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THEY SAID IT

When the lessons of history were quoted they were answered by the flag and the eagle. When caution was urged in view of possible future exigencies, it was answered by prophecies of military success and denunciations of rebels. When the need of deliberation was urged, it was answered by clamor in regard to the necessities of the government. When it was said that irredeemable paper had always wrought ruin, it was answered that our resources were unlimited, and that these precedents did not make a rule for us. When it was prophesied that the paper would depreciate, and that we should not be able to retrace our steps, the prophets of evil were indignantly pointed to the "pledged faith" of the United States, and asked if they thought that would be violated. The inference that the notes must be made legal tender, because the government needed money, was never analyzed, and its fallacy never shown . . . Whatever strength a nation has is weakened by issuing legal tender notes. One might as well say that it is necessary to open the veins of a weak man who has a heavy physical task to perform. All history shows that paper money with a forced circulation is not a temporary resource. It cannot be taken up and laid down as we choose. It is a mischief easily done but most difficult to cure.

William Graham Sumner, *A History of American Currency*, 1874.

WILL IT WORK?

The big question in everyone's mind right now seems to be whether the Obama "economic package" is going to "work." But this is a nonsense question because the word "work" in this context seems to mean, to paraphrase Humpty Dumpty, just what anyone who uses it chooses it to mean -- neither more nor less. We don't even know what Barack himself thinks it means. Would he be pleased with a return to some semblance of the *status quo ante*? Or does he view the current economic mess as an opportunity to remake a system that he has always viewed as abhorrent? After all, Rahm Emanuel noted just the other day that "you never want a serious crisis to go to waste."

Moreover, it is not even clear that said "package" will have any more meaningful influence on upcoming events than the Coast Guard had on the direction and the destructive nature of Katrina. After all, we're talking about a *global* financial crisis here, which means that at least some of variables involved may be outside the ameliorative effect of one or even two trillion newly printed U.S. dollars, which are only worth anything at all because the paper of virtually every other nation in the world is based on the "full faith and credit" of governments that are even more poorly run than America's. Perhaps, in the final analysis, the question should

In this Issue

Will It Work?

Men Without Chests.

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not be whether the “package” will “work” but whether the cleanup efforts in the aftermath of the storm will be handled wisely and efficiently. And that is likely to be a long way off.

The only thing we can know for certain is that we are living in one of those periods that the great historian Daniel Boorstin described as a “fertile verge,” “a place of encounter between something and something else . . . between kinds of landscape or seascape, between stages of civilization, between ways of thought and ways of life.”

From Boorstin’s perspective, fertile verges were academically fascinating. From the perspective of the average individual living during such a time, they are testing grounds for Herbert Spencer’s much-maligned theory of the survival of the fittest. No question, some individuals are going to get creamed, wiped out, crushed. Pick your cliché. Others are going to get rich, some legally and some not. Some are going to gain considerable economic and political clout. Others are going to lose a great deal of both. No one is going to emerge unchanged from this mess. Nor are any of the nation’s primary social, political, religious, and cultural institutions.

If you have a small amount of emergency cash stashed away, some canned food in the basement, a cord of wood out back, an old Philco radio that still works, a wicker rocker on the front porch, an appreciation for the ludicrous, an aberrant fascination for train wrecks, and the spiritual equanimity to accept without excess rancor a financial fleeing from a bunch of crooks and fools in Washington, you might want to just sit back and enjoy that which Honoré de Balzac and later William Saroyan described as “the human comedy.” Lord knows it’s going to be a fascinating drama.

On the other hand, if you are unable to distance yourself from the tempest, either emotionally or monetarily, you might want to reread and consider the famous advice that Orestes Brownson gave to the students of Dartmouth College in 1843. To wit:

Bind on, if need be, your tunic of coarse serge, and feed on water in which pulse has been boiled, as did Saint Bernard de Clairvaux, or sew you up a suit, ‘one perennial suit,’ of leather, as did the sturdy old George Fox, and putting your trust in God, thus defy the world, and maintain, in all their plentitude, the freedom and dignity of scholarship. Ask not what your age wants, but what it needs; not what it will reward, but what, without which, it cannot be saved; and that go and do; do it thoroughly; and find your reward in the consciousness of having done your duty, and above all in the reflection, that you have been accounted to suffer somewhat for mankind.

As was the case with Katrina as it crashed into the Louisiana and Mississippi coast, no one knows what the extent of the wreckage will be. What we do know is that we are in the midst of a category five, economic hurricane, which, before it is over, will make the destruction wrecked by Katrina look pale by comparison. And like Katrina, it will make permanent changes in the landscape over which it passes. But again like Katrina, the biggest changes will come from the decisions made by the clean up crew. You get a house trailer. You don’t. You get \$300 billion. You get squat.

Now, if you’re looking down on this scene from the moon like Mennipus viewing the Colossus of Rhodes, what you realize is that there is very little if anything that Barack can do about the catastrophe itself. The forces of history are on the move and will not be stopped or even slowed significantly by a mere mortal, even one like Barack with his legendary, messianic qualities. In the final analysis, there is going to be a great deal of pain. What Barack can and will do is attempt to shift the burden of this pain among various individuals and groups based on his preferences as a politician and his own sympathies and prejudices.

But our guess is that his influence on this process will be fairly limited. In the final analysis, given the huge debt burden that the federal government has already

acquired, is in the process of acquiring right now, and will acquire in the future, it will soon have no choice but to begin levying heavy taxes on wealth, in addition to raising taxes on income and fanning the flames of inflation.

The first large and serious proposal along these lines will be to means test both the payments into and the payments out of Medicare and Social Security. Then will come a plan to confiscate money in 401ks and other retirement savings plans under the auspices of “protection;” increased taxes on the sale and possession of “luxury” items and goods that don’t pass the “green” test; much higher confiscatory death taxes; and higher taxes on “unearned income.” This will inevitably be a boon to financial advisers who can come up with means, both legal and illegal, by which people can hide their wealth or move it off shore, but that in turn will simply make the federal confiscation apparatus more powerful.

Another “gimme” will be heavy new regulatory requirements on just about every commercial activity in the nation, along with requirements for huge, mandatory “green” expenditures, which will likely force many small businesses to either close shop or sell to larger organizations that can afford the compliance costs. This consequence, by the way, will not come as a surprise to the regulators. It will be driven by the ongoing merger-of-interests between them and the nation’s large corporations and financial services firms, who will welcome the increased regulatory activities as a competitive tool.

Health care will soon be rationed, *de facto*, *de jure*, or by some combination of both, which will promote the establishment of an extensive off-the-books health care system, and possibly the construction of large, hospitals in Mexico and Canada for super-rich Americans.

Finally, while it is widely believed that it is just a matter of time before the housing industry in the United State gets back to “normal,” our guess is that this will never happen.

You see, if for all practical purposes the government owns the banks, and the banks own the underwater mortgages, someone in the government is going to propose that the banks simply take ownership of the houses and rent them back to the former homeowner at a reduced price via some form of government approved, sponsored, and guaranteed property management companies. This would be a kind of super expansion of HUD’s Section 8 Rental Voucher Program, which “increases affordable housing choices for very low-income households by allowing families to choose privately owned rental housing.” More importantly, it would provide a foundation of a new source of housing activity from which Barney Frank and his friends in Congress could steal. After all, “you never want a serious crisis to go to waste.”

In any case, it might be a good time to nail some plywood over your windows, if you have anything to lose in the governmental looting that is as certain to be a part of the ongoing storm as the wind itself. Hunker down, be safe, take care of your own.

MEN WITHOUT CHESTS.

So as things stand today, the residents of Gaza are enjoying a ceasefire, freed, at least temporarily, from the predations of their murderous tormentors. And by “their murderous tormentors,” of course we mean Hamas, the Iranian-allied, Iranian-armed terrorist thugs who ostensibly “run” Gaza and who picked this fight with the Israelis specifically to see how many of their fellow Palestinians they could get killed and how many bloody corpses and grieving family members they could get on evening news in the nations of the West.

Now, we know this charge – the charge that Hamas incited this bloodletting specifically to make Israel look bad – is simplistic. We realize that Hamas is, at least in part, a tool here; a tool wielded by Iran’s Mad Mullahs against Israel and against the broader non-Islamic world. And we get that this is just another episode in a long-running game of chicken between the Mullahs and Israel, the winner of which will be the

unquestioned supreme military power in the Middle East and the loser of which will be relegated to the proverbial dustbin of history.

But so what? The results are still very much the same, as is the desired impact on the target audience. Either way, we are left with scores of dead Palestinians and dozens of Western leaders, all shaking their heads wondering how they will ever manage to rein in the lopsidedly “brutal” Israelis.

The fact of the matter is that there can really be no other explanation for what is taking place or recently took place in Israel and the formerly occupied Palestinian territories. No Palestinian faction – not Hamas, not Fatah, not the Islamic Jihad – believes that their piddling, pathetic, cowardly attacks on Israel will actually affect the balance of power in and of themselves. They throw rocks and lob Cold War-era unguided missiles at Israel, while Israel responds with arguably the best armed and most battle-tested military in the world. There is no contest, no possible contest between the sides. And, more to the point, there is no real tactical advantage to be gained either. Israel is a fact, an indelible, indisputable part of the Middle Eastern landscape.

At least it is for now.

And that brings us back to Hamas and the reason it picked a fight with its much stronger, much smarter neighbors. Hamas and its Iranian masters understand that Israel continues to exist, in part, because it maintains the support and approval of the West, most notably the United States. And they also know that the key to undoing that support is this perpetual cycle of provoke-suffer-bleed-and-protest. The more Hamas can compel Israel to defend itself, the more it can “martyr” its innocents, the more it can draw on the sympathy of well meaning but utterly ignorant Westerners, and the more it can manipulate and intimidate the West into conceding defeat, turning common sense and moral perspective on their heads, and thereby declaring that it is the Jews who are in the wrong and who must therefore be punished.

In this month’s *Commentary*, Ze’ev Maghen, the senior lecturer in Islamic history and Persian language and chair of the department of Middle East Studies at Bar-Ilan University in Israel and research fellow at Bar-Ilan’s Begin-Sadat (BESA) Center for Strategic Studies, wrote about the Iranian and broader Islamic plans to do just that, to manipulate the West and to separate the Western nations from their Jewish forefathers. To wit:

Among theorists of international conflict resolution, the belief is widely held that the removal of one party’s “enclaves” or “outposts” from territory claimed by a rival party can not only help create mutually satisfactory borders but can inaugurate the kind of equilibrium that will eventually allow foes to become friends. In Europe, the great example is the post-World War II territorial adjustments that, however painful, put an end at last to the centuries-old enmity of France and Germany. In the Middle East, on a purely local scale, the same logic underlay Prime Minister Ariel Sharon’s policy of evacuating Israel’s Gaza settlements and handing over the territory to the Palestinians, as it did Prime Minister Ehud Olmert’s projected “consolidation” of the Jewish settlements in Judea and Samaria.

The specter that now haunts the state of Israel is that the West may some day adopt this logic, deeply problematic as it has proved to be locally, and apply it internationally vis-à-vis Iran and the “Little Satan” as a means of resolving the larger conflict between fundamentalist Islam and the “Great Satan.” For no agenda is being pushed more energetically by today’s Islamists worldwide than that, for the sake of Muslim-Christian rapprochement, and on pain of terrible consequences otherwise, America and Europe agree to offer

up the Western imperialist enclave or outpost known as Israel on the altar of “accommodation.” . . .

The Iranians and their allies throughout the Muslim world are bent on making the abandonment of Israel the price of “peace in our time.” In a scenario that should ring frighteningly familiar, a charismatic leader of an ideological, totalitarian state is building upon an endemic anti-Semitism inculcated by centuries of religious indoctrination to create an atmosphere in which the massacre of large numbers of Jews and the destruction of their independent polity will be considered a tolerable if not indeed a legitimate eventuality.

Maghen’s argument is couched in terms of religious affinity and analogous historical treatment of Jews by Christians and Muslims. But his main point – his primary concern – is that the Western/Christian nations of Europe will, at some point agree to give up the Jews out of animosity and/or indifference. In essence, he’s worried about the resurgence of anti-Semitism in the West and in Europe in particular.

Certainly, he has every right to be concerned. As we, among countless others, have noted throughout this decade, Jews have, once again, become the catch-all scapegoat for many in the West, but particularly those on the political left. The debasement and misuse of the term “neoconservative,” the revival of concerns about “dual loyalty” and the undue influence of the nefarious “Jewish lobby,” and the incessant cries for “evenhandedness,” are all a part of the “new” anti-Semitism. But they are only a part. As countless stories, articles, and essays from the last several weeks amply demonstrate, the “new” anti-Semitism is very much like the old anti-Semitism and brings with it much of the old hatreds and old means of expression. The inimitable Mark Steyn summarizes:

In Toronto, anti-Israel demonstrators yell “You are the brothers of pigs!”, and

a protester complains to his interviewer that “Hitler didn’t do a good job.”

In Fort Lauderdale, Palestinian supporters sneer at Jews, “You need a big oven, that’s what you need!”

In Amsterdam, the crowd shouts, “ Hamas, Hamas! Jews to the gas!”

In Paris, the state-owned TV network France-2 broadcasts film of dozens of dead Palestinians killed in an Israeli air raid on New Year’s Day. The channel subsequently admits that, in fact, the footage is not from January 1st 2009 but from 2005, and, while the corpses are certainly Palestinian, they were killed when a truck loaded with Hamas explosives detonated prematurely while leaving the Jabaliya refugee camp in another of those unfortunate work-related accidents to which Gaza is sadly prone. Conceding that the Palestinians supposedly killed by Israel were, alas, killed by Hamas, France-2 says the footage was broadcast “accidentally.”

In Toulouse, a synagogue is firebombed; in Bordeaux, two kosher butchers are attacked; at the Auber RER train station, a Jewish man is savagely assaulted by 20 youths taunting, “Palestine will kill the Jews;” in Villiers-le-Bel, a Jewish schoolgirl is brutally beaten by a gang jeering, “Jews must die.”

In Helsingborg, the congregation at a Swedish synagogue takes shelter as a window is broken and burning cloths thrown in; in Odense, principal Olav Nielsen announces that he will no longer admit Jewish children to the local school after a Dane of Lebanese extraction goes to the shopping mall and shoots two men working at the Dead Sea Products

store; in Brussels, a Molotov cocktail is hurled at a Belgian synagogue; in Antwerp, lit rags are pushed through the mail flap of a Jewish home; and, across the Channel, “youths” attempt to burn the Brondesbury Park Synagogue.

In London, the police advise British Jews to review their security procedures because of potential revenge attacks. *The Sun* reports “fears” that “Islamic extremists” are drawing up a “hit list” of prominent Jews, including the Foreign Secretary, Amy Winehouse’s record producer, and the late Princess of Wales’s divorce lawyer. Meanwhile, *The Guardian* reports that Islamic non-extremists from the British Muslim Forum, the Islamic Foundation and other impeccably respectable “moderate” groups have warned the government that the Israelis’ “disproportionate force” in Gaza risks inflaming British Muslims, “reviving extremist groups,” and provoking “UK terrorist attacks” — not against Amy Winehouse’s record producer and other sinister members of the International Jewish Conspiracy but against targets of, ah, more general interest.

One need not agree with Steyn — or *The Wall Street Journal Europe* or the countless others who have documented the uptick in radical and violent anti-Semitism in the West — to see that the fears that the West will tire of defending the Jews is a very real one. Steyn calls this Europe’s “oldest hatred,” and it’s a hatred that has been reinvigorated both through what the *Wall Street Journal Europe* calls the “reimportation” of anti-Semitism and through ideological fervor as well. The left, as we have noted, has an impulsive affinity for those whom it believes are “oppressed” and, moreover, it presumes unthinkingly that the less developed, less affluent, more third-worldly actor is always and everywhere the oppressed, whether it truly is or not.

But there is an additional aspect to this resurgence of anti-Semitism, one that is rarely discussed but which may hold the key to the West’s — and by extension, to Israel’s — future. The fact of the matter is that a great many Westerners, in Europe AND the United States, dislike the Jews and believe them to be the aggressor in the Middle East simply because it is easy and, more to the point, less dangerous to do so. The Jews don’t blow up embassies. They don’t fly airplanes into skyscrapers and military installations. They don’t take over hotels and slaughter the guests. They don’t behead “infidels.” They don’t riot if someone draws a nasty picture of Abraham. And they don’t turn out *en masse* carrying signs and shouting “death to” anyone if they don’t get their way. They don’t kidnap and slaughter nuns if the Pope makes them unhappy. They don’t deny history, brag about their hatreds, or discuss their desire to wipe other nations off the face of the earth.

The Jews’ enemies, by contrast, do all of those things. And they do them routinely, unthinkingly even. These things define them. A great deal of ink has been spilled over the last seven-plus years about the inanity of George Bush’s phrase “the war on terror.” Terror, it is noted, is a tactic, not an enemy, and such a label actually diverts attention from the real enemy, namely radical Islam. All of that is true, of course, but still, “terror” as a tactic is almost exclusively associated these days with radical Islamists; they are the terrorists, and everyone — right, left, and in between — knows it. As the old saw puts it: not all Muslims are terrorists, but all (or nearly all) terrorists are Muslims. And it’s not as if this is a secret.

Nearly seventy years ago, CS Lewis penned *The Abolition of Man*, his response to the intellectual and philosophical attacks on natural law and on objective morality. Lewis forecast a dystopian future dominated by those whom he called “men without chests,” men who are over-intellectualized, devoid of character, lacking in courage and other traditional virtues, men who “laugh at virtue.” “Their heads are no bigger than the ordinary,” Lewis wrote, “it is the atrophy of the chest beneath that makes them seem so.”

Sadly, though unsurprisingly, Lewis was right, and the West today is dominated by men (and women) with no chests, who care little for conventional virtues or traditional morality and who lack both the wisdom and the fortitude either to defend themselves or to defend others, those who most need defense. These are the men who refuse to publish cartoons for fear of riots, or who apologize for the publication of said cartoon, conceding that it was “insensitive” and that sensitivity should everywhere and always take precedent over historical values like free speech – at least in those cases in which the offended party has a history of flagrant and brutal violence. These are the men who shriek loudly and affectedly at the prospect of terrorist prisoners being subjected to any number of ignominies, from severe interrogation, to austere accommodations, to having their Korans touched by infidels not wearing proper protective handwear. These are the men who refuse to fire their weapons at the enemy – or worse, refuse to carry weapons, much less raise them against a “fellow human.” And these are the men who instinctively prattle on about “proportionate response” and the “cycle of violence” and the need for Israel simply to get over its hang-ups about random missile attacks and simply to “deal with it.”

Take a gander back at the pages of the major newspapers since the Israeli incursion into Gaza began some three weeks ago. You will see that these “men without chests” are everywhere and dominate the “international community,” from the United Nations to France to Great Britain to *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times*. The only question left is whether they will dominate at the White House as well, beginning later today.

Just to clarify, no one here is arguing for a return to sheer barbarism or expressing a love for war or arbitrary violence. In fact, we are actually lobbying for precisely the opposite. Understanding, accepting, and standing up for what is right may contribute to pain, sorrow, and difficulty now, but as millennia of human history have amply demonstrated, they will, in the long run, pre-empt greater and more horrific violence. Had the Allies, for example, stopped Hitler in 1938, millions of lives would have been saved. And were the nations of the global community – and of the West in particular – to stand up today and determinedly defend Israel’s right to exist and the Jews’ right to live, a second Holocaust may well be prevented.

But they won’t. At least Europe won’t. Which is to say, as we noted above, that the future of Israel may well rest with the man who, after participating in a tacky, week-long inaugural extravaganza that makes the Super Bowl halftime show look like a backyard birthday party, is sworn in as the 44th President of the United States today.

Make no mistake, Israel can and will defend itself. And it will do so violently if need be. But that defense and its attendant violence would likely be unnecessary if one man has the courage to stand up and declare that it will be unnecessary, that he too will fight to keep the barbarians outside the proverbial gate.

We’ve seen the tabloid pictures of it and listened to the captivated press swoon over it. Soon we will see if that man’s chest is merely physical or if a more powerful and more symbolic heart beats within it as well.

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