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THEY SAID IT

In the second century of the Christian Era, the empire of Rome comprehended the fairest part of the earth, and the most civilized portion of mankind. The frontiers of that extensive monarchy were guarded by ancient renown and disciplined valor. The gentle but powerful influence of laws and manners had gradually cemented the union of the provinces. Their peaceful inhabitants enjoyed and abused the advantages of wealth and luxury. The image of a free constitution was preserved with decent reverence: the Roman senate appeared to possess the sovereign authority, and devolved on the emperors all the executive powers of government. During a happy period of more than fourscore years, the public administration was conducted by the virtue and abilities of Nerva, Trajan, Hadrian, and the two Antonines. It is the design of this, and of the two succeeding chapters, to describe the prosperous condition of their empire; and after wards, from the death of Marcus Antoninus, to deduce the most important circumstances of its decline and fall; a revolution which will ever be remembered, and is still felt by the nations of the earth.

--Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of The Roman Empire*, Volume I, 1776.

SOME THOUGHTS ON THE IRAQ STUDY GROUP REPORT.

Some day, when some future historian writes the definitive history of the fall of the American Hegemon, he or she will, no doubt, include a discussion of how, late in the 20th century, a large portion of the American public had become incapable of distinguishing between logical thought and drivel.

Our historian of the future will note that this phenomenon made it difficult for Americans to arrive at solutions to even the simplest problems, since any position on any issue, no matter how illogical or vacuous, could find a ready contingent of champions to argue on its behalf and would therefore be welcomed by the public as a legitimate contender in the debate. Needless to say, this circumstance also rendered the public highly susceptible to political hucksters and frauds, which, not surprisingly, prospered and multiplied in this environment like worms in an old cheese.

Presumably, because of this, our author will point out that political debates stopped being a means of reaching a satisfactory resolution to a problem and took on the character of a professional sports enterprise, complete with celebrity participants, noisy cheering sections, large corporate sponsors, and a focus by virtually everyone involved on entirely selfish objectives. Our historian will cite numerous causes for this phenomenon, among which will, most certainly, be the following.

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■ The politicization of every issue, large and small, even those involving national security and moral principles, which, in a healthy society, would be matters of wide unanimity of opinion rather than intense dispute.

■ A public education system that failed to teach young Americans the rudiments of critical thinking, but instead deliberately instilled in them a prideful propensity to rigidly adhere to attitudes and opinions that coincided with their personal prejudices, while at the same time refusing to even consider competing arguments.

■ And finally, to the success of the enlightenment project to destroy the religious foundation of Western civilization and its attendant failure to replace it with a viable new set of moral principles. Regarding this latter point, our historian will explain that government is fundamentally a moral endeavor, dealing as it does with making judgments about such matters as justice and the common good, and that the absence of a body of widely accepted moral principles thus doomed the entire concept of government by the people because it rendered the people unfit for the task.

Our historian will find no shortage of examples of this problem, so one cannot say with certainty that last week's report from the Iraq Study Group will be cited in his book. But this report is a textbook example of how Americans have institutionalized the trivialization of political discussion, up to and including crucial debates involving the very security of the nation.

In fact, an astute observer might point out that the establishment of the "bi-partisan" Iraq Study Group was itself an exercise in political obfuscation; that this organization was formed by Congress with foreknowledge that its final report would contribute nothing meaningful to the debate over the future course in Iraq; that its purpose was, in fact, to cloud the waters around this politically charged issue just enough to give every frog in the pond a place to hide while croaking melodiously for the edification of its admirers; and that a large portion of the American public would gleefully join in a confusing

and meaningless debate over even the most specious proposals in the report, happily strutting along with the old frauds who were leading them toward disaster, like the oysters in Alice's Wonderland just before they were eaten.

Indeed, anyone who is at all familiar with the formation of these congressionally mandated panels understands that the very process of choosing members assures that the group will either fail to agree on anything substantive or reach agreements that are not substantive. While bi-partisanship is touted as the elixir that assures success, this "bi-partisanship" is achieved by carefully mixing representatives of various highly partisan groups, each of whom understands that his or her task is not to force a particular view on the "bi-partisan" panel but to assure that this particular view is represented in the "bi-partisan" conclusions. Often, one or two individuals will be selected to serve who are ideologically muddled but have a reputation for integrity. The purpose of this is to provide the enterprise with a patina of objectivity and to help facilitate the eventual adoption of unthreatening compromises.

When viewed from this perspective, the most pathetic argument made last week on behalf of the Iraq Study Group's report was that all ten of its members were able to agree unanimously on 79 separate recommendations dealing with some of the most controversial subjects of the day. Purveyors of this praise were, we fear, employing the logic used by the man who forgave the poor performance of the dancing pig by noting that the notable aspect of the show was not that the pig did not dance well but that he danced at all. The flaw in this observation is that it fails if the performance in question was billed as a demonstration of an exquisite dance by a pig rather than simply as a pig that is capable of dancing.

In any case, the two chairmen of the ISG, James Baker and Lee Hamilton, soon revealed the secret of the Group's miraculous demonstration of bi-partisanship when they explained why the term "victory" did not appear anywhere in a report. This mystery was, they explained, due to the fact that the word "success" had been used in its place.

The implication was that the two words were essentially synonymous. But, of course, this is nonsense, and they knew it. The word “victory” is a powerful and conclusive noun. It means the “defeat of an enemy,” or “the act of conquering.” The term “success,” on the other hand can mean many different things to different people. Surely, for example, most Americans would not confuse Nancy Pelosi’s view of “success” in Iraq with “victory.”

Now it has been argued that if nothing else, the ISG report served as a stimulus for a healthy national debate over the issue of the war. Yet it taxes logic to see the good in confusing a highly important discussion over a matter as significant as the war in Iraq with a plethora of preposterous suppositions and proposals that remind one of the punch line from the old joke about the engineer, the minister, and the economist stranded on a desert island with only a can of beans to sustain them and no means for opening it. When each is asked for a solution to this conundrum, the economist points his finger in the air and says, “assume a can opener.”

What good, for example, could possibly result from the foolish assumption that if Israel were to give up the Golan Heights to Syria, militant Islam would give up its war against U.S. interests around the world? This would be akin to the French suggesting in the 1930s that if England were to relinquish control of Gibraltar to fascist Spain, fascist Germany would abandon its claim to the Alsace-Lorraine and its desire to one-day establish a military and Gestapo headquarters in the Hotel Majestic in Paris. It would be comforting to believe that introducing this assumption into the debate was the result of ignorance or naiveté on the part of the panel. But its appearance seems more likely to have resulted from the private, business interests of at least one of the Group’s members who happens to have a close, long-time relationship with the Saudi “royals.”

Even more interesting is the question of how anyone, anywhere could consider it useful to promote the idea that Iran and Syria might help the United States achieve “success” in Iraq. This proposition is either delusional or deliberate sophistry aimed at promoting

some gnostic notion understood only by a few select initiates. When asked how they arrived at this curious suggestion, both Baker and Hamilton began their answer by claiming that while it may not do any good for America to hold talks with these two enemies, it would not do any harm, sort of like the surgeon who continued with the lobotomization even after the patient had joined “the choir of the invisible,” to borrow a phrase from George Eliot.

This explanation failed to convince one stubborn questioner, so the dynamic duo took another shot at it in the form of a curious non sequitur. They said that the United States should hold talks with the Syrians and Iranians because it did so with the Russians during the Cold War. No one asked what one had to do with the other. Nor did anyone point out to the two illustrious foreign policy gurus that talking with the Soviets contributed nothing to America’s ultimate victory, that indeed America’s Cold War triumph was the direct result of something that the ISG appears to have rejected out of hand, namely the construction of a strategy for winning.

Yet, nothing could have been more useful to the members of the ISG, assuming they had actually been seeking a pathway for real American “success” in Iraq, than the blueprint for victory in the Cold War that was adopted over two decades earlier by Ronald Reagan’s White House. They could have discovered the essence of this blueprint on the internet by searching for National Security Directives Number 32 (signed in March 1982), Number 66 (signed in November 1982), and Number 75 (signed in January 1983). These once secret but now famous documents provide the basis for a concerted, calculated, aggressive, multi-faceted offensive against an “evil empire” that the defeatist elite in Washington believed at the time could not be beaten, that indeed could only be kept from defeating America by the process of “talking.”

Among other things, these directives set in motion an extensive program of support for the Solidarity movement in Poland and the resistance movement in Afghanistan; a strike at the heart of the Soviet economy by limiting Western purchases of natural gas from the Soviets and, with Saudi Arabian help,

a reduction in the price of crude oil, the USSR's largest export commodity; limitations on Soviet access to Western high tech goods, including gas and oil exploration technology; and an intense U.S. military buildup that severely strained Soviet defense resources.

The specifics of these directives would, of course, not be applicable to the war with the insurgency movement in Iraq or with militant Islam worldwide. But we can't help wondering how much better it would have been if the ISG had taken note of President Reagan's successful war effort, and decided, as he did, that victory against an evil enemy is not only achievable but necessary, and then had set about formulating a concerted, calculated, aggressive, multi-faceted offensive against this threat.

But it didn't. And Americans will have to live with the consequent result, which appears to be a muddled, useless, cacophonous, and all-around-good-time debate over their future survival, never knowing that, like the stupid oysters following the self-serving Walrus and Carpenter down the beach, they are headed for disaster. On a positive note, they can at least take some solace in the fact that they are playing important roles in the upcoming best seller, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the American Hegemon*, which will likely begin as follows:

In the closing years of American century, the influence of the United States comprehended the fairest part of the earth, and the most civilized portion of mankind. The frontiers of that extensive democracy were guarded by ancient renown and disciplined valor. The gentle but powerful influence of laws and manners had gradually cemented the union of the provinces. Their peaceful inhabitants enjoyed and abused the advantages of wealth and luxury . . . It is the design of this, and of the two succeeding chapters, to describe the prosperous condition of their empire; and after wards, following the exit of Ronald Reagan from the presidency, to deduce the most important circumstances of its decline and fall; a revolution which will ever be remembered, and is still felt by the nations of the earth.

ISLAMUNISM.

As stated in the above article, our collective opinion is that the long-awaited report issued last week by the Baker-Hamilton Iraq Study Group was a uniquely weak document, even by Washington standards. In a town filled with commissions studying this, analyzing that, and planning the other, the ISG's report nonetheless stood out for its banality, cynicism, and irrelevance.

Part of the problem with the report is that the solutions it posits are tired, contemptuous, superficial, and entirely unfeasible. Apparently, the ISG sages have concluded that there is no problem in Iraq or the greater Middle East that can't be solved by promising nations that have no desire to deal with the United States concessions that the United States has no right nor ability to make. As Scott Johnson of the Powerline blog put it late last week:

If Iran picks up the pace of its 27-year-old war against the United States, a healthy serving of Israeli territory seems to be the answer. If Syria resumes its murderous Lebanon campaign, a healthy serving of Israeli territory seems to be the answer. If Baghdad is dissolving in sectarian violence, a healthy serving of Israeli territory to third parties seems to be the answer. If a healthy slice of Israeli territory can't be offered to satisfy Hezbollah and Hamas, they can be ignored.

Of course, the biggest problem with the ISG is one that Chesterton once noted in his classic detective novel, *The Scandal of Father Brown*, i.e., "It isn't that they can't see the solution. It is that they can't see the problem." Baker, Hamilton, Sandra Day O'Connor, Vernon Jordan and the rest have spent countless hours (and countless taxpayer dollars) pondering Iraq and the battle there, treating the struggle for control of that nation as a small-scale solvable problem, apparently believing that the Islamic world's hatred of the West is a discreet challenge that can be addressed with a discreet solution. But it isn't. And it can't.

The fact of the matter is that Iraq is anything but discreet. Indeed, it is merely a small part of a far bigger, global problem. The hatred the Islamists bear for Americans and other Westerners, which is on full display in Iraq, transcends the battle for that particular tract of land. It transcends the broader war on terror. It transcends the American presence in the Middle East. And while this may come as a shock to an old Jew-baiter like Baker, that hatred even transcends Israel.

The loathing and revulsion the Islamists feel for the West, is visceral. It is primal. It is a fundamental conviction of their ethos. It is the force that compels their attack on the West. But it is more than that as well. In fact, it is becoming increasingly fair to say that the Islamists' hatred for the West, and for Israel and the United States in particular, transcends Islam. What James Baker et al., as well as most politicians, commentators, journalists and analysts, are missing is that what was once a localized, spiritual unorthodoxy has rapidly morphed into the "vanguard of the global revolution."

By virtue of its anti-Westernism, Islamism has become the revolutionary ideology of choice among those who despise the West, even (or perhaps *especially*) those who are part of the West themselves. When al Qaeda took down the Twin Towers, its members became *bona fide* heroes to all those who loathe the United States and Israel. To pretend otherwise is to deny the reality of the emerging post-Cold War global order.

This past Saturday, *The Wall Street Journal* ran a front-page article by Andrew Higgins detailing the overlap between the new anti-Americans (the Islamists) and the old anti-Americans (the leftists). Higgins' article is an excellent primer on the extent to which Islamism has been co-opted by anti-Americans everywhere, describing the leftist appeal of groups like Hezbollah and Hamas. To wit:

Some of Hezbollah's biggest fans are in Europe. There, the hard left, demoralized by the collapse of communism, has found new energy, siding with Islamist militants in

Lebanon, in Iraq and in a wider campaign against what they see as an American plot to impose unrestrained free-market capitalism.

"We are all Hezbollah now," read posters carried through London this summer during an antiwar protest march. Earlier, London Mayor Ken Livingston, known as "Red Ken," invited a controversial Egyptian cleric to the British capital, arguing that his views have been distorted by the West.

In deeply Roman Catholic Latin America, Hugo Chávez of Venezuela has become the exemplar of a new populism that sees common cause with Iran and Hezbollah. Mr. Chávez, re-elected in a landslide last Sunday, has met Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad several times and this summer was given the Islamic Republic Medal, Iran's highest honor. Amid the rubble of Beirut's southern suburbs, a Hezbollah stronghold, portraits of Mr. Chávez now hang alongside pictures of Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah. Hezbollah put them up after Mr. Chávez denounced President Bush as the devil in a September speech to the UN. "Gracias Chávez," they say.

Africa, too, is boarding the bandwagon. A summit of the 53-nation African Union this summer in Gambia featured two special guests: Mr. Chavez and Mr. Ahmadinejad. Back in Tehran, Mr. Ahmadinejad in November hosted Zimbabwe's authoritarian Prime Minister Robert Mugabe, an erstwhile devotee of Mao Zedong. Fulminating against President Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair, Mr. Mugabe said likeminded countries must "fight against these evil men and their evil systems."

Certainly, Western leftists have never tried very hard to hide their affinity for Islamism's hatred of America. The left in both the United States and especially Europe has been broadly supportive of the Palestinian

liberation movement. Indeed, they were champions of Yasser Arafat even before his band of murderous thugs ostensibly renounced terrorism. In fact, Arafat was largely a creation of the non-Islamic left, receiving extensive logistical and financial support from the Soviet Union for decades.

More recently, the non-Islamic left created the radical “anti-war” movement, which rails against America, lionizes and sympathizes with the Islamists, and demonizes the “Zionists.” The late, great Michael Kelly noted this three-and-a-half years ago, even before the invasion of Iraq, writing:

The marches in Washington and San Francisco were chiefly sponsored, as was last October’s antiwar march in Washington, by a group the [*New York Times*] chose to call in its only passing reference “the activist group International Answer.”

International ANSWER (Act Now to Stop War and End Racism) is a front group for the communist Workers World Party. The Workers World Party is, literally, a Stalinist organization. It rose out of a split within the old Socialist Workers Party over the Soviet Union’s 1956 invasion of Hungary -- the breakaway Workers World Party was all for the invasion. International ANSWER today unquestioningly supports any despotic regime that lays any claim to socialism, or simply to anti-Americanism. It supported the butchers of Beijing after the slaughter of Tiananmen Square. It supports Saddam Hussein and his Baathist torture-state. It supports the last official Stalinist state, North Korea, in the mass starvation of its citizens. It supported Slobodan Milosevic after the massacre at Srebrenica. It supports the mullahs of Iran, and the narco-gangsters of Colombia and the bus-bombers of Hamas.

Western leftist elites have long made common cause with the Islamists, choosing to support any radical whose anti-American, anti-Israeli, anti-Western ends

parallel their own – the “enemy of my enemy” and all that. But since the invasion of Iraq, the veneration of the Islamists has grown far more populist in character. Although the likes of Osama bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad preach the glories of the global caliphate, many of the world’s poor and oppressed hear only the promise of liberation and an end to the current global order.

Last week, J. Peter Pham and Michael Krauss reported on *TCSDaily.com* that a forthcoming study by Ely Karmon, a senior researcher at the Institute for Counter-Terrorism at Israel’s Interdisciplinary Center in Herzliya, will show a disturbing trend detailing “successful campaigns of proselytism in the heart of poor indigene Indian tribes and populations [of Latin America] by both Shi’a and Sunni preachers and activists.”

For much of the last century, people like the South American Indians backed Marxist-populists. Marxists in their various iterations proclaimed themselves the defenders of the downtrodden and cynically played upon the mean estate of the poor, manipulating their hopes and naiveté. But populism is hardly ideologically unswerving, and cozeners from across the ideological spectrum have manipulated populist yearnings. Just as Robespierre had the *sans-culottes*, Mao had the peasants, and Peron the *descamisados*, so now the Islamists appeal to the world’s powerless, or at least those who purport to speak for them, in their struggle against their great oppressors.

In the above-cited *Wall Street Journal* article, Higgins noted that at a recent conference in Beirut to celebrate Hezbollah’s “‘divine victory’ over Israel this summer,” many in the “audience wore T-shirts or badges featuring portraits of Che Guevara.” Guevara, of course, is an icon of the populist left, a petty thug whose image and persona are far more important as symbols than the man himself ever was, politically, ideologically, or militarily.

In many places in the world, bin Laden has taken on a Guevara-like cult following, adorning t-shirts and banners worn and carried by those who are not Salafist radicals, who don’t share his religiosity, who

know little about him or the doctrines he espouses, but who rejoice at his attacks on the United States and his ongoing verbal assaults on Israel. Likewise Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Hezbollah strongman Hassan Nasrallah have become heroes to the Chavistas and Bolivarians in Venezuela, to the *campesinos* in Bolivia, and to the leftist poseurs in London, Paris, Amsterdam, and Berlin simply by virtue of their aggression toward and perceived defiance of the United States and Israel.

In a piece last summer entitled “The Anti-Patriots,” which discussed the effects of anti-Americanism on potential domestic terrorists, we wrote “that anyone who believes he’s been wronged by ‘America;’ or who thinks that he’s gotten the short end of the stick (whatever stick that may be); or who feels that he is owed something by a racist, sexist government that has expended much energy in keeping him oppressed; or who feels extreme guilt for his part in perpetuating the racist American autocracy, has a natural ally in the Islamists.”

It is no coincidence, in our opinion, that the Islamists’ greatest successes in recruitment and conversion in this country take place on college campuses, where gullible children of privilege are already inundated with anti-Americanism and the radical chic, and in prisons, where those who believe they have been dealt a bad hand by society are steeped in bitterness, self-pity and loathing for those who have allegedly wronged them.

Though the Islamists may differ in character, ideology, and motivation, their plight resonates with the erstwhile leftists and populists. The Islamists share with the most prominent populist movements of the last century both a common enemy, namely capitalists and/or Americans, and a common scapegoat for all the world’s ills, namely the Jews. To this degree, it is a natural fit.

Islamism is hardly the first overtly religious doctrine to speak to the world’s underclass. Indeed, prior to about the 18th century, all populist movements in the West were explicitly religious. As we noted just two weeks ago, most “Reformation-era social upheavals, from the Hussite (Taborite) rebellion in Bohemia to Thomas

Muntzer and the Peasant’s War in Germany, to militant Anabaptism throughout central Europe, were anarcho-communistic movements that assailed the powerful institutions of human society – the ‘prince,’ the ‘rich,’ and most notably, the Catholic Church . . .”

More recently, in the last century, the very areas of the globe that now appear enamored with Islamo-populism, were taken in by Christian socialism. Liberation Theology, as preached by the likes of Gustavo Gutierrez, promised the poor, particularly in Latin America, “social justice” and portrayed Jesus as an overtly political figure who was the “Liberator of the Oppressed,” among other things.

Of course, the difference between the liberation theologians and the Islamists is that the former were very much a product of the 20th century and actively sought secular ends. The Islamists, by contrast, are a product of the seventh century and seek purely religious ends, ends which happen to coincide with those favored by the secular left for the time being, but which are ultimately incompatible with anything bearing any semblance of secularism, freedom, or modernity.

Additionally, the Islamists tend to be a little more implacable when it comes to variations from orthodoxy. The leftists will inevitably tire of their affair with Islamists either because they have been unsuccessful in waging the war against “imperialism,” or because they will find that success threatens the secular values they hold so dear. This suggests that the future of this alliance will be very bloody indeed.

What else can we deduce about the future of this alliance? Well, for starters, we suspect that it will be successful in the near term, there being nothing on the geopolitical horizon that will threaten the partnership.

And that brings us back to the Baker-Hamilton Iraq Study Group. If anything, ISG’s recommendations will likely bolster the Islamist-leftists alliance. Given the global nature of the enemy in the war on terror, we could say that ISG’s proposals amount to little more than putting a Band-Aid on a broken leg. But even that doesn’t quite capture the nature of the

damage that could be done by this commission. In truth, implementing the ISG's proposals would be more like jumping up and down on a broken leg. There is nothing even remotely realistic in Baker's "realism."

You see, bin Laden was right, at least in his assertion that people tend to gravitate to the strong horse and to abandon the weak one. Any hint of capitulation in Iraq or of compromise with Iranians and Syrians will look conspicuously like surrender and will all but surely make the Islamists in their various forms appear to be the strong horse, which leaves you-know-who as the weak one.

And you'll note here that there doesn't have to be any actual surrender on the part of the Americans, merely the whiff of it, the perception of it. Israel did not lose its war against Hezbollah this summer. And Hezbollah most certainly did not win. But Nasrallah and his patrons were able to declare themselves victorious, thereby bolstering their standing among the anti-American crowd and intensifying the global enthusiasm for their war against Israel and the United States.

On September 11, the left cheered the attack on America as a blow struck against Western/American hegemony. Even the perception of surrender in Iraq will bring further cheers and will convince a broad coalition of civilization's enemies to attack again and to wage the war more aggressively.

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