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THEY SAID IT

Dear Uncle Sam you got a lot to do
But I just want to have a little talk with you
You probably don't remember even who I am
But I build your cars and I till your land

While you're busy giving out all that cash
While you're politicians talk all that trash
While you're busy cleaning up your own mess
Maybe you could honor my small request . . .

I build your bridges and I carry your loads
I move the big rigs over your roads . . .

Song by Confederate Railroad, "Toss a Little Bone," January 1,
1995.

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THE SILENT MINORITY.

It won't be long until the experts and the pundits begin providing opinions about and analyses of "the first 100 days" of the Obama presidency. We've decided that we've seen enough to jump the gun a little. This is not to say that we have Barack's presidency all figured out. Indeed, it's just the opposite. We are as uncertain now about this man's dreams, hopes, goals, and agenda as we were last January. The thing is we have no confidence that we will know any more in two weeks. So here goes.

Careful readers may have noticed that we are somewhat conflicted when it comes to Barack's great adventure. Some days we feel certain that he is simply not intellectually up to the task of being president of the world's last remaining superpower; that his knowledge of history, economics, sociology, political philosophy, and even human nature is so limited, his association with the denizens of the radical left so long-lived, and his disdain for American exceptionalism so deeply-seated that he is incapable of seeing the world as it is; that he, like Plato's "prisoners," can react only to his narrow understanding of shadows on a wall.

Other times we find ourselves wondering if perhaps he is an evil genius who is driven by his oft-evidenced resentment and antagonism toward American society to pursue some grand, elaborate plan to destroy the traditional foundations upon which it stands.

For the time being at least, we have decided to ignore this conundrum; to proceed with the understanding that these two seemingly contrasting views of him are not mutually exclusive but symbiotic, and to concentrate instead on attempting to discern where all this is leading.

Needless to say, it is easy to despair. Regardless of his motives, we can be certain that Barack is going to succeed in permanently expanding the size and the power of the federal establishment far beyond the dreams and expectations of even the most ardent fans of the Leviathan.

At present, all eyes are on the virtual nationalization of the nation's banking, investment, and automobile manufacturing sectors. These were the low hanging fruit, made ripe for easy picking by years of egregious mismanagement, ethical laxity, greed, and most of all, by the many Faustian bargains that the magnates of these enterprises have made over the past several decades with their counterparts in Washington in the mistaken belief that they could, contrary to Benjamin Franklin's famous warning, lie down with dogs and not get up with fleas.

But, to borrow a phrase from Al Jolson, "you ain't seen nothing yet." Health care, energy, and education are next on Barack's hostile takeover agenda. But even more importantly, he is going to use the "global warming crisis" to attempt to gain control of virtually every aspect of American life, from the temperature in the nation's living rooms and the size of the televisions therein to decisions concerning which fortunate souls will receive "free" health care and which will die.

And as if that alone were not enough, Barack has laid the groundwork for spending the nation so deeply into debt that the government will have an excuse to tax wealth in addition to income. This in turn will allow him to directly address numerous other aspects of American society that are offensive to his leftist ideology, including but not limited to significantly narrowing the gap between "the rich" and "the poor" by making the rich poorer, to concentrate virtually all major decisions concerning the allocation of scarce capital in the hands of the federal government, and to dramatically lower defense spending.

The good news about all of this, if you can call it that, is that somewhere along the line these plans will collapse, or to add a bit of poetry to this optimistic notion, will "gan aft agley," like the best laid schemes of Robert Burns' "mousie."

The bad news is that by the time this happens, Obama's social engineering machinations will most certainly have caused enormous and permanent damage to the nation's economy and social structure, and will "lea'e us nought but grief an' pain, for promis'd joy," to continue with the Bard of Ayrshire's famous exhortation.

Moreover, the increasingly clear abandonment by Barack of the central and most critical tenet of President Reagan's highly successful foreign policy, i.e., that a strong military is the key to peace, will likely lead to some sort of history-altering incident either at home or abroad. As we have said several times in these pages, we don't believe Barack will be "tested" by the nation's enemies. We believe these enemies have already taken his measure and have concluded, rightly or wrongly, that he can be had. And somewhere, sometime, someone is going to make the attempt, either directly at America or at one of its allies.

In any case, our bottom line on Barack, based on his first 100 days in office, is that he will make gains toward realizing his vision of a collectivist, all powerful state, backed up by a weak military. But he won't get there.

There are many reasons we believe this. The key ones are money, gridlock, quagmire, and those whom we will call this week, for lack of a better term, America's silent minority.

When we refer to "money" as a hindrance to Barack's plans, we really mean the lack thereof. Revolutions are expensive. The French tried to pay for theirs by selling options on the future sale of confiscated Church properties. These were called assignats. The problem was that the revolutionaries placed no limit on the number that could be printed. So they did what Barack appears to be doing. They printed them until inflation made them valueless. The Bolsheviks tried something called *prodrazvyorstka*, or "food apportionment," which led to the starvation of some five million people and all but destroyed Soviet agriculture for decades to come. Barack is attempting to finance his revolution by selling options on the

future of a successful capitalist economy while he is in the process of destroying the capitalism that has made it successful. This is nuts, of course. And if past is prologue, it will eventually have dire secondary and tertiary consequences.

Gridlock will act as another nail in the coffin of Barack's grand vision of a collectivist state. Successful revolutions require that powerful interests be crushed by force. As we said earlier, the banks, the Wall Street barons, and the auto producers were easy marks. The health care and energy providers are going to be tougher nuts to crack. They have spent tens of millions of dollars over the years buying protection on Capitol Hill and, believe it or not, there are still "honest politicians" around, if one uses the standard definition of this term, that being that an honest politician is one who when bought stays bought. Part of Barack's plan involves reducing the power of these lobbyists. But that's a pipe dream. They are the sugar daddies of Capitol Hill, and as a result are better liked, more important, and collectively swing a bigger stick up there than he does.

Quagmire will occur in Afghanistan. For some strange reason, probably having to do with some combination of ego and ignorance, Barack argued during the campaign that his war against terrorism would be concentrated in Afghanistan, that the war in Iraq was the wrong war in the wrong place. This too is nuts. Afghanistan has always been a burial ground for the dreams of imperialists and do-gooders alike. Moreover, Barack and his Defense Secretary have bought into the Bush idea that the American military's primary mission is not to kill enemies but to turn them into friends, which guarantees that America's presence in Afghanistan, and Iraq for that matter, will be long and expensive, which in turn guarantees that the American people, who have the attention span of a gnat when it comes to wars, will eventually tire of the effort and Barack will find that both he and his domestic agenda have lost the broad support they need "to change America."

And finally we come to the problem of the silent minority, America's counterparts to those Englishmen

whom G.K. Chesterton described one hundred years ago as the "secret people,"

Smile at us, pay us, pass us; but do not quite forget,
For we are the people of England, that never has spoken yet.
There is many a fat farmer that drinks less cheerfully,
There is many a free French peasant who is richer and sadder than we.
There are no folk in the whole world so helpless or so wise.
There is hunger in our bellies, there is laughter in our eyes;
You laugh at us and love us, both mugs and eyes are wet:
Only you do not know us. For we have not spoken yet . . .

We hear men speaking for us of new laws strong and sweet,
Yet is there no man speaketh as we speak in the street . . .
But we are the people of England; and we have not spoken yet.
Smile at us, pay us, pass us. But do not quite forget.

These are the folks who pay the great majority of the nation's bills, the ones who do the nation's work. They are a silent minority today. But they exist at all levels of American society, from the richest to poorest. They are the doctors and dentists and small business owners, and the preachers and the teachers and the plumbers and the carpenters and the electricians and the brick layers and the store owners and the real estate agents and the farmers and the farm hands and the secretaries and the receptionists and the bartenders and the truck drivers and the waitresses and the military men and women and the factors workers. These folks don't resent the successful members of their community. They are friends with them, go to church and synagogue with them, and their kids play with their kids. They view the "rich" as symbols of what is possible in the land of the free and hope that their kids and grandkids will grow up "rich" too.

This crowd won't be easy to collectivize. They may not march in the streets, as irate citizens do in other countries. They have very few supporters in Congress, fewer still in the mainstream media, and none in the Obama administration. But they will fight back, each in his and her own way, to keep what they have earned, to maintain their life styles and their customs and their mores and their religious beliefs and their respect for human life and their ability, as well as their right to pass on to their children and grandchildren the fruits of their life's labor and enterprise.

These are the men and women who don't believe as the liberal Democratic Senator "Chuck" Schumer from New York said the other day that "traditional values kinds of arguments and a strong foreign policy are over" for America. Indeed, the lives and the hopes and the dreams of these people, along with their hopes and their dreams for their children and grandchildren, are centered around the very values that this Chuck Schumer fellow disdains, among which are Plato's classical virtues of wisdom, courage, temperance and a sense of justice; the Christian virtues of faith, hope and charity; and the Victorian virtues of work, thrift, cleanliness, self reliance, perseverance, and honesty.

And whether Barack knows it or not, these folks are the biggest hurdle he faces as he sets about the task of changing America into a collectivist state that is ashamed of its past and frightened to fight for its future.

PERCEPTION AND REALITY.

Barack Obama has a problem. Or rather, the United States has a problem. You see, Obama's a Democrat. And as a general rule, Democrats are perceived to be weak on matters of national security. It isn't that they are less well informed or less well read on the subject as their Republican counterparts. It is that they are less realistic. Or at least that's the perception.

Carter was an overcautious, apprehensive scold who thought that he could change the world and then couldn't decide what to do when it turned out that he

couldn't. Clinton was an opportunist, a president with no real interest in or knowledge of foreign affairs and who thought of foreign policy, when he thought of it at all, as little more than an extension of domestic policy, i.e., an opportunity to enhance his personal prestige and win plaudits with no real cost to himself or to his self-manufactured legacy.

John Kerry too was an opportunist, but he was also a renowned anti-warrior, a "winter soldier," as it were, who famously threw his (or someone else's) medals over the White House fence to protest American militarism. Michael Dukakis was infamously soft on defense, inopportunistly opposed to the death penalty, and was easily lampooned as a potential commander-in-chief (think "Dukakis in the tank"). George McGovern was the candidate of the pacifist left, described by his own initial running mate as the candidate of "abortion, amnesty, and acid." And the list goes on and on and on . . .

Now, one can argue that this is a mischaracterization, that Democrats are just as strong on national defense as Republicans and that the idea that they are "soft" is entirely misleading. And, truth be told, we would listen to such arguments, dubiously of course. But we would listen.

What one cannot argue, though, is that the perception of Democrats being soft on defense does not exist. It does. And this perception exists independent of us or any other commentators. And nothing we or anyone else can say will change it. Hawks vs. Doves. Republicans vs. Democrats. That's the paradigm. You know it. We know it. And, unfortunately, the world knows it.

Of course, it's not like President Obama hasn't done his fair share to reinforce this notion. In just under three months as president, he is already more than playing to type. First, he proposed a massive budget that throws money at anything and everything, except, of course, defense, which he cut. Then he sent a video message to the Mullahs in Iran asking if they'd like to go to the prom – or something like that. And finally, he paraded through Europe apologizing for American

militarism and promising to do whatever he can to ensure that the United States will no longer maintain an unfair advantage over the rest of the world by being able to defend itself. *The Jerusalem Post's* peerless Caroline Glick provides the gory details:

Somewhere between apologizing for American history - both distant and recent; genuflecting before the unelected, bigoted king of Saudi Arabia; announcing that he will slash the US's nuclear arsenal, scrap much of America's missile defense programs and emasculate the US Navy; leaving Japan to face North Korea and China alone; telling the Czechs, Poles and their fellow former Soviet colonies, "Don't worry, be happy," as he leaves them to Moscow's tender mercies; humiliating Iraq's leaders while kowtowing to Iran; preparing for an open confrontation with Israel; and thanking Islam for its great contribution to American history, President Obama made clear to the world's aggressors that America will not be confronting them for the foreseeable future.

Whether they are aggressors like Russia, proliferators like North Korea, terror exporters like nuclear-armed Pakistan or would-be genocidal-terror-supporting nuclear states like Iran, today, under the new administration, none of them has any reason to fear Washington.

So while some of his supporters might think it is an insult to call Obama "soft," we doubt that he would agree. Indeed, the American left has been arguing for decades now that the United States should be more like Europe, and Europe prides itself on its "soft power." Negotiations and diplomacy take precedent over overt military action; lives are spared, at least in the short term; and budgets can be spent on less worldly and more domestic endeavors. And that's precisely what Obama has promised.

The problem with this is that the rest of the world doesn't care what Obama or the Euros mean by "soft;" they think "soft" means soft and that "soft power" is a synonym for "weakness" or, at the very least, "irresolution." Obama, Gordon Brown, Nicolas Sarkozy and the rest of the West may think that going "soft" is just super – but so do Vladimir Putin and Dmitry Medvedev; so do Kim Jong Il and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad; so do Fidel Castro and Hugo Chavez. In fact, the only people who don't think that this is great are those leaders and nations who count on the United States to handle its business and live up to its agreements. Again, Caroline Glick explains:

Tokyo was distraught by the administration's reaction to North Korea's three-stage ballistic missile test. Japan recognized the betrayal inherent in Defense Secretary Robert Gates's announcement ahead of Pyongyang's newest provocation that the US would only shoot the missile down if it targeted US territory. In one sentence, uttered not in secret consultations, but declared to the world on CNN, Gates abrogated America's strategic commitment to Japan's defense.

India, for its part, is concerned by Obama's repeated assertions that its refusal to transfer control over the disputed Jammu and Kashmir provinces to Pakistan inspires Pakistani terror against India. It is equally distressed at the Obama administration's refusal to make ending Pakistan's support for jihadist terror groups attacking India a central component of its strategy for contending with Pakistan and Afghanistan. In general, Indian officials have expressed deep concern over the Obama administration's apparent lack of regard for India as an ally and a significant strategic counterweight to China.

Then there is Iraq. During his brief visit to Baghdad on Tuesday afternoon, Obama didn't even pretend that he would ensure that Iraqi democracy and freedom is secured before US forces are withdrawn next year. The most supportive statement he could muster came during his conversation with Turkish students in Istanbul earlier in the day. There he said, "I have a responsibility to make sure that as we bring troops out, that we do so in a careful enough way that we don't see a complete collapse into violence."

Hearing Obama's statements, and watching him and his advisers make daily declarations of friendship to Iran's mullahs, Iraqi leaders are considering their options for surviving the rapidly approaching storm.

Then there is Europe. Although Obama received enthusiastic applause from his audience in Prague when he announced his intention to destroy the US's nuclear arsenal, drastically scale back its missile defense programs and forge a new alliance with Russia, his words were anything but music to the ears of the leaders of former Soviet satellites threatened by Russia. The Czech, Polish, Georgian and Ukrainian governments were quick to recognize that Obama's strong desire to curry favor with the Kremlin and weaken his own country will imperil their ability to withstand Russian aggression.

As we note in the above piece and have noted several times before, we think that Joe Biden was wrong, as is his wont, and that the nation's enemies have no need whatsoever to "test" the new president, having already taken their measure of him and found him wanting. The nation's friends, it would appear, have done so as well. Last week's apology tour was a

difficult and painful spectacle for those who favor a strong American global presence. But it was anything but a surprise. It was perfectly in character, both for the Obama the world has come to know and for the typecast Democrat.

The exact end result of all of this is anyone's guess, though it is possible to speculate about likely outlines of what Glick calls this "post-American world." To start, things are likely to get messy. And bloody. Very bloody. The political fringes of both the left and the right have long argued that the United States needs to get out of the business of being the "world's policeman," but the actual consequences of such an abdication of responsibility are hardly ever discussed.

Interestingly, given the events of the last several days, we think that the best way to explore what those consequences might entail is to use the examples of Africa and of piracy. With Somali pirates taking ships at will and losing almost nothing in the process, the world is mesmerized by the spectacle – despite the fact that on a global scale, it is a very minor spectacle. Still, we believe that larger lessons can be drawn, largely because of the broader yet less heralded spectacle that is the continent of Africa.

It is worth noting in this context that the last two great episodes of global piracy were eventually ended only because of the actions of the world's existing and emerging global superpowers. The British Royal Navy, the archetype global military, ended piracy in the Caribbean in the early 18th century, and roughly a century later, the United States Marines did the same to the Barbary pirates by advancing to "the shores of Tripoli."

Today, the problem is slightly more complicated, given that the piracy off the coast of East Africa festers specifically because the nation of Somalia exists in concept only, which is to say that there is no one with whom to go to war and no one who can stop the proliferation of pirate camps. No one, that is, except a global policeman.

President Obama is rightly being praised this morning for agreeing to let the Navy use deadly force yesterday against the pirates who held Captain Richard Phillips of the American-flagged Maersk-Alabama. And we don't want to belittle this decision.

But what now? The Somali pirates still hold more than a dozen ships. And four fewer pirates is hardly going to stop the raids. And even if you lose a few here and there, piracy remains a high reward low risk endeavor.

As things stand, the only lessons the pirates will likely have learned is that they should stay away from American-flagged ships. Prior to last week, they'd had no problems doing just that. So it hardly seems that they'll have any problems doing it again. This is easy.

Take an American ship and you'll get shot in the head by SEALs. Take anyone else's ship and you'll get your ransom. What's to know here?

This is, as countless others have noted, reprimativization writ large, which means that is bad news for anyone who is in the Gulf of Aden but isn't on an American-flagged ship. Americans can and will protect their own. But everyone else can fend for themselves. It's not our problem.

Unfortunately, it's not just the Somali pirates who are learning lessons. Africa, as a whole, is a basket case, and if the United States is unwilling to bring order to the continent – in this case the Gulf of Aden – and is willing only to look out for itself in a very narrowly defined context, then others will expand their context and will impose their own order.

Roughly a year ago, we argued that the problems in Africa and spread by Africa would never be handled properly unless and until the continent was recolonized. And guess what? It is being recolonized. By the Chinese.

Unless President Obama elects to take more sustained action in the Gulf of Aden, then it is possible that others will, though the action in question will be

nothing at all like the action Americans would take. Think Somali pirates present a sticky problem now? Just wait until they are better armed or have faster boats, courtesy of the Chinese. Or the Russians. Or anyone else willing to fill the vacuum. And then think about the problem and the filling of this proverbial vacuum on a global scale.

We think that we have more than done our part over the years to dispel the idea that the United States can and should try to remake the entire world in its own image. We argued against Wilsonian adventurism when Clinton undertook it central Europe. And we argued against it when Bush made it the central tenet of his post-9/11 foreign policy. But even we know that the world needs order and that that order will be provided, if not by the United States, then by someone else who is far less interested in human rights and the rule of law than are Americans.

Right now, as Caroline Glick noted above, both America's friends and its enemies are making arrangements to ensure this order in a post-American world. Is it entirely necessary that they do so now? And is it entirely fair to assume that this is the direction Obama's foreign policy will lead? Maybe not. After all, the guy hasn't even been president for three months yet. But even so, in that three months, he has done little to dispel the perceptions that Democrats are and always will be soft on matters of defense and therefore will be unwilling to expend the energy and political capital to maintain the nation's traditional role in the world. Even when he acts soundly and with purpose, as he did this weekend with regard to the Somali pirates, these perceptions can and will be reinforced.

It is no coincidence, in our opinion, that the 9/11 attacks were not followed up by other terrorist attacks on U.S. soil. And nor for that matter was it a coincidence that the Somali pirates avoided taking American ships while George Bush was in office. Was Bush a military genius of some sort? Hardly. But rightly or wrongly, the nations and the non-nation global "bad actors" of the world understood him to

be a mad cowboy, capable of just about anything. And it is, in our opinion, likely that that perception affected the ways potential enemies acted while he was in office.

Likewise, the perception of this current Democratic president is affecting the actions of individuals, groups, and nations, only in the opposite direction. This may not be entirely fair. But so what? If President Obama wanted to dispel notions about his potential “softness,” he could have done so. But instead he reinforced them. And only time will tell whether he will continue down this path or come to realize how destructive that could be.

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