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## THEY SAID IT

If you talk to European officials, they'll tell you privately that that Seattle shooting is the way of the future -- that every now and then in Seattle or Sydney, Madrid or Manchester, someone will die because they went to a community center, got on the bus, showed up for work . . . and a jihadist was there. But they're confident that they can hold it to what the British security services cynically called, at the height of the Northern Ireland "Troubles," "an acceptable level of violence" -- i.e., it will all be kept "proportionate." Tough for Pam Waechter's friends and family, but there won't be too many of them.

--Mark Steyn, "Advocates of Proportion are Just Unbalanced,"  
*Chicago Sun-Times*, August 6, 2006.

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## THE PLOT THICKENS.

Clearly, things in the Middle East are getting complicateder and complicateder. And, not surprisingly, this is having a complicating effect on the American political scene. We would, of course, like to be able to sort all of this out neatly, analyze it, and present a path of likely resolution with a great deal of confidence. But we can't. There are simply too many variables. So we have decided to sort all of this out neatly, analyze it, and offer a path of likely resolution with a low level of confidence. So here goes.

*Point No. 1:* The United States will eventually win the war with militant Islam. By winning, we mean that when the dust settles on this conflict, the United States will be reasonably secure within its borders from large scale terrorist attacks by organized, state-sponsored militant Islamic groups and from the threat of nuclear attacks from Islamic nations such as Iran. Furthermore, winning means that the oil producing countries of the Middle East will be pumping sufficient quantities of oil and selling it at reasonable enough prices on the open market to keep the U.S. and the global economy running. Finally, winning means that Israel will continue to exist and its citizens will be able to enjoy a comfortable degree of peace and prosperity.

Why will all of this happen? Because militant Islam simply does not have the power to defeat the United States. It can make the cost of victory very high, depending upon the skill with which U.S. political and military leaders pursue the war. But militant Islam is not going to be the cause of the decline and fall of America, either by force or by denying it the resources it needs to stay militarily and economically powerful.

The United States may someday go the way of ancient Rome, but it won't be at the hands of a band of religious fanatics firing rockets off the back of pickup trucks, blowing themselves up one by one in pizza parlors and shopping malls, and by waving a nuclear weapon around like a madman with a pistol in a post office. The United States may cling far too long to the idea of proportionality and get pummeled as a

consequence, but it will eventually employ whatever means are necessary to achieve victory as defined above.

*Point No. 2:* The war with militant Islam is going to last for a very long time and is likely to contain periods that, to borrow a thought from Tom Paine, try men's souls and during which the summer soldiers and the sunshine patriots will lose heart.

But despite the growing strength of the anti-war movement within the Democratic Party, the United States is not even close to the point of surrender, or even of abandoning Iraq to America's enemies. The consequences of doing so are simply too great and a large majority of Americans know it. In fact, just last week, the Democratic Party's senior congressional leadership shied away from demanding a time table for withdrawal from Iraq in response to polls showing that only 17% of Americans favor an immediate withdrawal and only 30% of Democrats do. "Stay the course" may be a hackneyed expression that does not play well with most Americans, but it is America's policy for now and is likely to remain so at least until after a new president gets established in office in the spring or early summer of 2009.

This is not to say that the anti-war movement within the Democratic Party is unimportant. It is very important. Indeed, it could very well have a profound and lasting impact on the American political scene either by destroying the Democratic Party's chance of ever regaining majority status or by completely redrawing the ideological lines between the two parties. Or both.

Nevertheless, its importance, for the time being at least, is almost exclusively political. It is not influential enough at this point to have any real impact on the conduct or the outcome of the war in Iraq or the "war on terror," besides lending some moral support to an enemy that believes victory will be achieved when the cowardly Americans give up.

Time and again over the past several years, the leaders of militant Islam have publicly stated their belief that persistence is their key to victory. Time and again they have publicly stated that their strategy is to prolong

the war until Americans get tired of absorbing losses both in blood and treasure and go home. Time and again they have stated their belief that Americans are cowards who will eventually cut and run.

So the question that begs an answer is whether they have the resources to pursue such a strategy. And the answer is a resounding yes, absolutely. The first requirement for a fight of that sort is a large supply of young men who have nothing better to do than die for a cause. The second is money. Militant Islam has both in abundance.

The world of Islam is teeming with young men who have virtually no prospects for getting a meaningful job and living a normal life. Many have no marketable skills. Many are social misfits, warped by hatreds of various sorts and origins. Most are from countries that are economically backward and likely to stay that way. From the beginning of recorded history, young men such as these have found that joining the army is an attractive option, especially when there is an emotional appeal involved.

As for money, there is plenty of that around in the Middle East. In fact, there are large concentrations of it in the hands of men who have strong, vested interests in keeping the ire of these young men focused on "the West." For they know that if the poor among them ever look carefully around them they will discover that the boots that have been stamping on their faces forever are on the feet of their own politicians and religious leaders.

In the meantime, the war in Iraq and Afghanistan is going to drag on. If you are a philosopher, you may use this fact as an opportunity to reflect on the fallen nature of man. If you are an historian you may use it as a starting point to wax wisely on the ubiquity of war throughout time. If you are an investor, you may want to factor a long war into your investment strategy and then go fishing. If you are an interested bystander, you might want to consider the prospects for a lengthy war as a reason to resist the urge to assume that any little set back in any of the on-going, hot conflicts with militant Islam is a signal that all is lost.

Last Tuesday, the *Wall Street Journal's* "Global View" column by one Bret Stephens carried the alarming headline "Israel Is Losing This War." The war had hardly started and this fellow had already lost control of his sphincter.

On Thursday, two of the nation's top generals told a congressional committee that the situation in Baghdad was worsening and that the military was taking new measures to bring things under control. This kind of news from the front is always troubling to the folks back home as well as to policymakers. But it is not rare in warfare for one side to run into problems and have to revise its tactics and strategy. (Google "Dunkirk," for example.) In fact, it is common. But one would have thought from listening to the reaction to this news from some of the leading Congressional Democrats and liberal pundits that it was time to begin drafting the terms of surrender.

But that's not going happen. The United States can run from Iraq if it chooses, but it can't hide. In fact, it will have to drag its sorry butt back at some point if it does so. So our guess is that it won't. In any case, our advice to the worrywarts is "relax," not in the sense of "relax and enjoy yourself, everything is under control, life is sweet, and there is nothing to worry about." We mean it in the sense that an EMT says "relax" to someone who is hyperventilating and he wants that person to voluntarily try to bring his breathing under control. We mean it in the sense of "relax, this war is going to last for a while. It will be costly. There will be bad moments before it is over. But in the end the West will win."

*Point No. 3:* It is imperative to understand that the nature of the military threat from militant Islam is very different from anything that the United States has faced in the past. This conflict is not World War III. The threat from militant Islam bears no resemblance to the threat once posed by Imperial Japan, Nazi Germany, and the U.S.S.R. Nor, for that matter, to the threat posed by the British in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Indeed, it bears no resemblance to the threat currently posed by China. Militant Islam may have dreams of slaughtering millions of people, but for the time being at least, it does not have the means to do so. Militant Islam may have dreams of ruling over a vast

Islamic empire, but it has neither the wherewithal for acquiring such an empire nor the expertise to run it if it had one.

The threat from militant Islam is something quite new. It is like a terrible plague for which the treatment is worse or as bad as the illness. It is like syphilis in the days when the cure was sub-lethal doses of arsenic, mercury, and strychnine. Nuclear weapons or massive air strikes with conventional weapons could take Iran and Syria out of the picture, just as they did Germany and Japan in the 1940s, and this would significantly reduce the threat from militant Islam. But such a "cure" would be more costly to the American people than was the destruction of either Japan or Germany because the world is "globalized" today.

The United States is a "globalized" society. Its citizens are comfortable. They enjoy material comforts and pleasures undreamed of by previous generations and by people in most other nations, in large part because of "globalization." They dread the threat from militant Islam, but they would prefer that the cure not disrupt their comfortable lives.

President Bush's attacks on Afghanistan and Iraq after September 11 were designed to meet this concern, to avoid further discomfort at home by "taking the fight to the enemy." But even a war in a faraway land is still a little too uncomfortable for many comfort-seeking Americans. These pampered souls can feel the pea in the mattress better than any fairy tale princess ever could. They would like this war to be fought with words instead of bullets. And failing that, some would be willing to passively accept a certain amount of violence done to them and to their country. They note that the Europeans have perfected this type of "warfare."

But this won't work either. The enemy doesn't like them. It wishes to do them harm. It has declared war on them. Whether they like it or not, this plague is inescapable. It will have to be met with measures that cause discomfort. If nothing else is available, syphilis will be met with arsenic, mercury, and strychnine. I hate to be a pessimist, but I think it is likely that choices such as this will be common in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as strange new plagues move across the globe,

requiring uncomfortable and costly responses. Along with terrorism, bird flu and mad cow disease come to mind. If you are an investor, you might factor that into your portfolio also.

As we have said numerous times in these pages, the long-term cost of defeating militant Islam will depend on the nature of the threat it presents. Iran can avoid being destroyed by giving up its desire to become a nuclear power. Lebanon and Syria can avoid being destroyed by giving up their effort to destroy Israel. Our hope is that militant Islam recognizes this before it is too late. Our expectation is that it will not, that it will at some time escalate the violence to the point where the United States will have to respond with disproportionate force, despite the discomfort it will cause its pampered, comfort-loving citizens.

*Point No. 4:* It is worth keeping “globalization” in mind while watching the on-going debate in the United Nations over Lebanon and the upcoming debates over the nuclear ambitions of Iran and North Korea.

Most commentators and pundits concentrate their analysis of these types of debates on the traditional, geopolitical tensions that were so much a part of the old, Cold War, super power rivalries. And there is certainly validity to observations that result from looking at these debates from this perspective. Clearly, both China and Russia are constantly seeking influence in the Middle East at the expense of the United States. And both view setbacks to U.S. influence in the world as openings to advance their own interests.

But both nations also have strong reasons to want the global economy to stay on an even keel. Like it or not, we’re all capitalists now. In fact, a good argument could be made that the United States could survive a worldwide recession/depression caused by an American “overreaction” to an errant move by militant Islam better than either China or Russia could. Certainly, the existing U.S. government would be more apt to ride out prolonged economic hard times than would be the governments of Comrades Putin and Hu Jintao.

So it just may be that if militant Islam escalates the war to the point where the United States feels it necessary to unleash its full military might in the Middle East, both China and Russia could intercede on the part of the United States in the interests of the health of global capitalism. And what an ironic turn of events that would be.

## THE EMERGING MIDTERM DYNAMIC.

At roughly this point two years ago, the Democrats had had their political convention and the Republicans were just gearing up to have theirs. And while Republicans did their best to put on a happy face while heading to New York, the fact is that their backs were against the proverbial wall. Most of the big-name political prognosticators had already decided that the election was over. And most, if not all of them had decided that John Kerry would be the 44<sup>th</sup> President of the United States. Charlie Cook, long considered the dean of the Washington electoral forecasters, summed up the conventional wisdom nicely, writing that “unless something happens to change the dynamics and circumstances of this race, Bush will lose.”

We were reminded of this last week when we saw that Larry Sabato, another of the best known and most highly respected election analysts, had sensed a shift in the political currents and had therefore determined that the midterm momentum was clearly “moving towards Democrats.” Specifically, Sabato noted:

Historical trends and big picture indicators – generic congressional ballot tests and approval ratings of President Bush’s job performance in particular - have always been heavily stacked against the GOP in this “sixth year itch” cycle, but aggregations of more race-specific indicators are now suggesting that Republicans are headed for their most serious midterm losses in decades.

For the record, Sabato’s latest forecasts do not evoke memories of ’04 because he is hopelessly prejudiced against the GOP, as were some of the purportedly

“impartial” analysts who predicted a Bush loss two years ago, for example John Zogby. If anything, Sabato has a reputation of being a little biased in favor of candidates of the right.

Nor, we should add, does Sabato’s latest prediction put us in mind of ’04 because we sense a significant misreading of the electorate among the prognosticators, as we did during that campaign, when most of the big-shots failed to comprehend the contempt in which voters would hold the Democratic platform, or lack thereof. In this case, as in most cases, Sabato’s reading of the electorate actually seems to us to be pretty solid.

What got us thinking about ’04 and the similarity of the GOP’s expected fortunes at this point in the election cycle is the qualifier that Sabato included in his forecast, a qualifier that suggests that while all is not yet lost for the Republicans, they do need to get to work if they are to retain their majorities. He put it this way:

With just under 100 days to go, Republicans have reason for great concern, Democrats have reason for considerable optimism, but the GOP would be wrong to panic and the Democrats would be wrong to assume an air of celebration.

After all, it is still a month until Labor Day, and most voters don’t really pay attention to campaigns until the summer is over. Or, as Sabato put it, “The months that matter most in campaigns are September, October and the small piece of November before Election Day.”

What this means, in essence, is that Republicans will lose the election “unless something happens to change the dynamics and circumstances of this” campaign, which is precisely the position they were in two years ago. And while we imagine that Charlie Cook’s qualification in ’04 involved something he never expected the President would be able to do, we seized on it then and made it the basis for our continued bullishness regarding Bush’s chances for re-election. Similarly, we’ll seize on Sabato’s version of the same

caveat this year to explain why we’re not yet ready to throw in the towel on the GOP majority.

In our opinion, the conventional wisdom that has emerged in the run-up to the 2006 midterm is almost as completely mistaken as was the conventional wisdom that dominated prior to the 2004 election. Then, the standard line had it that Bush personally was in big, big trouble and that all Democrats had to do was offer a reasonable alternative (“Anybody But Bush”) and they would win, regardless of the specifics of their platform. Needless to say, that didn’t work out so well, as voters rejected the Democrats’ campaign nihilism.

Today, the conventional wisdom holds that all the Democrats need to do to win is to “nationalize” the election, to make it about national trends, national leadership, and the course of the country as a whole, rather than about the local issues and local personalities that generally dominate congressional campaigns. Conventional wisdom also holds that the only possible hope that Republicans have of salvaging this election is to mobilize their base by focusing on micro-level domestic policies, e.g. judicial appointments, immigration policy, tax and regulatory concerns.

In our humble opinion, conventional wisdom is dead wrong on both counts.

The belief in the value to the Democrats of nationalizing the election springs today from the same fount as did the similar belief that dominated the 2004 campaign, namely the presumption that George W. Bush and his foreign policy (Iraq and the broader war on terror) are so despised that any contest that is *de facto* about him will be a disaster for his party. While there is certainly no shortage of evidence suggesting that Bush and Iraq could, in fact, be net drags on GOP candidates, we doubt seriously that the nationalization of the campaign will aid the Democrats. Indeed, we strongly suspect that the more intense the focus on the war in Iraq and the war on terror become, the more likely it is that the President’s impact on the respective campaigns will become a net positive for his party.

It is important to remember, we think, that the opinion polls cited so adoringly by Democrats and the mainstream media show that the public is leery of Bush's foreign-policy agenda. But they don't show that the public would prefer a Democrat-directed agenda. The polls are generally unable to distinguish between absolute approval of the President's policy and performance and the qualified approval of his policy and performance relative to those of the Democrats. In other words, these polls may demonstrate that voters are not particularly thrilled with the President's "plan," but they do not demonstrate a preference for a Democratic plan, whatever it may be.

The problem that the Democrats have in capitalizing on Bush's purported foreign-policy weakness is their own weakness, which is considerably more glaring. Despite the President's travails, the Democrats remain wracked by frailty and dissension where national security is concerned.

If we had to hazard a guess, we'd guess that Democrats in Washington can be divided into two roughly comparable groups. One is probably larger in absolute numbers, but the other is disproportionately noisy and influential. The members of the first group either share President Bush's foreign policy vision or are too scared of the electorate to say otherwise. By definition, they offer no alternative to the President's policy and have reduced themselves to carping about the competence with which the current policy is being conducted. These members dare not even broach the idea of withdrawal from Iraq and instead prefer simply to complain, to accuse the administration of "arrogance," and to promise that if they are given the reins of power, they will do precisely the same thing, only better. Sadly for the Democrats, this is the "good" half of the party.

The other faction is comprised of those who have determined that a muscular American foreign policy is not in the best interests of the global community and that it would therefore be best if American armed forces left Iraq as quickly as possible, irrespective of the damage that would do to the Iraqi people, to

the broader Middle East, or to American strategic objectives. This "anti-war" crowd is openly and unashamedly opposed to the idea that Iraq and the war on terror can or even should be won. They oppose not merely the Bush administration's execution of foreign affairs, but the basic presumptions that underlie the post-9/11 foreign policy paradigms. They remain unconvinced that the United States represents a force for good in the world in general or in the Middle East in particular. They dispute the fundamental principles of right and wrong and good and evil in the current geo-political climate. They are, in short, proud defeatists.

We understand why most analysts – and those on the right in particular – believe that the GOP's only hope is to throw a little red meat to its base in the few weeks before the election. But given the state of the respective parties on foreign policy matters, we also think those analysts are wrong. The base may, indeed, be motivated by a red-meat domestic-policy strategy, but they are, in our opinion, just as likely to be motivated once again by a strategy that forcefully and definitively spells out what a Democratic victory would do to the nation's foreign policy and global standing. Moreover, this latter strategy would also have the potential benefit of mobilizing undecided or centrist voters, who would likely oppose the GOP on domestic matters but may well agree that the Democratic foreign-policy vision is simply too chaotic, too fatalistic, and too anti-Western to be allowed to become the vision of the Congressional majority.

In his forecast piece mentioned above, Larry Sabato suggested that GOP's greatest strength in this election cycle is the relative likeability of its candidates. Specifically, he wrote, "The problem for Democrats, however, has always been that a remarkable number of the GOP's targeted moderate incumbents are personally very well-liked in their states and districts." While we certainly won't dispute the idea that many of the Republicans candidates – particularly Blue State Republican candidates – are likeable, we'd suggest that this is really not the Republicans' greatest asset. Given the various positions of the parties on national security matters and the potential prominence of

those positions in this campaign, we continue to believe that the GOP's greatest strength is, as it has been for nigh on five years now, its opponents. Even when Republicans are too feeble and too complacent to make their case to the voters, they can rest assured that the Democrats will make a very compelling case on their behalf.

To this end, tomorrow's Democratic senatorial primary in Connecticut will serve as a bellwether. Three weeks ago, we noted that the Democrats were poised to purge Senator Joseph Lieberman from their party in part because he is pro Iraq war and in part because he is a Jew who is pro Iraq war. It now looks as if a Lamont victory is virtually assured, which will, of course embolden the anti-war and anti-Semitic elements within the Democratic Party. And this has potential disaster written all over it. As Martin Peretz, the editor-in chief of *The New Republic*, put it this morning:

The Lamont ascendancy, if that is what it is, means nothing other than that the left is trying, and in places succeeding, to take back the Democratic Party. Jesse Jackson, Al Sharpton and Maxine Waters have stumped for Mr. Lamont. As I say, we have been here before. Ned Lamont is Karl Rove's dream come true. If he, and others of his stripe, carry the day, the Democratic party will lose the future, and deservedly.

Of course, even without the Lamont-Lieberman race, Democrats appear poised to spend the next couple of months reminding voters just why, exactly, they are unfit to serve as the nation's majority party during a time of war.

For starters, this morning, *National Review's* Byron York reported that talk of impeaching President Bush, which has been downplayed over the last several months, could once again become an important campaign issue. Writing about the "investigative report" titled "The Constitution in Crisis; The Downing Street Minutes and Deception, Manipulation, Torture, Retribution, and Coverups in the Iraq War, and Illegal Domestic Surveillance" and produced by would-be House Judiciary Committee Chairman John Conyers, York alleged that:

[T]he 350-page "Constitution in Crisis," released last week, is, more than anything else, a detailed road map for the impeachment of George W. Bush, ready for use should Democrats win control of the House of Representatives this November. And Conyers, who would become chairman of the House Judiciary Committee – the panel that would initiate any impeachment proceedings – is the man who could make it happen . . .

Conyers's report is more than the world's longest blog post. Far more seriously, it is the foundation for possible articles of impeachment, detailing charge after charge against the president. "Approximately 26 laws and regulations may have been violated by this administration's misconduct," Conyers wrote Friday in a message posted simultaneously on the *DailyKos* and *Huffington Post* websites. "The report . . . compiles the accumulated evidence that the Bush administration has thumbed its nose at our nation's laws, and the Constitution itself."

Elsewhere in Demo-fantasyland, prominent Democrats continue to do and say things that are so far out of the political mainstream that they can't help but hurt the their party's chances. Last week, for example, John Dingell, the man who would be Chairman of the powerful House Energy and Commerce Committee, declined to take sides against Hezbollah. Dingell was one of seven Democrats to vote against House Resolution 921, which condemned Hezbollah for its role in the current Middle East violence and supported Israel's right to defend herself. When asked about his vote, Dingell dug himself in deeper, as the following exchange demonstrates (emphasis added, with thanks to the Powerline blog for the transcript):

ANCHOR: Overall majority of your colleagues didn't see it that way and some would suggest that if – even though there are obviously a lot of issues with Lebanon and with Palestinian cause wrapped up in this – that this largely boils down to Israel

against Hezbollah and Hezbollah is a group that the United States has deemed a terrorist organization, that there's only one side for Americans to come down on in this fight.

DINGELL: Well, we don't, first of all, *I don't take sides for or against Hezbollah or for or against Israel.*

ANCHOR: *You're not against Hezbollah?*

DINGELL: *No, I happen to be—I happen to be against violence, I think the United States has to bring resolution to this matter. Now, I condemn Hezbollah as does everybody else, for the violence, but I think if we've got to talk to them and if we don't — if we don't get ourselves in a position where we can talk to both sides and bring both sides together, the killing and the blood letting is going to continue.*

Let's make sure we understand this correctly. Dingell doesn't take sides against Hezbollah. That's fair enough, we suppose. Oh, except for the fact this is the very same Hezbollah that murdered 241 U.S. Marines in Lebanon in 1983; that bombed the Jewish community center in Buenos Aires in 1994, killing 85; that bombed the Khobar Towers complex in Saudi Arabia in 1996, killing 19 U.S. airmen; and which was, prior to 9/11, the most prolifically murderous terrorist organization in the world. Yet a Democratic victory in November would make a man who feels it unnecessary to "take sides" against Hezbollah the Chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee.

As things stand, prominent Democrats, who will become chairmen of important committees should their party win back the majority, are talking about impeaching a wartime president and refusing to condemn terrorists who slaughter American civilians and soldiers alike. And all of this has taken place *before* Lamont's expected victory in Connecticut and thus before the "anti-war" left feels completely emboldened. One can only speculate as to how they will conduct themselves once they're feeling their oats a little bit.

One of the laments of Republican strategists is that there are only a handful of working days left in the Congressional session, what with the August recess upon us and adjournment for the campaign to follow quickly after the recess ends. This, they fear, will make it impossible for the GOP to enact any of its agenda before the election and thereby to "energize" its base. We understand their concern, but think they're wrong.

In our opinion, the smartest thing Republicans could do right now is stay as quiet and as far away from Washington as they can. As long as Congress remains in town, voters will be reminded of just how pathetic the GOP majority has been on most matters that are important both to the base and to the nation at large. But if Congress gets out of town, the GOP banner can and will be carried by President Bush, who despite his many problems is still a far more likeable and effective spokesman for the Republican majority than is any member of Congress. At the same time, with Nancy Pelosi, Harry Reid, and the like at home, the opposition banner will be carried by Howard Dean, Cindy Sheehan, Markos Moulitsas Zúniga, and the rest of the anti-warriors. And this is a far bigger electoral advantage to the GOP than confirming a handful of judges could ever be.

Last week, Larry Sabato looked into his Crystal Ball and determined that the Republicans have their work cut out for them if they are to retain their majorities this November. The bad news for the Republicans is that he's right.

The good news for Republicans is that they continue to run against the Democrats, which means that there may never come a point at which all hope is lost. Just as they did in 2004, Republicans will have many opportunities over the next three months to "change the dynamics and circumstances" of this campaign. Moreover, there is a reasonable chance that they will not have to do any of the heavy lifting to that end, given that the Democrats seem just as determined as ever to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory.

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