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## THEY SAID IT

It is well said, in every sense, that a man's religion is the chief fact with regard to him. A man's, or a nation of men's. By religion I do not mean here the church-creed which he professes, the articles of faith which he will sign and, in words or otherwise, assert; not this wholly, in many cases not this at all. We see men of all kinds of professed creeds attain to almost all degrees of worth or worthlessness under each or any of them. This is not what I call religion, this profession and assertion; which is often only a profession and assertion from the outworks of the man, from the mere argumentative region of him, if even so deep as that. But the thing a man does practically believe (and this is often enough without asserting it even to himself, much less to others); the thing a man does practically lay to heart, and know for certain; concerning his vital relations to this mysterious universe, and his duty and destiny there, that is in all cases the primary thing for him, and creatively determines all the rest. That is his religion; or, it may be, his mere skepticism and no religion: the manner it is in which he feels himself to be spiritually related to the unseen world or no world; and I say, if you tell me what that is, you tell me to a very great extent what the man is, what the kind of things he will do is. Of a man or of a nation we inquire, therefore, first of all, what religion they had? Was it heathenism, – plurality of gods, mere sensuous representation of this mystery of life, and for chief recognized element therein physical force? Was it Christianity; faith in the invisible, not as real only, but as the only reality; time, through every meanest moment of it, resting on eternity; pagan empire of force displaced by a nobler supremacy, that of holiness? Was it skepticism, uncertainty, and inquiry whether there was an unseen world, any mystery of life except a mad one; – doubt as to all this, or perhaps unbelief and flat denial? Answering of this question is giving us the soul of the history of the man or nation. The thoughts they had were the parents of the actions they did; their feelings were parents of their thought; it was the unseen and spiritual in them that determined the outward and the actual;– their religion, as I say, was the great fact about them.

Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes and Hero Worship and the Heroic in History*, 1841.

## A VOTE AGAINST MRS. CLINTON IS AN ACT OF KINDNESS.

Last Thursday, Mitt Romney gave a widely covered and well-received speech on his religious beliefs and on how, if he should gain the presidency, these beliefs would influence his decisions as President. On the same day, the Dow-Jones Industrials rose 174.93 points. These two events were not related. But they should have been.

### In this Issue

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Serious Unseriousness.

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Why? Well, for two reasons. The first is that this sudden public interest in what might be called “character” could indicate – just *could* mind you – that the American people have placed this elusive attribute a little higher on their list of qualifications for the highest office in the land than they have in the past, which in turn could mean – just *could* mind you – that Mrs. Clinton has a slightly higher hurdle to jump with regards to this issue than her ethically and morally challenged husband did.

The second reason is that while we have no firm data to support this belief, we nevertheless believe that the next President of the United States will wake up in the White House the morning after inauguration day to find that he or she has suddenly been dropped into an environment that is richer in temptations of wealth and power than any of them, with the possible exception of Mrs. Clinton, might have imagined.

If we are right about this, then, for the sake of the future of this great land, probity will be one of the most important qualities that the next president can bring to the office, and it is good, indeed bullish, that the public and the press have made a little time for a brief discussion by at least one of the candidates of his ethical and moral moorings. In fact, if this short break from the more common discussions of war and taxes leads to further interest in this topic by the public and the press then even more bullish days could, we believe, be justified.

So, what’s new about all of this, you ask? American Presidents have always faced temptations, as have all leaders of nations big and small since the beginning of time. Today is not different from yesterday, or the day before, or the century before. To which, we would respond, no, you are wrong, things are very different today in this brave new world of global capitalism. There is considerably more money sloshing around, lots more, money in amounts that are beyond the wildest dreams of those who used to be considered “rich.” And there are new players in the global financial sandbox, players hailing from vastly different cultures with vastly different moral and ethical beliefs than those that not too long ago formed the standard for behavior in the world of global commerce.

Moreover, there are myriad more opportunities to make money in this globalized world than at any other time in the past, and this is especially true for those individuals and organizations that have “connections in high places” in various governments and quasi-governmental organizations, which have assumed a very big part in of the world of money in the past several decades.

If this sounds familiar, it is because we harped a little on the same subject a couple of months ago in an article entitled “Coming Soon: A Lower Tone Of Public Life.” We put it this way.

The stakes in Washington will be higher this time around. For one thing, the global mob network is much stronger today, better organized, better connected with each other and with political entities around the world, and richer by far. From Wall Street to Main Street, from Mexico to Canada to China to Russia to India to Eastern Europe and to all points in between, crooked enterprises are flourishing and the amount of money involved is almost beyond belief.

The United Nations is a clearinghouse for international corruption, as are myriad NGOs and “charities” and “research institutes.” From drugs to prostitutes, from government contracts to military secrets, from investment banking deals to money laundering, the world is a playground for corrupt billionaires, fly-by-night cheats, and crooked politicians, and it’s hard to tell one from the other.

Generally speaking, there are three primary checks on elective human behavior. The first is religious in nature, and comes down to a desire for God’s approval and/or a fear of divine retribution, either in this life or the next. The second is respect for the law. And the third is a preference for an orderly life, which covers a lot of ground, ranging from enlightened self-interest to the dread of shame, which can have both material and psychic consequences.

So, we would ask, for the sake of argument, which of these three can be counted upon to promote what in the West would be regarded as ethical business behavior from the state bureaucrats who manage those “sovereign wealth funds” that are said to contain somewhere between \$1 trillion and \$3 trillion at the present time and are expected to increase into the \$10 trillion range during the next five years?

The Chinese, who are in charge of one of the biggest of these funds, fear no God and honor no laws that do not promote the interests of China. Moreover, they are on a path to becoming too big to worry too much about what others think of them. The Arabs, who control several such funds, believe in a God, but it is a God that does not require Muslims to deal honestly with infidels, a God that indeed condones even the most heinous act against such “infidels,” including outright murder. Moreover, Arabs have little reverence or even respect for secular laws. Both the Chinese and the Arabs engage in enlightened self-interest, of course, which facilitates business. But those interests are subject to change on a whim, and are often quite different in many respects from the interests that honesty would dictate.

One might also question which of the three checks on elective human behavior should have kept the Grand Panjandrum at the United Nations from perpetrating and/or ignoring the multi-billion dollar “oil for food” scandal, which doomed the last best hope to avoid war with Saddam? And which of the three might influence the likes of George Soros to act either ethically or morally?

Better yet, which of the three would prevent an unethical and amoral President of the United States from becoming the “fixer” of choice for myriad players from all over the world, any one of whom has more than enough money to make offers to a President and to his or her political party that would be difficult to refuse?

We are not talking here about a few campaign donations from impoverished Buddhist monks, or whether the president and spouse are likely to abscond with the White House silver when his or

her term is up. Much more than that will be riding on the honesty of the choice that American voters make next November. In fact, a good case could be made that nothing less than the continued economic health of the entire global economy is at stake. For if the President of the United States does not insist that global commerce and international relations be conducted in an ethical and moral manner, and lead by example, no one else will. Count on it.

Finally, if we are right about all of this, and given Mrs. Clinton’s past weakness in the face of comparatively petty temptations, like small time tax fraud, trading irregularities in the futures market, crooked real estate transactions, and the looting of a small Savings and Loan, compassionate voters might come to believe that they would be doing Mrs. Clinton a great favor by keeping her from holding a position that brings with it temptations that would severely challenge the honesty of individuals with stronger sinews of moral fiber than she has. After all, it would not be an act of kindness to offer Machine Gun Kelly a job in a gun store or Willy Sutton a job in a bank.

## SERIOUS UNSERIOUSNESS.

If we were to tell you to drop everything and go right now to our web site ([www.thepoliticalforum.com](http://www.thepoliticalforum.com)) and, once there, to search our archives for “Steyn,” you would undoubtedly be startled by a couple of things. First, you’d probably be a little shocked to learn that we have a web site (and have for five years), one with a “search function,” nonetheless. You might also be surprised to find that the word “Steyn” – as in “Mark Steyn” – has appeared in some way in 59 pieces over the last four-and-a-half years. Given this, it really should go without saying that we think Steyn is one of only a handful of journalists/columnists working today who has intelligent things to say and says them intelligently. Or to put it another way, we’re fans.

It was with a little dismay, then, that we learned late last week that Steyn and his current Canadian home publication, *Macleans* magazine, have had a “human rights” case brought against them in something called the “Canadian Human Rights Commissions,” which

are quasi-judicial bodies apparently set up by the government to root out the society-warping crime of meanness.

As it turns out, these commissions (Steyn and *Maclean's* have had cases brought against them both federally and at the provincial level) will hear the case made by the Canadian Islamic Congress that Steyn and *Maclean's* (which ran excerpts of Steyn's book *America Alone*) were "flagrantly Islamophobic" and subjected "Canadian Muslims to hatred and contempt." As ridiculous as it sounds to those of us who enjoy the blessings of the First Amendment, simply by telling the truth about Islam and demography, Steyn apparently offended some Muslims (shocking though that might sound), and now may well have his book officially labeled "hate speech" or some such politically correct legal-twaddle.

This is deeply troubling on a number of counts. First and most obviously, we hate to see Steyn harassed like this, and over something so stupid. We don't know him, but, like we said, we're fans. Second, we hate these "human rights commissions" and all that they represent. As Steyn's *National Review* colleague Stanley Kurtz put it, these commissions and the charges against Steyn are, at their core, totalitarian.

Steyn and others like him can be silenced, even for writing something objectively true, simply because someone else, somewhere in Canada either took offense or, as in this case, feigned offense. This is not only absurd but rather alarming. Throughout the Western world, thought is being censored in the name of "human rights," which not only perverts the concept of human rights, but cuts to the very core of the freedoms of which those rights are part and parcel.

Most important, though, this case serves as yet one more incredibly vivid reminder of the shocking unseriousness with which most Westerners approach radical Islam *and the war it started*. Note if you will, that it is now six-plus years since three thousand men, women, and children in New York, Virginia, and Pennsylvania were murdered by the Islamists. It is six

years since the jihadists and their patrons were deposed and chased out of Kabul. It is now nearly five years since Saddam Hussein was toppled, leaving his country to become the central front in the clash of civilizations that is the war on terror. And yet the "serious people" in the West, the societal elites, the politicians and other public servants, the very men and women responsible for the preservation and safety of the people and the countries they represent are still unable to figure out who the "bad guys" are in this global melodrama.

Given the choice between the religious fanatics who loathe all things western and modern and who seek literally to destroy them, with bombs, guns, and knives, and a contemplative, show-tune fancying, ex-pat Canadian, who lives peacefully with his wife and kids in rural New Hampshire, writing a few thousand words a week, Western elites – or at least Canadian elites – are unable to pick out the real threat to human rights and, indeed, to civilization. The word "unserious" is unquestionably right, but it is also somehow woefully inadequate.

Unfortunately, the Canadians are not alone in their refusal to take the enemy in the war on terror seriously and in their concomitant inability even to identify the real enemy. As Steyn himself noted in his public acknowledgement of the human rights case against him, this type of unseriousness is nearly universal throughout the West:

The response of the EU Commissioner for Justice, Freedom and Security to the Danish cartoons was to propose a press charter that would oblige newspapers to exercise "prudence" on, ah, certain controversial subjects. The response of Tony Blair's ministry to the problems of "Londonistan" was to propose a sweeping law dramatically constraining free discussion of religion. At the end of her life, Oriana Fallaci was being sued in France, Italy, Switzerland and sundry other jurisdictions by groups who believed her opinions were not merely disagreeable but criminal. In France, Michel Houellebecq was sued by Muslim and other "anti-racist" groups

who believed opinions held by a *fictional character* in one of his *novels* were not merely disagreeable but criminal.

If there is anything good that one can say about this Euro-Canadian unseriousness it is that the ultimate consequences (i.e. the eventual demise of all freedom of speech, complete capitulation to the demands of the Islamo-grievance industry) are still only hypothetical and, in any case, are years from realization. The same, sadly, cannot be said of the American version of this unseriousness.

Today, a mere four weeks from the Iowa Caucuses and less than eleven months from the selection of George W. Bush's successor, both political parties seem so unconcerned with the war and related national security matters that they have begun drifting toward candidates who openly revel in their lack of national security *bona fides* and their foreign policy unseriousness.

The Democratic challenger and now-Iowa frontrunner, the first-term Senator from Illinois, proudly proclaims that he is prepared to tackle American foreign policy because he lived abroad as a child. His Republican counterpart, the silver-tongued Baptist minister and former Governor of Arkansas, naively believes that the key to foreign affairs is to apply to them the Golden Rule. "You treat others the way you like to be treated," he recently told *The Des Moines Register*. "That's to me the fundamental issue that has to be re-established in our dealings with other countries."

Of course, in fairness, we should note that alternative candidates, others with more experience and who should know better, don't necessarily inspire confidence in their seriousness. It is worth remembering, we think, that the other big-time Democrat, the one on whom the smart money is still being bet, is married to the man whose most significant contribution to the war on terror was to fire a few cruise missiles into some empty tents and an aspirin factory, all in the hopes of distracting the nation from the grand jury testimony during which he quibbled over the parsing of the word "is."

One shudders to think what type of foreign policy decisions a repeat administration might make, and what misconduct it might be made to conceal.

But of all the signs of American unseriousness regarding national security and the war on terror, perhaps none is graver or potentially more immediately relevant than the most recent National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) on the nuclear activities of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the public and political response to that document.

As you likely know, last week the vaunted American "intelligence community" told us all that we can rest easily, safe in the knowledge that the Mad Mullahs of Iran are not building nuclear weapons, are not finalizing arrangements for the long-anticipated Second Holocaust, and are not planning to unleash the forces of chaos that will, in turn, precipitate the return of the 9<sup>th</sup> Imam and the End of Times. These revelations have been greeted from all segments of the political community – right, left, and in-between – as reason for celebration, relaxation, or simply to continue heaping scorn upon George Bush and the dastardly neocons. Whatever the reaction, though, nothing is more obvious in this than the fact that neither the political nor media elites in this country are in any way serious about the global threats posed by Iran and the shakiness and/or insignificance of this report.

Anyone serious about Iran and national security would know that there are several limitations that render this report only modestly relevant at best. First, there is the fact that the intelligence community, such as it is, has, in the past, been less than stellar in its analysis of matters relating to Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs) and matters relating to the Islamic world, and Iran in particular. The intelligence community, of course, was caught off guard by the Iranian Revolution in 1979. It was caught off-guard by the advanced state of Saddam Hussein's WMD programs in the early 1990s. It was caught off guard by the North Koreans' development of nuclear capabilities. It was caught off guard again by the state of Saddam Hussein's WMD programs in the early 2000s, this time drastically overestimating his capabilities. It was caught off guard

by the advanced state of the Libyan nuclear weapons program in 2003. And, most relevant in this case, it reported with “high confidence” precisely the opposite about Iran’s nuclear programs just two years ago. Clearly this is a record that should not inspire a great deal of confidence.

A second problem is that powerful factions within the intelligence community, and within the CIA in particular, have been playing politics with national security matters for some time now, actively and aggressively undermining President Bush and his administration’s policies. Many critics of the NIE’s conclusions believe that the document must, at the very least, be viewed with skepticism for precisely this reason. As the former United Nations ambassador John Bolton put it last week:

Too much of the intelligence community is engaging in policy formulation rather than “intelligence” analysis, and too many in Congress and the media are happy about it . . .

[T]he headline finding – that Iran halted its nuclear weapons program in 2003 – is written in a way that guarantees the totality of the conclusions will be misread. In fact, there is little substantive difference between the conclusions of the 2005 NIE on Iran’s nuclear capabilities and the 2007 NIE. Moreover, the distinction between “military” and “civilian” programs is highly artificial, since the enrichment of uranium, which all agree Iran is continuing, is critical to civilian and military uses. Indeed, it has always been Iran’s “civilian” program that posed the main risk of a nuclear “breakout.”

The real differences between the NIEs are not in the hard data but in the psychological assessment of the mullahs’ motives and objectives. The current NIE freely admits to having only moderate confidence that the suspension

continues and says that there are significant gaps in our intelligence and that our analysts dissent from their initial judgment on suspension. This alone should give us considerable pause.

But the biggest problem with the NIE is not so much the report itself, but the attention being paid it by political leaders of both parties and by the mainstream press. Let’s assume for a moment that the report is 100% accurate and that the Mullahs did, in fact, halt their nuclear weapons programs four years ago and have no current plans to restart them. Still, in our estimation, the only appropriate response to such a report would be “So what?”

We know that Americans have ever shortening attention spans, but this is ridiculous. Are we really to believe that we can rest easy, that we can believe that Iran is no longer a grave and deadly threat to the global community, simply because the mullahs are not now pursuing nuclear weapons?

Are these people serious? Well, actually, they’re not. If they were, they would acknowledge the fact that the United States does not need an excuse like nuclear weapons to go to war with Iran. The United States is, in fact, already at war with Iran. Iran started this war, and it started it so long ago that the commencement of hostilities took place when one of us at The Political Forum was in third grade and when the other of us still had a full head of hair. This war began not when George W. Bush declared Iran a party to the “Axis of Evil,” but when Jimmy Carter stood silently and watched as Iranian terrorists – including the current Iranian president – attacked sovereign U.S. territory and took dozens of American civilians prisoner, holding them illegally for more than year. This war began back when Ross Perot was best known as a successful can-do billionaire who wanted only to bring the American prisoners home, not as the kooky little guy who twice ran for president.

Roughly two years ago, we semi-seriously predicted the assassination of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, not at the hands of foreign enemies, but at those of his clerical masters. Our reasoning went

something like this: Ahmadinejad has been sufficiently demonized by the Bush administration and the global community in general, and he is now the official poster-child for Iranian belligerence and nuclear ambition. But he is also merely a toothless figurehead, who serves simply to deflect attention from the Islamic Republic's real leaders. He could, therefore, be sacrificed, thus placating the global community and allowing his successor to repair relations around the globe. And all the while, the real powers that be in Iran would continue with their plans as if nothing had changed, knowing full well that Ahmadinejad's "sacrifice" had bought them some cover and some time.

The point, of course, was and is that the figurehead of the government doesn't matter one whit. It's the regime itself that matters. And the regime has been at war with the West, with the United States, and with Israel for nearly three decades. Iran may or may not be currently constructing nuclear weapons. But there is no question that it is still leading the global Islamist war against the United States. Khomeini started this war. Khomeini continues it. And the matter of a nuclear bomb is irrelevant to the maintenance of this war. Nukes would certainly affect the conduct and tactics of the war, but in no way does their existence or non-existence affect whether or not it is being waged.

Our inclination here is to blame the Democrats for this woeful state of unseriousness regarding Iran. The Baby Boomer liberals, who have always suffered from a fundamental self-absorption and related inability to see beyond their own immediate experiences, have also unquestionably, turned the war on terror into "Bush's war." Whether they did so out of ignorance or power-lust or, as we believe, some combination of the two, the Democrats have taken a longstanding conflict with radical Islam and have tied it specifically to Bush, apparently believing that discrediting a president they despise is more important than confronting the face of evil in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

At the same time, we can't let the Republicans off the hook completely, since some of them have followed the Democrats' lead and tried to turn the war on terror into "Bush's war." The difference between these Republicans and their Democratic brethren is that the Republicans cannot plead ignorance and thus must be presumed to have acted wholly in conjunction with political opportunism.

The Bush administration too bears some blame here. As we have argued on countless occasions, the administration's willingness and ability to communicate the importance and consequences of this war have been feeble at best. President Bush has done many wonderful things in this struggle, but he appears never to have fully understood the transcendent nature of the war and has therefore never communicated that transcendence effectively. We believe that the history books will judge Bush favorably. But many truly great and truly serious war leaders, like Roosevelt and Churchill, were judged favorably even before the histories were written.

All things considered, we'd like to be upbeat about the state of the world. After all, the security situation in Iraq has improved so dramatically that no one, save Harry Reid, can pretend otherwise. And as the inimitable Michael Barone noted this morning, "the world looks safer, friendlier, more hopeful than it did as we approached Christmastime last year."

After the events of the last week, though, we just can't be comfortable that the situation is going to improve. From Canadian Human Rights Commissions to Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to the CIA, it seems that the world is filled with unseriousness at what really should be a time of resolute seriousness. Who knows? Maybe the country will get lucky and a serious presidential candidate will emerge from Iowa and New Hampshire and restore our confidence in the country's political class. Of course, with only one or two such candidates in the respective races, we're not exactly holding our breath.

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