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THEY SAID IT

If we attend carefully to the psychology of the persons who manifest such an eagerness to serve us, we shall find that they are even more eager to control us . . . Let one consider again Mr. Woodrow Wilson, who, more than any other recent American, sought to extend our idealism beyond our national frontiers. In the pursuit of his scheme for world service, he was led to make light of the constitutional checks on his authority and to reach out almost automatically for unlimited power. If we refused to take his humanitarian crusading seriously we were warned that we should “break the heart of the world” . . . The truth is that this language, at once abstract and sentimental, reveals a temper at the opposite pole from that of the genuine statesman . . .

The particular confusion of the things of God and the things of Caesar promoted by Mr. Wilson and the other “idealists” needs to have brought to bear on it the second of the sayings of Jesus that I have cited (“By their fruits ye shall know them”). The idealists so plainly fail to meet the test of fruits that they are talking refuge more and more, especially since the war, in their good intentions. The cynic might, indeed, complain that they already have hell paved at least twice over with their good intentions. We can no more grant that good intentions are enough in dealing with men than we can grant that they suffice a chemist who is handling high explosives. Above all, no person in a position of political responsibility can afford to let any “ideal” come between him and a keen inspection of the facts.

Irving Babbitt, *Democracy and Leadership*, 1924.

PHYSICIAN, HEAL THYSELF.

This is the second installment of our annual “Forecast” issue. It deals with foreign affairs and carries the same caveat as last week’s issue on domestic matters, namely that we know better than to think that we can peer into the future, but attempt to do so with the intention of possibly shedding some light on the present, with an eye to how it might affect the nation in 2009.

Prediction #1: *Contrary to the forecast made during the campaign by Vice-President-elect Joe Biden, Barack Obama’s mettle will not be “tested” early in his presidency by a foreign adversary or even by a “strategic competitor,” as President Bush once described China.*

Why? Because no nation, friend or foe, needs to conduct such a “test.” All know that Barack would have no choice, as an “untested” “young” president from the dovish side of his dovish party, but to respond to a

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Physician, Heal Thyself.

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serious “test” of his resolve with resolve. Moreover, and more importantly, all nations know that Barack, if he is not forced to respond to some “test,” will threaten no one.

In fact, from the perspective of America’s enemies and rivals, Barack has to be the least threatening president to come down the pike since Jimmy Carter. He has a record of sympathy with both leftist and Islamic dogma. He has no apparent chauvinistic characteristics. Indeed, he has an indisputable record of sympathy for those who find nothing in America’s past to warrant pride or patriotism. He has said that he wants to soften America’s image in the world, to heal old wounds, to make new friends. He is not judgmental. Indeed, he has a record of requiring very little of his friends in the way of character or integrity. He is not a “cowboy.” He has none of the macho, American male characteristics that much of the world, including many Americans today, find so objectionable. In fact, he is a prototype of the trendy “metrosexual male.”

In short, Barack is a talker. So why, pray tell, would any nation wish to “test him,” to call him out, so to speak. Why would they not talk? Talk may be cheap, as the saying goes, but it buys one of the most precious of all strategic commodities, namely time.

Certainly, Iran and North Korea could use as much time as they can get to prepare for the final face off with the “great Satan.” After all, nuclear weapons take time to build and to perfect. President Bush gave both nations eight years. There is no reason for them to believe that Barack will not give them at least another four. And why, one might ask, would Russia, China, Lebanon, Syria, or any other nation for that matter be in a hurry to employ sticks, when Barack appears to have an appetite for carrots?

Prediction #2: Tension in the Middle East will increase throughout 2009, but there will be no major, new “hot war” in the region.

Obviously this prediction is based on a great many “iffy” assumptions. We assume, for example, that while Israel will not be any closer to “peace” with its

Islamic enemies by the end of 2009, it won’t have to defend itself in an all out war during the year either. Aside from continuing the routine task of protecting itself from assaults by various radical Palestinian groups, as it is doing now in Gaza, and preparing for an eventual, full-scale confrontation with Iran, the most important challenge Israel will face this year will be to resist efforts by the Obama administration to force it to make further concessions to its neighbors in exchange for fatuous promises of peace.

Israel can be certain that Barack will say all the right things in public. But, given his long association and friendship with numerous, high profile Jew baiters among America’s black and radical leftist communities, the Jewish state can’t necessarily assume Obama’s good faith. After all, the essence of the long-term danger to Israel’s existence has never been that the United States would formally abandon it, but that the promise of a “lasting peace” with Islam and the prospect of a steady supply of oil would persuade its American friend it to sell it out under the auspices of “trying to be helpful.”

Relative to Iran, we assume that the Mullahs believe that time is on their side; that “talks” with the Obama administration will provide it with a global platform from which to declare its peaceful intentions while continuing to prepare for the holy war to come; that they are slowly gaining ground in their proxy war against Israel; that their efforts to find common ground with anti-Israeli organizations among the Sunni nations is working; that their atomic weapons development program is on track; that Barack will have no more stomach than George Bush had for a direct confrontation with them over their nuclear weapons development; and that Barack will do all he can to keep Israel from launching a surgical strike against their nuclear facilities.

We assume that Barack will let General Petraeus handle matters in both Iraq and Afghanistan. He has nothing to gain by interfering with the basic plan as it exists and much to lose if he does so and things go wrong. Our belief is that things will improve somewhat in Iraq during the year and worsen somewhat in Afghanistan. At some point, Obama will

have to decide whether continuing the Afghan war is worth it to him politically, but probably not during 2009.

The big new problem that will face the Obama crowd will be the tension between Pakistan and India and Pakistan and the United States. Mutually assured destruction will keep India and Pakistan from a nuclear war with each other, at least in 2009, just as this much maligned but alarmingly persuasive reality kept the U.S.S.R. and the United States from demolishing each other during the Cold War. Pakistan's need for U.S. friendship during this period of tension will keep it from doing more than complaining loudly about American military incursions across the border into Pakistan from Afghanistan.

Finally, the global recession will force all nations, including Russia and China, to concentrate on keeping order at home rather than causing more than the routine amount of mischief abroad.

Prediction #3: The Obama/Clinton diplomatic initiative to restore America's moral authority, its international standing and respect, and its legitimacy as a world leader and as the bedrock foundations of American influence – to borrow a host of clichés from the liberal press – will fail on all counts.

This is a highly subjective prediction and one that won't be easily confirmed one way or the other. But we believe that the issues it raises are extremely important to any consideration of the probable consequences of the Obama administration's foreign policy initiatives this year. So let us explain.

Roughly stated, modern day American foreign policy can be viewed as a struggle or, perhaps more accurately, an uneasy merger between two contrasting opinions as to the primary objective of the nation's actions abroad. The first of these centers on the belief that the United States is an integral part of some grand, historical order, ordained by God, or simply by destiny, to advance the cause of mankind, or simply to "do good."

This is an extremely common and ancient belief among nations and people, although the exact nature of God's alleged intention for any particular group of "chosen" people can vary widely. Its domestic roots can be traced to John Winthrop's famous "city upon a hill" sermon of 1630 in which he basically proclaimed that his Puritans had formed a special covenant with God to advance His cause in the New World.

The second, contrasting view of the purpose of foreign policy can best be described as *realpolitik*. It too is an ancient idea. But it was first, formally codified as a modern, operative political philosophy in the mid 19th century by August Ludwig von Rochau in an essay entitled *Grundzüge der Realpolitik*, which posited the notion that moral law only applies to individuals, that the state's only obligation to itself and to mankind is to maintain its existence and develop its potentialities. The impetus for this work was the failure of the revolution of 1848. Rochau's message was that Germans should renounce the idealistic demands behind this revolution for such abstractions as liberty and democracy and accept the advent of the all-powerful state, as envisioned and implemented by Bismarck.

At about the same time, another German, one Heinrich von Treitschke, expanded on this theme in several works, arguing that foreign relations should be divorced from religious, ethical, and emotional considerations; that diplomacy should be conducted for the sole purpose of advancing the interests of the state via formalized diplomatic relations, elaborate coalition building, multilateral consultation, balance of power considerations, and considerable effort to assure that things don't spin out of control due to some mistake made in anger. The domestic roots of this concept can be traced to Washington's famous "Farewell Address," in which he lectured at length against entangling the United States in the affairs of other nations.

There was no real conflict between these two ideas during the 19th century. That is, Washington's warning to avoid foreign entanglements was not generally viewed as being antagonistic toward America's

“divinely ordained” expansion of its borders across North America and later to annex Cuba, the Philippines, and Guam. After all, “manifest destiny” didn’t involve the kinds of entanglements that George seemed to have in mind.

The tension between these two camps came into full bloom in the immediate aftermath of World War I, when President Wilson, like an apparition of John Winthrop, insisted on the existence of a divine link between America’s destiny and God’s word. A great description of his determination on this point can be found in *Presidential Anecdotes*, one of Paul F. Boller Jr.’s many delightful and highly informative books on U.S. Presidents.

Wilson never doubted that he was a foreordained agent, “guided by an intelligent power outside himself,” with important work to do in the world [Lippman]. For him the League of Nations, his most famous enterprise, was not simply a human contrivance for ordering international relations; it represented God’s will and, in rejecting it, the United States was trying futilely to resist its Providential destiny. As Wilson told some friends toward the end of his life: “I have seen fools resist Providence before, and I have seen their destruction . . . That we shall prevail is as sure as God reigns” [Edith Bolling Galt Wilson].

Citing Lloyd George’s memoirs of the peace conference at Versaille, during which Wilson presented his blueprint for the League of Nations and defended it, Boller offers the following humorous anecdote as further evidence of Wilson’s apparent belief that his interventionist foreign policy was a reflection of God’s will.

It was part of the real joy of these conferences to observe [French Prime Minister Georges] Clemenceau’s attitude toward Wilson during the first five weeks . . . If the President took a flight beyond the azure main, as he was occasionally inclined to do without regard to relevance, Clemenceau

would open his great eyes in twinkling wonder, and turn them on me as much as to say: “Here he is off again.” . . . His [Wilson’s] most extraordinary outburst was when he was developing some theme – I rather think it was connected with the League of Nations – which led him to explain the failure of Christianity to achieve its highest ideals. “Why,” he said, “has Jesus Christ so far not succeeded in inducing the world to follow His teaching in these matters? It is because He taught the ideal without devising any practical scheme to carry out his aims.” Clemenceau slowly opened his dark eyes to their widest dimension and swept them round the Assembly to see how the Christians gathered around the table enjoyed his exposure of the futility of their Master.

Boller then, once again, quotes Lloyd George, who sat between Wilson and Clemenceau throughout the conference, as saying the following: “I think I did as well as might be expected seated as I was between Jesus Christ and Napoleon Bonaparte.”

Henry Cabot Lodge Sr. led the opposition to Wilson’s initiative, employing many of the arguments and warnings that Washington included in his Farewell Address. Lodge put it this way in a speech on August 12, 1919.

You may call me selfish if you will, conservative or reactionary, or use any other harsh adjective you see fit to apply, but an American I was born, an American I have remained all my life. I can never be anything else but an American, and I must think of the United States first, and when I think of the United States first in an arrangement like this I am thinking of what is best for the world, for if the United States fails, the best hopes of mankind fail with it.

I have never had but one allegiance - I cannot divide it now. I have loved but one flag and I cannot share that devotion and give affection to the mongrel banner invented for a league.

Internationalism, illustrated by the Bolshevik and by the men to whom all countries are alike provided they can make money out of them, is to me repulsive . . .

We would have our country strong to resist a peril from the West, as she has flung back the German menace from the East. We would not have our politics distracted and embittered by the dissensions of other lands. We would not have our country's vigour exhausted or her moral force abated, by everlasting meddling and muddling in every quarrel, great and small, which afflicts the world . . .

Conservatives won this battle against American participation in the League of Nations and continued right up until the beginning of World War II to oppose foreign entanglements. After that war, the Democrats picked up the old Wilsonian baton and ran with it. President Truman led the way, arguing just as strenuously and much more effectively than Wilson did in favor of U.S. participation in a global organization to make the world a better place. This new and improved organization was, as every schoolboy knows, called the United Nations, which, as Truman noted in his first speech to that august body, bound every member, "legally and morally" to "keep the peace."

More specifically, he argued that "every member is bound to refrain in its international relations from the threat, or use, of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state" and "to the principle that planning, initiating or waging a war of aggression is a crime against humanity for which individuals as well as states shall be tried before the bar of international justice."

This was pure nonsense, of course, and everyone in the room surely knew it, including "give-'em-hell Harry." In any case, those who did not, didn't have a long to wait to discover the truth. Indeed, shortly after the establishment of the United Nations, Hungary fell to a Moscow-engineered communist coup, virtually assuring the take-over of all of Eastern Europe by

the Soviets; it became apparent that the communists were about to defeat Chiang Kai-shek's forces in China; and Secretary of State George Marshall proposed the Marshall Plan, saying that he hoped it would keep France from falling under the influence of Communism and would prevent Soviet plans for Germany from turning that nation into "a congested slum or an economic poor house." At about the same time, it was revealed that Soviet spies had gained access to U.S. atomic secrets. This was followed 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.

During the subsequent Cold War, President Washington's warning against foreign entanglements became passé to conservatives, liberals, Republicans, and Democrats alike. Active global engagement became the centerpiece of America's role in the world. Over time, the debate became not whether but how aggressively the United States should pursue the role of policeman, moral sherpa, and Mother Teresa to the entire world.

Indeed, it finally came to pass, during the opening days of the 21st century, that the "conservative" President George W. Bush invoked God's name in support of a policy "to seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world."

In support of this elaborate, Wilsonian fantasy, Bush's Secretary of State Condi Rice argued that anyone who didn't support the administration's plan to make a "generational commitment" of U.S. blood and money to the goal of "transforming" the Middle East into a group of a nation's with "democratic values" was morally akin to those whose "voices" argued in favor of racial segregation during her childhood in Alabama.

As we noted in these pages at the time in an article entitled "Over The Edge With Condi," this was insane, not just because it was utopian in the extreme, but also in terms of being a foolish plan on which to spend American blood and money.

The interesting thing, and herein lies the point of this prediction, is that Barack and his Secretary of State designate Miss Hillary, who were critical of Bush's democracy initiative from the very beginning, appear to be poised to launch a foreign policy agenda that puts the Bush crowd to shame when it comes to idealism, interventionism, utopianism, and an inclination to meddle in the affairs of all the nations of the world on behalf of some presumed obligation that America has to the good of mankind.

The list of ambitions is so long and elaborate that it's hard to get a handle on the extent to which Obama and company intend to be globally involved, but it is useful to begin considering this prospect with a quote from a speech he gave in Chicago last year in which he called for the creation of a "twenty first century military to stay on the offensive, from Djibouti to Kandahar." Reading this, one wonders if President Wilson, mouldering in his grave, didn't feel a thrill go up his leg when Obamas made this pledge.

Eliminating global poverty, global warming, and genocide are just part of the Barack-Hillary agenda. With thanks to an article by Bob Dreyfuss in *The Nation* entitled "Obama's Evolving Foreign Policy," we would note that, among other things, they plan also to make "investments in agriculture, infrastructure, and economic growth" in developing countries and to establish a "global health infrastructure" to combat infectious diseases, a \$2 billion global education fund, a "civilian assistance corps," and a streamlined development agency staff with a "new cadre of development experts."

They wish to implement a sweeping nation-building and democracy-promotion program, which would include strengthening the National Endowment for Democracy and constructing a civil-military apparatus that would deploy to rescue and rebuild failed and failing states in Africa, Asia and the Middle East. They intend to provide aid to dissidents and democrats from Africa and the Middle East to Russia and China; to "integrate civilian and military capabilities to promote global democracy and development,"

including the creation of "Mobile Development Teams (MDTs) that will bring together personnel from the military, the Pentagon, the State Department and USAID, fully integrating U.S. government efforts in counter-terror, state-building, and post-conflict operations;" and to establish "an expeditionary capability" for non-Pentagon agencies, including the departments of State, Homeland Security, Justice and Treasury. And the list goes on.

No doubt these are all noble projects and certainly, when considered *en masse*, they include enough good intentions to pave the road to hell over many times. Indeed, it is probably safe to say that when taken together they would make Alexander's efforts to Hellenize the then-known world look like a simple "get to know your neighbor" project.

But it seems highly unlikely in the extreme, to us anyway, that this frenzy of aggressive meddling will change either the world or any significant portion of the world's opinion of America. Indeed, it is more likely to open even more bottomless pits of corruption and waste into which the United States can pour blood and money and dramatically expand the list of secondary and tertiary unintended consequences that will worsen rather than improve America's image in the world.

From whence grows our pessimism? Well, we believe that the hard truth is that there are two elements involved in the decline of respect for America in the world that so worries Barack, Hillary, and other Democrats. The first is that nihilism is marching across the globe, seeping into every corner of every civilization, and in the process is destroying the ability of people everywhere to distinguish what is good from what is bad and to recognize and appreciate decency, honor, charity, and kindness when they see it. Thus, it is worth recognizing, in this context, that while people around the globe may well have lost respect for America in recent decades, it would be difficult to identify anything that is decent for which they have gained collective respect during this period.

The second element in the decline of respect for America is that American society has become less deserving of respect, less attractive as a model for other nations. And please note here that we realize that we are toeing a fine line.

There are those who, in the words of Ambassador Kirkpatrick, instinctively “blame America first”; who insist that America is undeserving of respect in general and is less a force for good in the world than a force for evil and for repression. And then there are those, like we, who believe not that America’s problem is that its ideals are irredeemably oppressive, but that the problem lies in the nation’s unwillingness to embrace those ideals.

While certainly better situated than many in the West, the United States too suffers from the sloth and moral apathy of nihilism, and there are factions within its population – deeply entrenched factions – whose most fervent aim is to foment the moral confusion that already cripples much of the civilized world. And, whether Barack knows it or not, the solution to this problem is not for America to increase its efforts to improve others, but to increase its efforts to improve itself and allow its conduct to serve as an example and model to others.

From the perspective of foreign policy, this would involve tempering America’s currently strong Wilsonian inclinations with a healthy dose of humility, prudence, recognition of its own limitations, and even more, a recognition of its own moral failings.

It is highly unlikely that such a message would be understood, by Barack, or by any other American politician of either party. But a place to begin would be to consider the following words from Claes Ryn’s classic 1991 book *The New Jacobinism, Can America Survive*. Claes is Professor of Politics at Catholic University and an old and valued friend of The Political Forum.

Traditional Western morality creates a strong presumption that man’s primary moral obligation is to deal with problems at close range, starting with self. The individual is actually aware of his own weaknesses, aware that much needs to be done to remedy them. Doing well by family, kindred, friends, and colleagues is in itself a demanding task. If this task does not consume the energy of the individual, other heavy and pressing responsibilities await most human beings rather close to home and workplace. These should be attended to before presuming to tell people at a great distance how to live . . .

The modern substitution of a sentimental love of mankind for personal character has shifted the burden of moral responsibility away from individuals, groups, and local communities. Obligations have been transferred to government, which has expanded greatly and become highly centralized. It is now widely believed that a person demonstrates moral worth by wishing to order other people’s lives according to allegedly benevolent political schemes. The stronger that wish, the greater the evidence of virtue. Domestically, this morality places people under the administrative supervision of government. Internationally, it provides a mandate for telling other countries what is good for them.

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