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THEY SAID IT

“So you’ve been over into Russia?” said Bernard Baruch, and I answered very literally, “I have been over into the future, and it works.”

The Autobiography of Lincoln Steffens, 1931.

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“Beijing, you are host to the present and gateway to the future.”

Jacques Rogge, President of the International Olympic Committee, immediately before Chinese President Hu Jintao officially opened the Olympic Games in Beijing last week.

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THE MURDERERS AMONG US.

Lincoln Steffen’s famous quote, cited above, about Russia in 1919 has been the subject of much ridicule over the past half-century or so. And why not? The “Red Terror” had been on going for almost two years by the time Steffens visited Russia. Tens of thousands of Russians had already been slaughtered and anyone paying attention could see that many more were to follow. Indeed, Yuri Martov, the head of the Mensheviks had written the following in 1918.

The beast has licked hot human blood. The man-killing machine is brought into motion . . . blood breeds blood . . . The reign of terror established by the Bolsheviks since October 1917 has filled the air of Russian fields with vapors of human blood . . .

The Black Book of Communism, a joint effort by several French historians and published in 1999, noted the following about that period, which discredits any contention that Steffens was simply not exposed to any of the groups of individuals who suffered under Lenin’s terror.

Unlike the terror of the French Revolution . . . terror under Lenin was directed at all political parties and at all layers of society: nobles, the bourgeoisie, soldiers, policemen, Constitutional Democrats, Mensheviks, Socialist Revolutionaries, and the entire mass of the population, including peasants and workers.

Needless to say, we have always shared the widespread disdain that history has heaped on Steffen’s willfully ignorant prediction. And, until recently, we would have had a similar view about Jacques Rogge’s cloying contention, cited above, that China is the “gateway to the future.” After all, as with Steffen’s Russia, China

today is a highly repressive, deeply corrupt, police state run by a gang of common thugs who have no regard for the rights or even the lives of the individual citizens over whom they rule, *sans* any form of popular mandate no less.

But we are not so certain anymore that either Steffens' or Rogge's statement is in error. Steffens was, of course, very premature in his optimism over the pending success of Russian totalitarianism. And if Rogge is right about China being the "gateway to the future," we would argue that he is right for the wrong reasons. Nevertheless, we are slowly coming to the conclusion that the above-cited observations of both of these men may yet prove prescient; that the future model for governments all over the globe will not be "capitalist liberal democracies" as Francis Fukuyama maintained in his best-selling 1992 book, *The End of History and The Last Man*, but repressive kleptocracies, run by gangster capitalists, as in Russia and China today.

The reason for our change of mind? Among other things, it stems from a combination of technological innovations and an awareness of a growing laxity among Americans of the dangers of getting too chummy with evil. Let us explain.

Because of the enormous size of Russia and China, both in population and landmass, the early Russian and Chinese communists had to kill, quite literally, millions of people in order to achieve the kind of mass intimidation that was necessary for them to gain control. And they had to continue the killings and maintain police-state conditions for many decades in order to keep that control.

According to R. J. Rummel's 1998 book *Death By Government*, Lenin and Stalin were responsible for the murder of approximately 50 million civilians, the large majority of them citizens of the Soviet Union. Rummel estimates that the great hero and founder of modern day China, Mao Tse-Tung, whose giant portrait graces one side of Tiananmen Square and whose moldering body resides in a tourist attraction

there, was personally responsible for the deaths of some 37.8 million individuals. Relative to Mao's murderous regime, Rummel says the following:

Indeed, from October 1949 to 1987, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) probably killed more than 35.2 million of its own subjects. These were "landlords" and "rich" peasants, "counterrevolutionaries" and "bandits," "leftists," "rightists," and "capitalist roaders," "bourgeoisie," scientists, intellectuals, and scholars, Kuomintang "agents" and Western "spies," "wrong" and "bad" elements, and often loved ones, relatives, and friends. Even babies.

Perhaps a way of better comprehending this is in terms of the rough risk of a citizen's being killed by the Communist Party of China. Since 1949, conservatively, 45 out of every thousand people have been killed, or almost one out of every 20 men, women and children.

Murder on this scale turned out to be extremely costly in many ways, as were the "iron curtain" policies that were necessary to stop the masses in both Russia and China from realizing the wretchedness of their condition vis-à-vis the rest of the world.

Among other things, these consequences included the necessity of iron-fisted, state control of virtually all aspects of society, both cultural and economic, which resulted in a terribly inefficient allocation of capital, an extremely low productivity rate, an inability to reap the manifest benefits of international free trade, globe-wide enmity, and the development of a sullen, nihilistic citizenry.

These and other factors led most outside observers, including us, to believe that both communist states would prove to be unstable over an extended period of time; that they would eventually be forced to abandon their thuggish, totalitarian forms of government in favor of the aforementioned "capitalist

liberal democracy” model. This belief was strongly reinforced when the Soviet Union collapsed in 1989, and when China was led by fears of what had happened in the Soviet Union to open its system to some aspects of capitalism.

But something happened on the road to this happily awaited transition from kleptocracy to capitalist liberal democracy. For starters, technological advances have allowed both China and Russia to become considerably more adroit at using murder, torture, and other forms of intimidation as a means for controlling dissent. Due to enormous advances in the field of surveillance methods and devices, individual “enemies of the state” are much more easily identified and separated from the mere complainers than they were in “old days,” which allows the killings to be more selective and, thus, less disruptive, socially and economically. And because of the globalization of news, one killing can intimidate as many people as the murder of an entire village once did.

Arguably, for example, the well publicized poisoning of Kremlin critic Aleksandr Litvinenko in London in 2006 with a dose of highly radioactive polonium-210 sent as clear a message to his fellow dissidents in Russia as the murder of several thousand innocents would have in the old days, and at a much lower cost to the economy and to the nation’s standing in the global community.

But more importantly, murder, punitive detention without charge or trial, government harassment, imprisonment and house arrest of critics of the government, censorship of the Internet and other media, repression of minorities and religious groups, and public executions are much more easily forgiven, or at last overlooked, in the West today than the genocidal activities favored by the beloved founders of these states.

After all, what pray tell are these complainers in Russia and China complaining about? Can they not buy an I-Pod if they wish? A designer purse? Can they not surf those areas of the worldwide web that their rulers deem non-subversive? Is not China the “gateway to the future?” Can these fools not tell, as President

Bush did, by gazing in Vladimir Putin’s eyes that this former KGB plug-ugly is “very straight forward and trustworthy?”

Now we are not advocating war or even unfriendly relations with either Russia or China. We are simply suggesting that, as things stand now, there is no reason to believe that these murderous regimes will change any time soon. From the perspective of the ruling elite of these nations, there is no immediate penalty whatsoever for remaining as they are. Indeed, if they play their cards right, there may be great rewards in the currency of global power. And the penalty for attempting to liberalize could be the gallows.

Moreover, they may be on to something. According to a recent Pew Research Center report on a poll it conducted in 24 nations, 86% of the Chinese people surveyed said they were content with the country’s direction, up from 48% in 2002. The next highest country, Australia, was 25 percentage points lower, at 61%. And 82% of Chinese were satisfied with their national economy, up from 52%.

By comparison, only 23 percent of people surveyed from the United States said they were satisfied with their country’s direction and only 20 percent said the American economy was good. Russians were the third most-satisfied people with their country’s direction, at 54 percent.

Now far be it from us to attempt to explain the source of these folks’ satisfaction. Expectations clearly play a big roll in such matters. The question is whether this is good news or bad for the United States, or for humanity in general. True contentment is a blessed thing, of course. For one thing, it promotes peace. But history teaches us to be wary when the citizens of large and powerful nations, such as Russia and China, embrace evil as a means of restoring national pride.

But the true danger is not that this evil has beguiled the Russian and the Chinese people, but that it is becoming attractive, or at least perfectly acceptable, to the rest of the world. After all, evil is highly contagious, especially in today’s environment where moral relativism is considered by the elite as a sign

of virtuous tolerance. Evil offers salve for pangs of conscience and shortcuts for success. Tocqueville stated this latter point as follows:

There is some danger that our impatience for quick results may lead us to choose instruments which, though perhaps more efficient for achieving the particular ends, are not compatible with the preservation of a free society. The increasing tendency to rely on administrative coercion and discrimination where a modification of the general rules of law might, perhaps more slowly, achieve the same object . . . is still a powerful legacy of the socialist period which is likely to influence policy for a long time to come.

In the meantime, we can enjoy watching the marvelous and disciplined athletes from these two nations perform in the Olympics in Beijing, and pray, for their sakes, that Jacques Rogge was wrong when he proclaimed that China is the gateway to the future. They deserve better than that.

THE MONSTERS AMONG US.

While most of the major media types were focusing their efforts this past week on the sordid love life of a has-been/never-was politician whose career was essentially over anyway, and flagellating themselves for not catching on to the story in the first TEN MONTHS since the *National Enquirer* broke it, the real news of political relevance was taking place thousands of miles away, in the quiet Colorado town of Idledale, about 14 miles southwest of Denver. According to *Fox News*:

A mountain lion crept through an open door into a house outside Denver, snatched a Labrador retriever from a bedroom where two people were sleeping and left the dog's dead body outside, wildlife managers said Tuesday. No one else was hurt in the home . . .

Wildlife officials later trapped the 130-pound male cat using the dog's body as bait and fatally shot it.

This is a gruesome story, but one that could have been worse – much worse – and that should serve as a warning to others. A warning that monsters are real, and that they kill. Or as law professor and blogfather Glenn “Instapundit” Reynolds put it, “Monsters are loose, and some people know it, while others pretend not to.” Let us explain.

Back in 1991, a teenager named Scott Lancaster was attacked and killed by a mountain lion in Boulder, Colorado. This was in the middle of the day and within view of his high school. That attack and the subsequent investigation prompted National Public Radio's science reporter David Baron to write a book on the subject of mountain lions and their relationship to modern man. That book, *A Beast in the Garden: A Modern Parable of Man and Nature*, was published five years ago, and it does indeed offer what the title promises, a modern parable – one that, when extrapolated slightly, is particularly relevant this week.

Baron's tale is one we have all heard many times before. Man encroaches on nature, and nature responds. In this case, man has been moving slowly but surely into the habitat of the mountain lion, and, as was bound to happen, mountain lions responded, by attacking and killing livestock, domestic animals, and people. Scott Lancaster, among others.

But this is not your simple, run-of-the-mill, blame-the-developers morality play. Baron examines the history and consequences of man's interaction without mountain lions and finds that the cause of such attacks is complicated and has more to do with man's hyper-consciousness about disturbing these animals than any actual disturbance of them.

In his review of the book, Glenn Reynolds describes the evolution of Americans' interaction with nature over the last century, beginning with the “fluffy-bunny syndrome” in which predators are classified as a moral

blight (for killing fluffy bunnies, natch), and ending with “fluffy mountain lion syndrome,” whereby not just bunnies, but all of nature is revered and “loved,” and man does his best to “co-exist” with all of nature’s creatures, including mountain lions.

The problem with this, of course, is that all of nature’s creatures were not meant to coexist. Some are killers. And they, well, kill. Unfortunately, there are some who refuse to accept this fact of nature.

As Reynolds notes, you can’t exactly blame the predators for killing; that is, after all, what predators do. Rather, the villain in this story is man – not all men, mind you, but those who pretend, despite the evidence, that these “monsters of God” are not monsters at all, that they simply need to be treated with respect and “dignity.” Or as Reynold’s puts it, “So many were so invested in the notion that by thinking peaceful thoughts they could will into existence a state of peaceful affairs that they ignored the evidence right in front of them, which tended to suggest that cougars were quite happy to eat anything that was juicy, delicious, and unlikely to fight back.”

The moral of the story doesn’t translate exactly from nature to politics. For example, in politics, i.e. man’s interaction with man, the propensity for killers to kill cannot be blamed on instinct. It can, indeed *must*, be blamed on evil. That notwithstanding, much of the basic lesson does, indeed, transition well, if not entirely seamlessly.

In his explanation for the violent encounters between man and beast, David Baron writes that the residents of Boulder, Colorado, and other like them were trying to “re-create a mythic past – a time when man and beast lived in harmony.” The parallel here is too obvious to miss.

That “mythic past” is a common feature on the political left, dating to the medieval Millenarian heresies and finding its clearest expression in the work of Jean Jacques Rousseau, the godfather of the modern left. The “myth,” clearly based on the biblical creation story, nonetheless glosses over original sin and its

effects; or, to put it in secular terms, it disregards “the human condition.” This was no accident, of course, for as we have noted often in these pages, that was Rousseau’s greatest philosophical contribution, his insistence that “original sin” was a lie, that it is man’s institutions that enable evil, and that proper institutions could both eliminate evil and, to borrow from Baron, “re-create a mythic past,” the idyllic state of nature.

Since the end of the Cold War at least, Europe, as a collective, has put Rousseau’s thoughts into action, insisting that previously the institutions were corrupt and that the proper, most effective way to manage geopolitics and to conduct foreign affairs is to rely on “soft power” rather than brute force. Soft power, of course, presupposes that, all men being rational, reasoned negotiation can solve all of the world’s most pressing crises. Not only must one take as fact that all men will negotiate in good faith, one must also believe that evil does not exist or, at the very least, will not intrude into man’s global affairs.

The American left has also embraced the tenets of soft power, believing or at least publicly claiming, that reason and negotiation can and should be employed in all or nearly all cases. Note that the bill of indictment against George Bush has long been his willingness to employ hard power, i.e. military force, rather than to rely on the power of talk. Almost since the day the Twin Towers were destroyed, the political left has argued that the urge for “retribution” must be suppressed and that the skills of diplomacy must be employed. John Kerry ran against Bush in 2004 as a superior diplomat; and Barack Obama likewise runs against Bush (but not as his opponent) as the man who can and will reestablish America’s good name by sitting down with and discussing global matters with anyone and everyone, without “preconditions.”

Over the past decade, what this has led to in Europe, then, is “fluffy Serbian Nationalist Syndrome.” And in the United States, “fluffy Jihadist Syndrome.” The problem isn’t that Milosevic or Osama or Saddam were bad people; it’s that they were misunderstood. And we, in the West, didn’t make it any easier on them

by imposing our lifestyles upon them. We needed to appreciate their culture and respect their space and concerns. Or so the reasoning goes. And then the killers kill.

But even when they kill, it's not their fault. It's ours. If only we'd been more respectful or more understanding or less Zionist – or something, anything – then this wouldn't have happened. It's the institutions, you know, not the killers.

Last week, we were exposed to two new and bloody variants of this disorder: Fluffy Russian Syndrome and Fluffy Chicom Syndrome.

When the Russians rolled their tanks into the breakaway Georgian province of South Osetia, most rational people understood what was going on. The Russians have long mourned the collapse of their empire, have long coveted the recapture of the Central Asian components of that empire, and have done little to hide their intentions. And as the bombs began to fall, Republican presidential hopeful John McCain called a spade a spade and condemned the Russian aggression.

By contrast, his Democratic counterpart, Barack Obama, asked if we couldn't please talk about this before someone gets hurt. Actually, what he asked for were "talks among all sides and said the United States, the U.N. Security Council and other parties should try to help bring about a peaceful resolution." He understood, you see, that the Russians were unhappy, but he knew that it could all be worked out. Mountain lions can, after all, be appeased, or at least satiated, can't they?

Sadly, though, Obama's response was not the worst of it. As we said, anyone paying even the slightest attention could have seen this coming, anyone that is except for George W. Bush, who bragged some years ago about looking into the eyes of Vladimir Putin and seeing a fluffy bunny (or words to that effect). Bush, it should be said, has been remarkable in his willingness to accept that evil exists and his willingness to do something about it. But he too is a product of his culture. And he too missed the signs and chose

instead to live "peacefully" alongside the killer Putin. And now the killer is killing again. And threatening to re-absorb Georgia. And then Azerbaijan. And then the entirety of central Asia. How fluffy, we have to wonder, will this mountain lion be when he controls the entire oil pipeline that was intended to bypass both Russia and Iran?

Elsewhere in the global wilderness, the entire world turned out last week to sing the praises of the Chinese regime and to participate in its "coming out party." No one dared address the nature of their hosts, and even those who could manage the gall to pick nits could only complain about the quality of the air. Certainly no one had the bad manners to call out the killers in their midst.

No one, that is, except Claudia Rossett, who, interestingly enough, had been to Beijing before and had seen handiwork of this very same regime before – 19 years before, to be exact, in June of 1989. For those of you who may have forgotten the events of that month, here is what Rossett wrote last week, recalling what she saw:

Nineteen years have passed, but as one of the eye-witnesses in the Beijing streets and in Tiananmen Square itself to that night of June 3-4, 1989, I look at this map and in memory can still hear the first cracks of the bullets, feel the treads of armored personnel carriers shaking the pavement, and see the people looking grimly at the advancing rows of helmets, silhouetted against the burning roadblocks. They were clutching bricks and bottles against the guns of their own country's army. I remember a young man I saw closeup, shot in the chest, one of seven with bullet wounds I saw carried to a makeshift medical tent at the north end of Tiananmen Square during the final hours – and wonder if any of them are named in this document. I remember the demonstrators sitting in the spring breeze, shortly before dawn, on the steps of the

monument to China's Revolutionary Heroes, surrounded on three sides by tens of thousands of soldiers in the final standoff in Tiananmen Square – and facing off against the huge portrait of Mao, the white Goddess of Liberty statue that stood in Tiananmen for less than a week before China's rulers knocked it down.

Here's the account I filed that June 4th, recording what I had witnessed, and trying to answer my editor's question, what does it mean? . . . in the closing paragraph, I tried to set down something that still applies today; not least as visitors to Beijing survey the massive security efforts, not all of which are intended strictly to protect the Olympics:

“No doubt when the Chinese government has finished dealing with its people, the tidy square will be presented again as a suitable site for tourists, visiting dignitaries and the Chinese public to come honor the heroes of China's glorious revolution. It will be important then to remember the heroes of 1989, the people who cried out so many times these past six weeks, ‘Tell the world what we want. Tell the truth about China.’”

Tell the truth about China, you say? Why would anyone do that? They make cheap t-shirts, you know. And their economic growth has averaged about 8%

over the last decade. And there is a TON of money to be made investing in Chinese companies and brokering investment banking deals. Tell the truth about China? Okay. The place may be mountain-lion central, but so what? We can live with that, right?

Well, we can. But there will be those who can't.

It's ironic. As Glenn Reynolds noted, it was the mountain-man cum politician Teddy Roosevelt who advocated that man maintain a healthy relationship with nature, lest he lose his understanding of it, his appreciation for its victims and its monsters. Today, it's Roosevelt's successors and namesakes who seem to have forgotten the lesson he tried to teach. There are too many among us who have lost the understanding that Roosevelt implored and who thus refuse to believe in monsters – be they animal or human – and who refuse to believe that killers still kill and that they will eventually kill even those who purport to love them and have their best interests at heart.

As you watch and read about the Olympics, the Russian invasion of Georgia, and the foreign policy battles between the respective candidates for the presidency, remember Scott Lancaster. Remember Tiananmen Square. And remember the frog in the fable of the frog and the scorpion and the scorpion's final words: “I had to sting you. I am a scorpion, after all. It's my nature.”

It's their nature.

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