

Mark L. Melcher Publisher
melcher@thepoliticalforum.com

Stephen R. Soukup Editor
soukup@thepoliticalforum.com

THEY SAID IT

The vanity, restlessness, petulance, and spirit of intrigue of several petty cabals, who attempt to hide their total want of consequence in bustle and noise, and puffing, and mutual quotation of each other, makes you imagine that our contemptuous neglect of their abilities is a mark of general acquiescence in their opinions. No such thing, I assure you. Because half a dozen grasshoppers under a fern make the field ring with their importunate chink, whilst thousands of great cattle, reposed beneath the shadow of the British oak, chew the cud and are silent, pray do not imagine, that those who make the noise are the only inhabitants of the field; that of course, they are many in number; or that, after all, they are other than the little shrivelled, meager, hopping, though loud and troublesome insects of the hour.

Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, 1790.

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THE LONG WAR.

To paraphrase a few lines from Alan Seeger, America has a rendezvous with al-Qaeda. It may be at some disputed barricade, or some scarred slope of battered hill, or at midnight in some flaming town. It may be in Iran, or possibly even Tel Aviv. If America leaves Iraq precipitously, it could be in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Jordan, or all of these places at once. Then again, it may be in downtown New York, the “Mall of America,” LAX, a nuclear plant in the Midwest, at some point in the nation’s food production, processing, and distribution chain, or . . . all of these places at once. But whether the peace-loving Democrats in Washington and their supporters in the heartland know it or not, America has a rendezvous with al-Qaeda, and it will, to once again borrow a phrase from Seeger, not fail that rendezvous.

It may be true that armies run on their stomach. But the American economy runs on oil, imported oil, lots of it, and this requires that the pumps keep pumping throughout the Middle East. More and more, the American economy also runs on trade, international trade, lots of it, and this requires open markets and open societies in all corners of the globe, unhindered by terrorists and terrorism. American politics runs on prosperity, which requires continuous economic growth in the same way that a shark requires forward movement to breathe, and economic growth requires imported oil and international trade, lots of it.

It doesn’t matter who occupies the Oval Office in January 2008, that person’s first *political* consideration will be to keep the American public continuously happy, and happiness in America today is fueled by continuous prosperity, which, as we said earlier, is fueled by imported oil, international trade, and security for American

persons and property, both at home and abroad. And this means aggressively engaging al-Qaeda, not just day-to-day, but year-to-year, for many years to come, whether the Democrats like it or not.

The *Wall Street Journal* related last week how the good folks in Youngstown, Ohio have decided that rather than struggle to regain the city's former glory by traditional methods of promoting industry and population growth, they will follow a novel economic development plan that revolves around the concept of "controlled shrinkage." This may well be a good idea for Youngstown, but no U.S. president could adopt it for the nation, no matter how concerned he or she is about "global warming," or how nobly determined he or she is to sacrifice abundant oil supplies for "peace." "Controlled shrinkage" would not a successful presidency make.

Since the end of the Cold War, huge gains in productivity and profits provided by cheap labor abroad and astonishing investment banking opportunities in corners of the world that were once off limits have combined to create opportunities for wealth accumulation that make Coleridge's opium induced dreams of Kubla Kahn seem like to a trip to the mall by comparison. Americans won't retreat from this opportunity to acquire treasure. They will continue to pursue it and they will continue to acquire it. As Silent Cal once put it, the business of America is business. But unlike, Fafnir, Americans cannot lay gloating upon their treasure in a mountain lair. They must constantly increase it, or it will go away. And they must defend it. And they will do both because while Americans today love peace, they love treasure more. And they won't countenance a president for long who doesn't understand this.

The mainstream press, the political pundit community, and, oddly enough, the leading candidates from both parties, would have Americans believe that the upcoming election is going to offer a choice between war and peace.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Harry, Nancy, Barack and Hillary and all of the other shrivelled, meager, hopping, though loud and

troublesome insects of the hour can chink endlessly against dependence on imported oil, the war in Iraq, the war in Afghanistan, the Bush's administration's ineptitude, and Israel's stubborn insistence that it has a right to exist. But if a Democrat wins the presidency in 2008, he or she will have to learn to live with and to fight the long war with al-Qaeda. In the absence of a victory by one side or the other, it takes two to make peace and al-Qaeda has no interest in peace. Bertold Brecht is widely attributed with putting this pearl of wisdom in the form of an answer to the clichéd question, "What if they gave a war and no one came?" He reportedly said, "Then the war will come to you."

Could we be wrong about this? Could it be that the "peace now" crowd has it right? Could it be that al-Qaeda and the other Islamic terrorist organizations around the world would leave the United States alone if the United States left them alone? Maybe. But to believe that, one would have to believe that the following paragraphs from a publication released last week by the U.S. Department of State entitled "Country Reports on Terrorism 2006" are simply wrong about the growing threat from al-Qaeda and other terrorist organizations. And we doubt that any president, even Barack or Hillary, would risk making that judgment. To wit:

Recent trends include the emergence of "guerrilla" terrorism in parallel with traditional "expeditionary" approaches, improved AQ [al-Qaeda] propaganda warfare capacity, and emerging evidence of terrorist "conveyor belt" that seeks to deliberately manipulate and exploit grievances in at-risk populations.

A deeper trend is the shift in the nature of terrorism, from traditional international terrorism of the late 20th century into a new form of transnational non-state warfare that resembles a form of global insurgency. This represents a new era of warfare, and countering this threat demands the application of counterinsurgency techniques that focus on protecting, securing, and winning the support of at-risk populations, in addition to targeting violent extremist networks and individual terrorists. . . .

We have entered a new era of conflict that may demand new paradigms and different responses from those of previous eras. AQ and its core leadership group represent a global action network that seeks to aggregate and exploit the effects of widely dispersed, semi-independent actors. It openly describes itself as a transnational guerrilla movement and applies classic insurgent strategies at the global level. AQ applies terrorism, but also subversion, propaganda, and open warfare, and it seeks weapons of mass destruction in order to inflict the maximum possible damage on its opponents. It links and exploits a wider, more nebulous community of regional, national, and local actors who share some of its objectives, but also pursue their own local agendas. Finally, it works through regional and cross-border safe havens that facilitate its actions while hampering government responses.

To the extent that AQ succeeds in aggregating this broader constellation of extremist actors, it can begin to pursue more frequent and geographically extensive terror attacks. Therefore, we must act to disaggregate the threat, through international cooperation, counterpropaganda, counter subversion, counterinsurgency, and traditional counterterrorism . . .

To make such active measures effective, the three strategic components of the terrorist threat that must be neutralized are leaders, safe havens, and underlying conditions. Leaders provide a motivating, mobilizing, and organizing function and act as symbolic figureheads. Safe havens, which are often in ungoverned or under-governed spaces, provide a secure environment for training, planning, financial and operational support; and a base for mounting attacks. They may be physical or virtual in nature. In addition, underlying conditions provide the fuel, in the form of grievances and conflicts that power the processes of radicalization. Treating

this new era of conflict as a form of global insurgency implies that counterinsurgency methods are fundamental in combating the new form of transnational terrorism. These methods include firstly, a focus on protecting and securing the population; and secondly, politically and physically marginalizing the insurgents, winning the support and cooperation of at-risk populations by targeted political and development measures, and conducting precise intelligence-led special operations to eliminate critical enemy elements with minimal collateral damage.

Two weeks ago, we said, in the piece entitled “No Exit,” that even if a Democrat is elected to the presidency on a “get out of Iraq now” platform in 2008, he or she will find, during the requisite briefings from the Department of States, Defense, Energy, Homeland Security, the FBI, and the CIA, that the collapse of a friendly government in Iraq would create conditions in the United States that would likely render Americans unhappy. Our guess, we said, is that Barack or Hillary or whomever would react to this depressing news by announcing a “flexible timetable” for withdrawal, which would have the practical effect of guaranteeing a U.S. military presence in Iraq for a very long time. When considering this, it is worth keeping in mind that Richard Nixon won the presidency in 1968 in part by promising to get the troops out of Vietnam. President Ford honored that pledge seven years later.

In any case, getting out of the war with Iraq would be easier for a Democratic president than getting out of the on-going one with al-Qaeda and its Islamic terrorist allies around the globe. Our guess is that neither the next president nor the next will be able to do that. For public relations purposes, the Pentagon has recently dropped the use of the term “the long war.” But that doesn’t mean it won’t be a long war. In fact, it is more probable that it means that the more that America’s senior warriors study the situation, the more they come to realize that it is likely to be much longer and much more costly than the American public needs to know right now, regardless of whether a Democrat or a Republican sits in the Oval Office.

MADNESS AND THE 2008 ELECTION.

Although George W. Bush still has roughly one-fifth of his presidency remaining, the campaign to succeed him has not only begun, but has already become the principle preoccupation of our politics-obsessed media. With still a-year-and-a-half before election day, the various candidates are raising money and courting voters aggressively, and the press and pundits are quickly developing their story lines, fleshing out the themes that they are all but certain to beat into the ground during this, the longest campaign in American history.

Chief among those themes will be the “collapse” of the GOP and the attendant resuscitation of the Democratic Party. The ongoing and otherwise pointless obsession with the public’s approval/disapproval of President Bush, a man who cannot constitutionally stand for reelection, serves simply to reinforce the idea that this “Republican” presidency is not going particularly well and that the electorate will surely vote for “change” in 2008.

It is now nearly universally accepted that the election of '08 is the Democrats' to lose. Last week, for example, *USA Today* noted “Five Reasons the GOP Faces an Uphill Climb in '08,” and even William Kristol, editor of *The Weekly Standard* and an habitually optimistic conservative, conceded that there are a great many good reasons why “Democrats think they’re sitting pretty for 2008.”

At this point in the election cycle, we are unwilling to buck this conventional wisdom. Indeed, the basic theme peddled by the mainstream press – i.e., that the voting public aches for “change” – makes a certain amount of sense to us. In any case, even we are not foolhardy enough to make any serious “unconventional” forecasts about a contest in which we won’t even know the respective participants until a full year from now.

At the same time, we would caution that this storyline touting the Democrats’ inevitability strikes us as a bit flimsy and, at the very least, poorly and uncritically

developed. There is no question that the Democrats have a distinct advantage in that their GOP opponents are hapless and bumbling. But bearishness regarding the Republicans should not necessarily be extrapolated to suggest bullishness on the Democrats.

Their electoral success last November notwithstanding, the Democrats remain a deeply troubled and deeply divided party that is intellectually bankrupt and spiritually wasted. More to the point, large swaths of the political left continue to drift further and further away from the political mainstream and even from objective reality, thereby threatening the Democrats’ ability to remain a serious party, much less a viable majority party.

For better than four years now, we have chronicled the Democrats’ ongoing “descent into madness.” Just because they won last fall’s mid term election does not mean that this descent has stopped, or that it is no longer a serious threat to the party’s long-term prospects.

Over the weekend, *The New York Times* reported what anyone paying even the remotest attention to the political scene already knew, namely that “antiwar groups” are newly empowered and are thus driving the opinion positions of the Democratic Party’s leaders. According to the *Times*, “The antiwar coalition combines the online mobilization capabilities of MoveOn with the old-school political muscle of organized labor,” and has been “working in tandem with Democratic leadership in both the House and the Senate on a systematic strategy to unify Democrats, divide Republicans and isolate the President.” More important, these groups are well funded, well connected to Democrats on Capitol Hill, well organized at the grass-roots level, and “shrewd.” And they are leveraging their resources to push legislators to adopt their positions.

This is all well and good. In fact, that’s the way the game is played in Washington. But in this case, the game is a dangerous one for Democrats, in large part because many of these groups with whom the party is making common cause embrace and advocate ideas that are politically risky, to put it mildly.

Consider, if you will, a recent visit to Ann Arbor by Michigan's senior Senator and a founding member of the anti-Bush movement, Carl Levin. *The New Republic's* Eve Fairbanks retells the story thusly:

One recent weekend, Michigan Senator Carl Levin traveled to Ann Arbor to give a talk to a crowd of students. The brainy Levin is known for his unabashed liberalism – he led the opposition in the Senate to authorizing the Iraq war in 2002 – and, as College Democrats and antiwar protesters filed into the sunny room, it would have been fair to assume he was only among friends. But, as Levin thanked a serviceman who had stood up in the audience, the protesters held up their signs: aipac owns levin!

Fairbanks thinks this is interesting because Levin is an “original hero of the antiwar movement,” who just happened to cross the antiwarriors by stating the obvious, that the Democrats would not vote to cut off funding for the troops while they are engaged with the enemy. We think that the even more interesting and telling aspect of confrontation was the line of attack that the protestors used against Levin. AIPAC is, of course, the acronym for the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, and Levin is, of course, Jewish. The Jew, who happens to be an “unabashed liberal” is nonetheless a “bad actor” here simply because he is a Jew, and as such, can't help but be bought and paid for by the Jewish lobbying groups. Or so the protestors' thinking goes.

More than four years ago, even before the invasion of Iraq, we noted and discussed the anti-Semitic nature of this purported “peace” movement. As we put it in a March, 2003 piece, “There are, in other words, certain important constituencies within the Democratic party's left wing which believe that in the case of this war (and the war on terrorism and the general unrest in the Middle East) Jews are, indeed, a significant part of the problem.”

In the years since, we, among countless others, have repeatedly documented the Democrats' continued flirtation with “Jew-baiting” and their alliances with

virulent anti-Semites. And this concern, which was once relegated to the loony left wing, has grown increasingly mainstream within the Party and continues to be one of the driving forces behind the so-called “antiwar” movement.

Unfortunately, this pathology is but the tip of the proverbial iceberg on the political left. The Democrats' anti-Semitic flirtations may be the most heinous of their irrationalities, but it is hardly the only one, or even, for that matter, the most irrational. Consider the following, which comes from a Rasmussen poll measuring Americans' attitudes about 9/11, President Bush, and the war on terror, released last week:

Democrats in America are evenly divided on the question of whether George W. Bush knew about the 9/11 terrorist attacks in advance. Thirty-five percent (35%) of Democrats believe he did know, 39% say he did not know, and 26% are not sure.

Republicans reject that view and, by a 7-to-1 margin, say the President did not know in advance about the attacks. Among those not affiliated with either major party, 18% believe the President knew and 57% take the opposite view.

Overall, 22% of all voters believe the President knew about the attacks in advance. A slightly larger number, 29%, believe the CIA knew about the attacks in advance.

Those numbers are staggering, to say the very least. What they tell us is that three out of every five Democrats in this country either believe that President Bush had foreknowledge of 9/11 or are at least unconvinced that he didn't. Or to put it another way, not even two in five Democrats feel confident in saying that the President of the United States did not have prior knowledge of a terrorist attack in which more than 3,000 people were slaughtered and which served as the pretext for an entire overhaul of American national security policy. That is, in a word, nuts.

What this means is that the Democrats are not simply embracing positions that differ from those of Republicans. And they are not merely embracing positions that might be classified as “outside the mainstream.” They are, in fact, being strongly influenced by a population for whom erstwhile “outside the mainstream” positions have become mainstream, a population that holds beliefs that are both demonstrably false and indicative of an entirely unhealthy and politically dangerous paranoia.

When the *New York Times* says that the “antiwar” groups are exerting influence over Democrats, the implications go far beyond the nation’s policy with regard to Iraq. These groups overwhelmingly believe things that most Americans find offensive or insane. And they’re having an effect not just on the party’s leaders, but on its rank and file as well. In medium-to-long-term, that is a recipe for political disaster and political impotence.

We have no way of knowing when or how any of this will impact the Democratic Party’s long-term political viability. But we do know that at some point it will. A party simply cannot survive over the long term with significant factions embracing, advocating, and evangelizing hateful and demonstrably ridiculous positions. Like the black leaders who encouraged their supporters to believe that the post-Katrina flooding in New Orleans was precipitated by the intentional bombing of the city’s levees, the Democratic leaders who do not actively dissuade their supporters from

believing some of the more vile conspiracies about President Bush and his nefarious Zionist cabal are sacrificing the long-term credibility of their political base for short-term consolidation of power.

Eventually, this will backfire. As Senator Carl Levin discovered in his trip to Ann Arbor, the powerful and rising antiwar factions are insatiable. They will not be content until the entirety of their agenda is enacted. And since their agenda is based in part on falsehoods and inanities, the more mainstream Democrats will eventually have to make a choice. Either they can embrace the neuroses of the antiwar base and risk alienating the electorate at large, or they can reject these neuroses and incur the wrath of a base that is exceptionally well funded and comprises a significant and growing segment of the population that determines Democratic primary winners.

This isn’t a choice that we’d want to make. And it isn’t one that is suggestive of a party that is likely to remain healthy and well integrated over the longer term.

There is no question that the Republican Party is in some immediate, short-term trouble, which gives the Democrats a slight advantage at least in the early part of the ’08 election cycle. But we wouldn’t get too carried away with this theme. The GOP has problems. But so do the Democrats. And in many ways, the Democrats’ problems appear more severe and more likely to have a lasting effect.

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