should be similar unanimity about who the bad guys are here.

By suggesting that terrorism will be a *response* to American action, rather than the moral abomination that it is and thus the *cause* of American action, opponents of the Bush foreign policy have inverted both the causation and the moral dynamic at work. Under their moral construction, any Iranian terrorism would be the fault of George Bush and his over-aggressiveness rather than the fault of the Mullahs and their hate-fueled Islamo-fascist death cult.

In order to do the “moral” thing under these conditions, one would have to avoid direct military confrontation with the Islamic Republic at all costs in the irrational hope that, as Kling put it, “the movement outgrows its militant phase and turns moderate and mature.” And this would have to be done even if that were to mean allowing the Mullahs to acquire the most powerful and most dangerous weapon that man has ever known.

Regular readers know that over the years we have turned quite often to Eric Voegelin’s “dream world” to explain otherwise inexplicable behavior on the part of America’s political elites. And while we hate to use the Voegelin crutch yet again, this twisted conception of moral behavior seems precisely what he had in mind in his description of the liberal “dream world,” in which “leaders will recognize dangers to their existence when they develop, but such dangers will not be met by appropriate actions in the world of reality. They will rather be met by magic operations . . .”

After more than a quarter century of open and impenitent warfare against the United States, and no more than a handful of days, weeks, or months from attaining the ultimate weapon in this war, the Mullahs are rather unlikely to respond positively to further diplomacy or to the threat of sanctions. And anyone who thinks that one more diplomatic entreaty will help the Iranians to see the error of their ways is delusional. Talk about your “magic operations.”

The bottom line here is that those who believe that Mullahs can be brought to heel through diplomacy or by the imposition of halfhearted unilateral sanctions are deluding themselves. In truth, such actions would not defuse potential hostilities, but merely delay them until a time when the circumstances will be more favorable to the Mullahs.

It is quite possible, maybe even likely, that an attack on Iranian nuclear weapons sites would result in Iranian-sponsored terrorist attacks both on American targets abroad and on American soil, just as the skeptics insist. But that, quite simply, is the nature of the enemy. To pretend otherwise is to deny reality and to adopt a position that is both morally and tactically dubious.

Sadly, though, the dubiousness does not end there. Another argument forwarded by those who oppose confrontation with Iran is that the threat posed by Iranian nukes has been exaggerated, that despite the Mullahs’ bluster, we can actually live with a nuclear Iran. This argument was advanced most prominently just over a month ago in a *New York Times* piece

written by MIT political scientist and liberal foreign policy gadfly Barry Posen, fittingly enough entitled “We Can Live With a Nuclear Iran.”

The basic premise of the piece and of the argument it is that there are a number of reasons to expect that even a nuclear-armed Iran will not pose a significant threat to the global order because using nukes or passing them to terrorists would not be in the Islamic Republic’s rational self interest.

The problem with such presumptions about rationality breeding stability is that they rely entirely on the idea that the Iranian leaders will behave rationally, an idea that experience would tend to discredit. As OpinionJournal’s James Taranto noted recently, “Posen utterly ignores the nature of the Iranian regime – namely, that it is run by theocratic lunatics.” More to the point, it is run by theocratic lunatics *who have openly expressed their intentions to use the nukes, with which we can theoretically live, to wipe the state of Israel off the map.*

While Posen and those who share his beliefs about the Mullahs’ inherent rationality can afford the luxury of disregarding said Mullahs’ overt and antagonistic anti-Semitism, neither the Israelis nor their cogent American allies can be quite so cavalier.

The reasons that the Israelis can’t take Iranian nukes lightly should be obvious, yet Posen chooses to ignore them. He suggests that Israeli nukes will serve as a deterrent to the Iranians using theirs, something akin to the Mutually Assured Destruction policy (MAD) that prevented a Cold War nuclear exchange and which has thus far kept India and Pakistan from destroying one another. “Anyone who attacks the United States with nuclear weapons,” he writes, “will be attacked with many, many more nuclear weapons. Israel almost certainly has the same policy.”

Of course, that’s not really how things work, and we suspect that both Posen and the Mullahs know it. As Victor Davis Hanson points out, Posen’s “rationality” doesn’t fare so well in the face of reality.

To do nothing, a mere 60 years after the Holocaust, would imply three assumptions on the part of an Israeli leadership — “wiping us off the map” is just theocratic rhetoric; if the Iranians ever do get the bomb, they won’t use it; and if they use it, it won’t be against us.

Those are, in fact, three big “ifs” — and no responsible Israeli can take the chance that he presided over a second holocaust and *the destruction of half the world’s surviving Jewry residing in what the radical Islamic world calls a “one-bomb state.”* (emphasis added):

History would not see such restraint as sobriety, but rather as criminal neglect tantamount to collective suicide, and would reason: “An Israeli prime minister was warned by the president of Iran that he wished to wipe Israel off the map. He was then informed that Iran was close to getting nuclear weapons. And then he did nothing, allowing a radical Islamic regime to gain the means to destroy the Jewish state.”

The reasons Americans cannot dismiss the nature and rhetoric of the Iranian regime quite so easily as does Dr. Posen are slightly more complicated than the Israeli reasons and, as above, have both moral and practical elements.

The moral component is not too terribly difficult to decipher. After the extent of the atrocities committed during World War II by the National Socialists was understood, the civilized world, led by the Americans, joined the Jews in avowing “never again.” And while it has become fashionable on the left to claim that the “Zionists” are now so powerful that they don’t need anyone to protect them, and are so malevolent as to be undeserving of that protection anyway, rational people know better. If the phrase “never again” has any meaning at all, then it means that America cannot

sit back and allow another fascist madman to pick up where the previous one left off, particularly since this new madman has specifically promised to finish the job begun by the first one, and to perform it more quickly and efficiently.

As for the practical component, that too has its roots in the aftermath of World War II. In her classic *Origins of Totalitarianism*, written in that war's wake, Hannah Arendt noted that anti-Semitism is the universal, common precondition in the development of the world's most aggressive and destructive totalitarian regimes, most notably Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia.

In short, whether those opposed to interventionist foreign policy understand it or not, Middle Eastern anti-Semitism, which is most openly and violently expressed by the Iranian Mullahs and their clients in Lebanon and the Palestinian territories, is a threat not just to Israel, or Zionists, or even just to Jews. It is a threat to every non-Muslim man, woman, and child in the world. And to wait until this threat is indisputable is, again, to postpone the inevitable conflict until a time more favorable to America's enemies.

In our estimation, what all of this means is that men and women of moral clarity and honest realism will almost certainly conclude that a confrontation with Iran is, frankly, inescapable. And for all his manifold and manifest faults, we still believe that President Bush possesses both the moral clarity and the practicality to reach that very conclusion, which is to say that the denials radiating from the White House this weekend regarding the planning for a possible war with Iran should be taken with a grain of salt.

The only question that remains is whether the necessity of such a confrontation can be sold to the American people. Critics suggest that Bush cannot possibly hope to accomplish this given how poorly he has sold the current one and how unenthusiastically the American public has responded to his obviously weak sales pitch.

Certainly that is a risk. But Bush likely has an advantage here that may balance his wretched communication strategy. The fact is that the American people, unlike their political elites, don't need much selling to convince them that the Mullahs are a threat. While the nation's liberal elites may have forgotten or undervalued the Mullah's acts of war against the United States, the public likely hasn't. The images of the blindfolded hostages, of burning American symbols and effigies of American presidents, of "Great Satan" signs and posters, of children chanting "death to America," and of the coffins draped with flags still burn brightly for a great many people.

The American public likely realizes what Jimmy Carter didn't 27 years ago and what a great many political elites don't today, namely that the Islamic Republic is an avowed and determined enemy, and peace will be impossible until that enemy is defeated

## **DAWN OF A NEW POLITICAL ERA, PART IV.**

For nine years now, we have been writing articles about what we have variously described as "the new political paradigm" (1997), the "dawn of a new political era" (three parts, 1999), and the "new progressives versus the reactionaries" (2000). The details within these and a plethora of related articles have changed slightly over the years, but the thrust has been the same throughout, namely that traditional American liberalism and traditional American conservatism have been slowly dying ever since the end of the cold war.

One factor that we have often cited for this phenomenon has been the fading importance of some of the high profile issues that have historically defined and divided these two political philosophies, issues such as labor versus capital, rich versus poor, big government versus limited government, hawk versus dove. For one reason or another, these issues, which not to long ago played a decisive roll in the two-

party alignment of modern American politics, have either disappeared as a result of widespread prosperity and globalization or morphed into factional disputes between and among the parties.

In addition, the Clinton years took a heavy toll on liberalism by all but destroying its appeal to vast numbers of Americans who hold traditional, middle class, family values and religious beliefs. It wasn't simply Bill's boorish, goat-like sexuality and fundamental dishonesty that hurt. It was also the Democratic Party's insistence that this was not only acceptable behavior for a president but that anyone who thought otherwise was a narrow-minded hypocrite, a religious fanatic, or both, and didn't belong in the Democratic Party.

Likewise, five and a half years of President Bush's big spending, "compassionate" conservatism and his neo-Wilsonian foreign policy have badly frayed the ties that once bound together the various factions of post-war, American conservatism.

Hence, we are now witness to a Democratic Party that is so ideologically confused that it is painfully incapable of engaging in constructive contributions to any of the pressing political debates of the day and has instead focused virtually all of its energy on a debilitating form of reactionary politics, which manifests itself in being against anything that President Bush is for. And we have a Republican Party that is so rife with factional disagreements over everything from immigration policy to the very definition of conservatism that the only thing holding it together is a lame-duck president who has no obvious successor, either institutionally or ideologically.

Now, as we said earlier, we have been watching and writing about this political phenomenon for almost a decade now. Our understanding during this period has always been that the two parties were in the process of reformulating themselves around new issues, which would be quite different from the old ones but which would eventually provide clear divisions between Democrat and Republican and liberal and

conservative. As such, it was our view that the Americans politics of the future would end up looking very much like the American politics of the past, i.e., two powerful, competitive parties divided by clear differences over matters concerning a small number of high profile, national issues.

To some degree this has happened, with abortion policy and the "family values" controversy providing a fairly clear political dividing line between liberal Democrats and conservative Republicans.

But it has occurred to us recently that something else is taking place as part of this reformulation process that is quite different from anything that has happened previously and that may well change the very nature of American politics. This is a subtle process that some observers might argue doesn't even constitute a change. But we will outline it here and let you, gentle reader, decide whether it is real and whether we are correct in thinking that it is likely to make American politics increasingly unstable and confusing in the future, both as it affects domestic as well as international policy.

We'll begin by noting that the two-party system has been a staple of American politics since shortly after the founding, when the Federalists and the Anti-Federalists squared off over the reach and responsibilities of the new federal government. The founders of these two parties and the founders of all of those that have been created since that time established their organizations for the purpose of promoting a specific philosophy of government and in doing so supporting the interests of a specific group or class of voters. The idea behind the formation of these parties was to select people from within the ranks of the party to represent the views of the party on the political stage. Citizens who agreed with the purpose and agenda of the party would be encouraged to support these candidates at the ballot box.

For example, in the early days of the nation, a group of Americans who believed in a strong federal government formed the Federalist Party and encouraged citizens of like mind to support this

party. Those who believed in placing more emphasis on states rights formed the opposing Anti-Federalist Party. When this debate became largely settled, the two parties disappeared, a new political bifurcation emerged, and two new parties were created on the foundations of the old ones to fight the new battles. These were the Democratic Party, which was established to represent the common interests of small business owners, farmers, slave owners, and pioneers, and the Whig Party, which was created to oppose slavery and to support tariffs and other federal efforts to help large businesses grow and prosper.

This general pattern has continued right up until the present time, with an occasional “third party” emerging upon the scene, formed by groups of citizens who felt that their views on a specific issue were not being properly represented by either of the two major parties. None of these third party entrants lasted very long or made it to the big time nationally, partly because they were all very narrowly focused and party because of the existence of the electoral college.

The bottom line on all of this is, as any schoolboy knows, that under the American system of democratic government, citizens generally have a choice between two political parties, and they select the one that best represents their views on a host of high profile, national issues. Since political parties have traditionally been established for the purpose of representing a specific viewpoint held by a specific population group, they have added a degree of stability and predictability to the government, which has been especially welcome during tumultuous times. Republicans hold certain views and values. Therefore, when they are in power these views and values can be expected to influence policy decisions accordingly. And the same can be said about Democrats.

But this model began to change perceptibly in the late 1960s when the Democratic Party moved sharply and distinctly to the left on a number of major issues, most importantly in the area of race relations and support for the U.S. military. The result was a large migration of white, blue-collar voters from the Democratic Party

to the GOP. This was especially noticeable in the South, where the Democrats suffered huge political losses at the hands of the Republicans.

In response to this new-found opportunity to garner support among a large constituency of disgruntled, white, erstwhile-Democratic, blue-collar workers, President Nixon pushed the Republican Party sharply toward the center-left by proposing huge new governmental initiatives that ran counter to everything that the Republican Party had stood for in the past. These included a proposal for a comprehensive national health insurance program, a proposal for a comprehensive plan to nationalize welfare, and the actual implementation of wage and price controls.

This shift in the underlying principals of both parties was the beginning of a trend that continues today, which has been marked by frenetic periods of ideological maneuvering within the two parties, engineered by politicians bent on garnering support from various voting blocks regardless of whether the hopes, dreams and demands of these voting blocks are entirely consistent with the hopes, dreams and original governing philosophies of the party in question or of a majority of the members of that party.

Hence we saw Bill Clinton, the ostensibly liberal Arkansas governor, flying home in the middle of his first presidential campaign to make certain that the death penalty was imposed on a black man whose brain was so damaged that he didn't eat the desert at his last meal, telling the guards he would save it for later. And when he became president, Bill unfurled the flag of the “New Democrats” and helped the Republicans enact large cuts in welfare spending; signed legislation that virtually abolished due process for illegal immigrants; signed the “Effective Death Penalty Act,” which severely limited death row appeals; opposed international efforts to ban land mines; supported legislation authorizing “roving wire-taps;” made a mockery of the radical feminist movement; doted on, and accepted campaign contributions from the very same Chinese to whom he had referred during the his election campaign as the “Butchers

of Beijing;” supported large increases in defense spending; and was arguably as promiscuous in his use of military power as any Republican had ever been. And he did all of this with little or no consideration for what had once been important, fundamental tenets of the Democratic Party and in opposition to the expectations of the overwhelmingly liberal base of that party.

Not to be outdone, when George W. Bush ran for the White House he declared himself to be a “compassionate conservative” and proceeded, after winning the race, to spend money like a drunken sailor, to dramatically expand the power and reach of the federal bureaucracy, to vastly increase the federal debt, and to all but abandon formerly high priority conservative positions on issues relating to such things as farm subsidies, school vouchers, and the influence of the federal Department of Education. In addition, of course, he spearheaded an effort to establish the largest new entitlement program since Medicare was passed almost fifty years earlier and launched a foreign policy initiative to spread democracy around the globe that was described by Georgetown Professor George Carey in the recent edition of the conservative quarterly review *Modern Age* as “Wilsonianism on steroids.” And he did all of this with little or no consideration for what had once been important, fundamental tenets of the Republican Party and in opposition to the expectations of the overwhelmingly conservative base of that party.

So the questions arise, what *are* the fundamental tenets of each of the two political parties today? What philosophies of government does each promote? What segments of the population does each represent? What kinds of policies can one expect if a Republican sits in the White House? Conversely, what can one expect from a Democratic president? How can anyone in the United States or around the world, confidently make plans around the likely future course of American policy, even if one could feel confident about which of the two parties is likely to occupy the White House?

To answer these questions one has to begin by understanding that neither of America’s two major political parties is any longer wedded to what might be called fundamental tenets. These parties no longer function as the locus of a single political philosophy or represent a specific viewpoint on a handful of important national issues. Each today is little more than a vast network of special interest groups bound together by a common interest in keeping the organization politically viable as a means for advancing their own individual agendas.

The common desire to keep the coalition healthy and politically viable imposes some practical limits on ideological drift, since some common ground is required in order to hold the various factions and interest groups together. But the ideological boundaries are broad and growing more so all the time as the nation’s first two baby boomer presidents, Bill Clinton and George W. Bush, demonstrated.

As such, the new political dynamic in America is competition within the two parties among advocates of various interest groups to place a person at the helm of the party who supports their particular cause or governing philosophy. Hence, the Democratic Party did not start out as the principal political vehicle for the abortion-on-demand feminists or the gay rights activists. But through a great deal of hard work and coalition building, these groups managed over time to place themselves at the very pinnacle of the Democratic Party’s priority list, supplanting numerous other groups with older ties to the Party, such as organized labor and farmers.

Within the Republican Party, religious conservatives, who place great emphasis on abortion and other pro-life and family-related issues, are on the top of the heap right now, as are the so-called neo-conservatives, who are the strongest advocates of President Bush’s nation-building initiative. Libertarians and fiscal conservatives have had a tough go of it during the Bush years, despite the party’s supposed ideological bent toward smaller government.

Yet, all of this could change. For example, the election of a Republican president in 2008 is by no means a guarantee that democracy building is going to be a central factor in American foreign policy. Oddly enough, the election of Democratic president in 2008 doesn't necessarily mean that it won't be. Nor does a victory by one party or the other necessarily presage American policy toward the war in Iraq. And the same ambiguity exists when one considers what the White House position might be on a great many high-profile and important domestic issues, from immigration law to trade policy.

As we indicated earlier, this widening of the policy choices of the two parties and atomization of political philosophies is likely to continue as the nation

becomes larger and more diverse, which in turn means that American politics is likely to become increasingly unstable and confusing both to Americans and to America's friends and enemies abroad.

There is no obvious solution to this problem. It is, as they say, a sign of the times. Perhaps the only positive thing that one can say about it is that to understand it is the first step in learning to live with it.

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