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THEY SAID IT

To expect that all the world should, and must, adopt the peculiar political institutions of the United States – which often do not work very well even at home – is to indulge the most unrealistic of visions; yet just that seems to be the hope and expectation of many Neoconservatives....Such naive doctrine led us into the wars in Indo-China – the notion that we could establish or prop up in Viet Nam a “democracy” that never had existed anywhere in south-east Asia. Such foreign policies are such stuff as dreams are made of; yet they lead to the heaps of corpses of men who died in vain. We need to ask ourselves whether the Neoconservative architects of international policy are very different from the foreign-policy advisors who surrounded Lyndon Johnson.

Most of the world never was satisfactorily democratic in the past, is distinctly undemocratic today, and has no prospect of decent democracy in the future. Were the United States to insist upon the attainment of democracy (plus capitalism) by every nation-state with which it has satisfactory relations, before long our principal trading-partner might be Switzerland. The United States cannot be forever unsettling the governments of client states, or small countries, or of allies, on the ground that they are not sufficiently democratic in obedience to the doctrines of Rousseau, or that they “discriminate” against somebody or other, or that they prefer traditional economies to a full-blown abstract capitalism....Successful foreign policy, like political success generally, is produced through the art of the possible – not through ideological rigidity. It will not do for the Department of State to repeat, like an incantation, “Democracy good, all other government bad.” In short, I am saying that a quasi-religion of Democratic Capitalism cannot do duty for imagination and right reason and prescriptive wisdom, in domestic politics or in foreign relations.

Politics of Prudence, Russell Kirk, 1993.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Sometime early next year, this nation is going to enter into a long and intense national discussion over its role in the world. This argument, or heated debate if you prefer, will probably begin soon after the big “Super Tuesday” primaries in early February. At this time, it should be fairly clear who the respective presidential candidates will be, and the major political battles will no longer be between members of the same party but will feature the two presidential hopefuls, mano-a-mano, or guano-a-guano, if you prefer.

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The first thing that will happen is that the debate will slowly move away from the subject of President Bush and begin to focus on what each candidate plans to do when he or she takes office. The Democratic candidate will try for a short time to keep the Bush presidency alive as an issue. But since his or her Republican opponent will be largely blameless for anything that President Bush did or did not do, the Democrat will soon learn that this is a fruitless enterprise, that the public is going to make its decision based on what lies ahead, not on what each thinks about what President Bush has already done.

The debate will begin with policy statements and comments on a variety of single issues. These will include the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, Iran's nuclear ambitions, North Korea's nuclear weapons, the threat of Islamic terrorism, America's commitment to Israel and Taiwan, the friend/enemy status of Russia and China, and the conditions under which the United States should go to war.

Slowly but ever so surely, however, the views of each candidate on these separate subjects will form a mosaic, which will provide what might be described as a "world view." Both candidates will initially attempt to keep this from happening, but they will realize soon enough that if they do not form and present their positions as some sort of foreign policy paradigm, the pundit community and the opposition will do it for them.

Our guess is that both candidates will strongly disavow President Bush's democratize-the-entire-globe initiative. But therein lies the rub. If the role of the United States around the world is not to promote democracy and fight against tyranny, then what is it?

This question has been kicking around the American foreign policy community ever since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, which rendered the old policy of "containment" passé. Many politicians and foreign policy pundits have tried in the intervening 18 years to formulate a replacement foreign policy paradigm that would garner similar, widespread, bipartisan support, but none have succeeded. The

intensity and illusiveness of this search provides a simple explanation for why politics no longer "stops at the border," as it did during the Cold War when virtually everyone, regardless of party, agreed that "containment" was the central focus of American foreign policy. There were, of course, many heated arguments over how to implement that policy, but the overall goal of containing communism was not disputed by either party.

We first wrote about all of this in a May 1992 article entitled "No 'X' Marks The Spot," which we coauthored with defense analyst Byron Callan, a colleague of ours in those days. The "X" in the title referred to the pseudonym used by the author of the famous piece in the July 1947 issue of *Foreign Affairs* magazine entitled "The Source of Soviet Conduct." It was later revealed that this article, which originated the policy of "containment," was written by the State Department's chief of policy planning, George Kennan.

Coincident with the article's publication, Hungary fell to a Moscow-engineered communist coup, virtually assuring the take-over of all of Eastern Europe by the Soviets. Chiang Kai-shek was losing the civil war in China. And Secretary of State George Marshall had just proposed the Marshall Plan, saying that he hoped it would keep France from falling under the influence of Communism and prevent Soviet plans for Germany from turning that nation into "a congested slum or an economic poor house."

A few months earlier, it had been revealed that Soviet spies had gained access to U.S. atomic secrets. This was followed two months later by Soviet U.N. representative Andrei Gromyko's outright rejection of a proposal by Bernard Baruch for a system of international controls over atomic production.

Kennan's basic premise was that the antagonism then being demonstrated by Soviet leadership toward the Western democracies was inherent in the internal system of power in the U.S.S.R. In response to this policy of antagonism, Kennan advocated a "long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of

Russian expansionist tendencies.” Among other things, Kennan advocated a system of economic and technical aid to non-Communist countries to support his containment policies.

The rest, as they say, is history. The Marshall Plan was initiated, and thus began a generous U.S. policy of aid and assistance to friendly governments around the world that continued for decades. In parallel with this economic, anti-communist policy, the “Free World” surrounded the U.S.S.R. with a chain of defense pacts against overt Soviet communist aggression.

The best known of these organizations was, of course, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), which was founded in 1949. But the network included two other similar pacts. The first was the South East Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO), which included Australia, France, New Zealand, Pakistan, the Philippines, Thailand, Great Britain and the United States. SEATO was established in 1954 and dissolved in 1977, following the take-over of Cambodia by the communist Vietnam.

Then there was the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO), which included Iran, Turkey, Pakistan, and Great Britain. The United States was a full member of some CENTO committees and had observer status at council meetings. CENTO was established in 1955 and dissolved in 1979, following the fall of the Shah in Iran. Iraq had been an original member, but withdrew in 1958, at which time the organization’s name was changed from the Baghdad Pact.

History will determine whether “containment,” which prompted numerous military skirmishes and full scale wars in Korea and Vietnam, was good or bad policy; whether another form of dealing with the Soviet Union would have been more successful; whether the Soviet Union would have fallen anyway.

For purposes of this piece, it is only necessary to note, as we said earlier, that ever since the fall of the communist government in the Soviet Union, the United States has had no universally recognized foreign policy *raison d’etre*, and thus no intellectually

integrated, widely accepted answers to a variety of fundamental questions concerning how the United States should employ its energies in this now multi-polar world.

Such questions would include, but are not be limited to the following. Does the United States have a moral obligation to proselytize democracy throughout the globe? Should the United States become the world’s policeman? How much force should be used if the decision is reached to police the world, and on which “beats” should the policemen concentrate? Indeed, what behavior by a foreign government is so unacceptable as to spark U.S. military action? Or, should America “come home,” tend to its own domestic problems, react only when its “national interest” is directly threatened? And if this is the policy, what exactly qualifies as the “national interest?”

Neither the first President Bush nor Bill Clinton made any coherent, or even apparent attempt to formulate and promote a comprehensive world view that would provide a framework from which Americans could begin the process of seeking a consensus regarding these and similar questions.

The current President Bush rose to the challenge when he announced, shortly after the invasion of Iraq, that henceforth, America’s role in the world would be to promote democracy, both as a boon to those nations and persons who would benefit from their new found freedom and as a means for making America safer, since, in his view, democracies don’t act aggressively against other democracies.

Using language that would make Woodrow Wilson look like an isolationist by comparison, President Bush announced a “generational commitment” of U.S. “blood and money” to the goal of “transforming” the Middle East into a group of nations with “democratic values.” Suddenly, words and phrases like “just peace,” “human liberty,” “America’s duty,” “great opportunity,” “replacing poverty, repression, and resentment around the world,” “lifting millions of peoples out of despair and want,” began to spurt out of the President’s mouth like ink from a squid

Initially, we, here at the Political Forum, didn't think he meant it. Indeed, we wrote the following in August of 2003. "I have never thought that this war had anything to do with a Wilsonian-type vision of 'making the world safe for democracy,' or of being the 'world's policeman.' In fact, I have always believed that to the degree that this kind of language has been used by anyone in the Bush crowd, it was used to soften the sharp edges of an aggressive, practical strategy of retribution and threat management that was, at its heart, the antithesis of altruism." Needless to say, we were wrong. It turns out that President Bush was indeed serious about making the "democracy thing" (as his father would have put it) the centerpiece of his foreign policy.

As we said earlier, given the problems that have resulted from the maiden exercise in this grandiose plan to remake the world, it seems highly unlikely that either of the presidential candidates in 2008 will shape his or her "world view" around this initiative. In fact, as we have said before in these pages, one of the most important long-term consequences of the war in Iraq could be to permanently cripple the Wilsonian element that has been an integral part of American foreign policy since the end of World War I. Even if "nation building" eventually works in Iraq, it is likely that the public would view the cost-benefit ratio of another such try as prohibitive.

The irony in all of this is that aggressive international idealism, marked by an assertive, missionary zeal to spread American "values" around the world, has always been anathema to traditional conservatives, as is noted in the above "They Said It" quote from Russell Kirk, one of the founders and giants of modern day conservatism. As Kirk indicates, the idea entered the Republican Party in the mid-1960s via the neo-conservative movement, which was made up of liberal democrats who were repulsed by the extreme anti-American, anti-military drift of the Democratic Party during the Vietnam years.

If we are correct that Bush's nation building experience in Iraq is likely to have soured the American public toward foreign adventurism for

many years to come, Republican standard bearers of the future will likely abandon the party's experiment with Wilsonianism and reacquaint themselves and the public with what might be called, for lack of a better term, "realpolitik," as defined not so much by von Rochau but by Henry Kissinger, who advocated dealing with foreign nations in a strictly practical manner, rather than on the basis of political doctrine and moral behavior.

They will not eschew an active role in international affairs or the use of military force to protect American interests anywhere in the globe. But they will let the "heathen in the hut" believe what he wishes and let the strongman in the capitol govern as he sees fit, treating him as friend or foe based on his actions rather than the visibility of his soul when looking into his eyes.

This approach is already apparent in the tendency of Romney and Giuliani to emphasize their practical experience in dealing with governmental problems rather than their ideological purity or utopian zeal.

Democrat candidates, on the other hand, are likely to adopt a posture of neo-isolationism. Paying daily obeisance to the party's antiwar wing will naturally move them in the direction of heavy reliance on diplomatic negotiations as a means of resolving all international conflicts, protecting U.S. jobs against foreign competition, and moving the line of defense against international terrorism ever closer to the shores.

This approach is already apparent in the agreement among all Democratic hopefuls on such issues as getting out of Iraq as quickly as possible, emphasizing the rebuilding of "friendships" abroad, placing controls on job exporting, and spending more money on counter-terrorism activities such as port security rather than intelligence gathering.

At the risk of being accused of employing extreme hyperbole, we would argue that the contest between these two "world views" will decide not just the future of the United States but the future of the entire world. Stay tuned.

THE BALKANS, FORT DIX, AND THE GLOBAL JIHAD.

Ask almost any Democrat, but especially one who served in the last administration, and he or she will undoubtedly tell you that the model for successful post-Cold War American military action should be the Clintonian interventions in the Balkans. You see, according to the Clintonistas, Bosnia and Kosovo were “good wars”; wars in which the “noble” Europeans led the way and in which the United States had the support, if not outright pleading from its allies in NATO.

Additionally, precious few American lives were lost, and NATO’s military objectives were ultimately achieved. Slobodan Milosevic was defeated, eventually arrested for war crimes, and died awaiting trial. Serbian aggression was halted. Genocide too was halted. And the people of the former Yugoslavia were granted the precious gifts of liberty and self-determination. Unlike Iraq, this story has a happy ending. Or at least it does when Democrats tell it.

The only problem with this telling of the story is that it’s not true, or at least not entirely true. For starters, the Balkan wars do not exactly represent Europe’s finest moment. Far from it, in fact. It’s not just that the Europeans stood by and watched as Milosevic slaughtered tens of thousands of Croats and Bosnians. But they actually exacerbated the problem, embargoing weapons from the region, making it impossible for Serbia’s victims to defend themselves.

Moreover, once they were finally shamed by Tony Blair into acting, the Europeans found that they were incapable of doing much to stop Serbian aggression or to stabilize the region, at least until the United States reluctantly agreed to help. Regrettably, the collapse of Yugoslavia and the resulting decade of turmoil provided a glimpse of things to come, establishing as they did that post-modern Europe – America’s “valued” ally – had grown both feckless and impotent at the same time.

The biggest problem with the glorification of the Balkan conflicts, though, is that the “happy ending” itself is misleading. While Serbian aggression may have been stopped, the idea that the former Yugoslavia is today a stable, productive place is inaccurate, to say the least. Indeed, like other regions around the globe in which Muslims have been engaged in conflict with non-Muslims (e.g. Iraq, Afghanistan, Chechnya, Somalia), the former Yugoslavia has become one of the battlegrounds in the global war on terror. Wahhabi fundamentalism has taken root in the region, serving both to radicalize portions of the population and to destabilize many erstwhile stable cities.

Two weeks ago, Stephen Schwartz documented the threat posed by radical Islamism in the Balkans. As you read the following, keep in mind several things. First, this is a region that should be aggressively pro-U.S., given all that America has done on its behalf. Second, Schwartz himself is no right wing, anti-Muslim crusader. He is, in fact, a “red-diaper baby,” a former avowed leftist, and, more to the point, a Muslim. In the late 1990s, Schwartz converted to Islam while in the Balkans (Sarajevo, to be exact), and today, he is the Executive Director of the Center for Islamic Pluralism. In the May 14 issue of *The Weekly Standard*, he wrote the following:

Taking the temperature of Islam in the Balkans this spring is only partly reassuring. In Sarajevo in late March, observances for the 800th anniversary of the birth of the great Sufi poet Mevlana Jalaluddin Rumi (who is hugely popular, incidentally, with American readers) were entirely in keeping with the moderate, peaceful character of the Islam of the region. Yet at the same time, a visitor to Bosnia-Herzegovina, Albania, Kosovo, and Macedonia encountered unmistakable evidence that extremist intruders are opening a Balkan front in the global jihad....

The ominous presence of Wahhabi missionaries, financiers, terror recruiters, and other mischief-makers bespeaks a fresh

offensive in that tormented land. From the new Wahhabi seminary in the lovely Bosnian city of Zenica, to the cobblestone streets of Sarajevo's old Ottoman center, to the Muslim-majority villages in southern Serbia, extremist Sunni men in their distinctive, untrimmed beards and short, Arab style breeches (worn in imaginary emulation of Muhammad), accompanied by women in face veils and full body coverings (a bizarre novelty in the contemporary Balkans), are again appearing, funded by reactionary Saudis and Pakistanis. They aim to widen the horizon of global jihad – witness the revived campaign of terrorism in Morocco and Algeria. In the Balkans, their targets are both Sufis and traditional Muslims....

The Albanian lands are witnessing three of the tactics commonly employed by Saudi-financed radicals seeking to export bloody terror. In Kosovo, they mainly burrow deep undercover, like moles. Where they can, as in Albania, they preach and recruit; thus, the stunning Ethem Bey mosque in the capital, Tirana, purely a cultural monument until recently, is now the scene of Wahhabi missionizing. And where government is indifferent and the extremists' chosen enemies appear vulnerable, as in Macedonia, they invade, occupy, and threaten....

Now, we bring all of this up today not because we feel some need to belittle Democratic foreign policy efforts or because we want to suggest that every foreign intervention is doomed to failure. Indeed, one may argue, as the inimitable Mark Steyn did yesterday, that one of the chief problems with the Balkan intervention is not that it took place at all, but that it came too late.

Rather, we raise the issue of the Balkans and of the radicalization of Balkan Muslims because of specific events that took place here in the United States last week, namely the arrest of the "Fort Dix Six," the Muslim radicals who had intended to attack Fort Dix

and to kill as many soldiers as they could. While most of the coverage of this story has focused on the fact that the Duka brothers, the plot's three ringleaders, were illegal immigrants, we think it more notable that the three are also ethnic Albanians, born in the Macedonian town of Debar.

As Albanians, the Dukas should, at least according to the Democrats' telling of the Balkans legend, be the type of Muslims who are grateful to the United States for all that it did in protecting and championing Albanian Muslims against their Serbian tormentors. And indeed, many of their fellow Albanians are quite grateful. As the AP reported this morning, most Albanians, Macedonians, and Kosovars do believe that they are deeply indebted to the Americans, and they "repeatedly express gratitude to the United States for intervening in the 1998-99 Kosovo war and a 2001 ethnic conflict that pushed Macedonia to the brink of civil war." "In Pristina," the AP continued, "the capital of Kosovo, which many expect to gain independence from Serbia later this year, U.S. flags are commonplace. The main avenue is Bill Clinton Boulevard, renamed to honor the president who ordered air strikes that halted Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic's brutal crackdown in the province."

In other words, if ever there was a population that should be universally sympathetic to and supportive of the United States, it's the Albanians, Macedonians, and Kosovars. But they're not. The Dukas, for starters, planned terrorist attacks against the United States, their adopted homeland, in spite of the fact that Americans had sacrificed blood and treasure on behalf of their fellow Balkan Muslims. And as Stephen Schwartz has pointed out, there are plenty of others in Albania, Macedonia, and Kosovo who have been radicalized and who would, presumably, gladly try to succeed where the Dukas failed.

This tells us several things. First, it should be clear by now, if it wasn't already, that the "global war on terror" is not about us. It's about the Islamists. We in the west are not the issue. No matter what we do, we cannot cure what ails them.

Some, on the left and the far right, have argued that the Islamists' hatred of the United States and of the west in general is something we have brought upon ourselves. Our economic imperialism, our cultural imperialism, our "plunder" of Middle Eastern natural resources, and, most important, our unwavering and "disproportionate" support for Israel are just a handful of the "crimes" cited by both the Islamists and their western sympathizers for the anti-Western, anti-American jihad.

All the available evidence, however, suggests precisely the opposite. Spain pulled its troops out of Iraq, yet it is still a target. Most of Europe is openly and assertively sympathetic to the Palestinian cause and openly disdainful of Israel, yet Europe remains a target. And now, the Americans who gave so much to defend the defenseless Muslims in the Balkans are a target of some of those very Muslims, including some who had gone so far as to plan and begin training for an attack on American soil. Even the left's favorite war, it's most selfless and noble use of American force – to defend Muslims whom no one else could or would defend, nonetheless – could not buy the nation any respite from Islamists.

Let us repeat so as to be perfectly clear: this not about us. It is about them. The Islamists want war with the West. And no amount of placation, no amount of capitulation, no number of noble actions will dissuade them.

The second thing that all of this should teach us is that the threat from radical Islamism is very real and very serious. Last week, we wrote the following:

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,

As obvious as this may seem to us, it is not universally accepted as fact. Indeed, many on the left, from John Kerry to John Edwards to the denizens of the radical "netroots," believe that the Islamist threat is overblown, largely a creation of the political right, a bogey-man used to justify expansionist foreign policy and to disparage Democrats as weak and unpatriotic.

But this too is contradicted by the evidence, only the latest of which comes in the form of the Duka brothers and their co-conspirators. Many in the media and in the Democratic establishment have noted that the Fort Dix Six were not affiliated with al Qaeda and that they, like a number of other would-be terrorists, have been rather more bumbling than threatening. But all of that is largely beside the point.

If anything we think that the Fort Dix plot merely serves to confirm the seriousness of the Islamist menace. You see, the threat here is not from the organization, but from the ideology. And as long as the ideology persists, is taught, and wins adherents, it will continue to be a threat. Terrorist cells need not be large, or well equipped, or even particularly well organized to pose a threat. They need only be steeped in the Islamist ideology of hate. It is worth remembering, we think, that 19 men armed with nothing more than a few weeks of flight training and a handful of box cutters were able to kill 3,000 people, to topple the symbols of American ingenuity and enterprise, and to strike at the very heart of the U.S. military.

Now, one may argue, as President Bush has done, that the way to counter this deadly ideology is to democratize the Muslim world. One may argue, as Stephen Schwartz and our friend Daniel Pipes have done, that the way to counter this ideology is to identify and support moderate Muslims who

can counter the hate and violence of the Islamists. One may even argue that “democratization” is a dangerous pipe dream; that the only way to avoid violent confrontations with radical Islam is to retreat into fortress America, to cut trade, to end foreign military interventions, and to mind our own business. But what one cannot do is argue that the threat of Islamism does not exist or has been artificially inflated. Attacks, both successful and foiled, continue to proliferate. And as they do, the charge that the Islamist threat is phony strikes us as less and less believable.

It is likely that the Fort Dix terrorist plot will soon fade from memory, forgotten and disregarded like the handful of foiled domestic attacks that came before it. Nevertheless, we believe the events of last week are instructive. There is no placating Islamism. And there is no pretending that the threat it poses does not exist. Rational people may disagree on how best to address these problems. But to insist that there is no problem – or at least no problem that can’t be solved by better American behavior – is irrational. Just ask the Duka brothers.

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