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THEY SAID IT

Although there has been progress in some areas as Pakistan's newly reestablished democracy has evolved, significant security challenges have also emerged. The extremists that have established sanctuaries in the rugged border areas not only contribute to the deterioration of security in eastern and southern Afghanistan, they also pose an ever more serious threat to Pakistan's very existence...

General David Petraeus, testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee, April 1, 2009.

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TALIBANISTAN.

When Franklin Roosevelt declared, some 67-plus years ago, that December 7, 1941 was a "date which will live in infamy," no one needed to ask why. The answer was obvious. But when we tell you that August 18, 2008 may well be another date that lives in infamy, you will likely not have the foggiest idea why that may be true, although it is distinctly possible that future generations will know all too well.

You see, August 18, 2008, was the date when the so-called "international community" finally got its wish, when President George W. Bush finally gave in, and when the tide of events in South-Central Asia may have turned forever and inexorably against the United States and the West. It was the date that Pervez Musharraf, then-president of Pakistan and the former Army chief of staff who had come to power by coup, stepped down, allowing his country to return once again to "democracy," however poorly it may be practiced.

Now, it's not that we have a brief to make on Musharraf's behalf. He was your average, everyday Third World military dictator – brutal, cruel, and loathsome. But he was also an ally in the war against al Qaeda, and he was, more or less, a stabilizing force in his country, as the guys with all the guns and tanks tend to be. More to the point, Musharraf was almost certainly the least of all evils in Pakistan, not that that bar is set particularly high.

Of course, with Musharraf gone, Pakistan is once again under the guidance of a manifestly corrupt and inept politician, this time Mr. Benazir Bhutto, also known as Asif Ali Zardari. And we say "of course" because it really is difficult – nigh on impossible – even to imagine a Pakistani politician who is not corrupt and inept. We suspect – though cannot prove – that those two adjectives are, in fact, included in the job description. As we noted in these pages nearly two years ago, for at least the last fifty years, the "Islamic Republic of Pakistan" has been "wracked by corruption, incompetence, and nepotism."

So how is this all working out? Funny you should ask.

Last week, *The Washington Post's* David Ignatius, whose views and columns represent the epitome of inside-the-Beltway conventional wisdom on foreign policy matters, penned a piece titled, "How Pakistan Almost Blew Up." Ignatius detailed the recent near collapse of the fledgling Zardari government thusly:

A detailed account of the March political confrontation emerged last week during a visit to Islamabad by Ambassador Richard Holbrooke and Adm. Mike Mullen. As described by U.S. and Pakistani officials, it's a story of political brinkmanship and, ultimately, of a settlement brokered by the Obama administration.

At stake was the survival of Pakistani democracy. Allies of President Asif Ali Zardari attempted to cripple his political rival, former prime minister Nawaz Sharif. The opposition leader took to the streets in response, joining a "long march" to Islamabad to demand the reinstatement of Pakistan's deposed chief justice, Iftikhar Chaudhry. The march threatened a violent street battle that could have forced Gen. Ashfaq Kiyani, the army chief of staff, to intervene.

The problem with Ignatius's analysis – and by extension with the Obama/Clinton intervention he praises – is that it appears to be based on the idea that the worst thing that could happen to "Pakistani democracy" is that the army would have to intervene in political matters and settle things down. Now, we're not exactly fans of military dictatorships, and we certainly have no problem with the practice of democracy. But the notion that a military coup would constitute a Pakistani "blow up," as Ignatius put it, is flatly absurd.

As Ignatius himself explains, General Ashfaq Kiyani, the chief of staff of the Pakistani army (and thus the presumed leader in the event of a coup) is close friends with and takes advice from Admiral Mike Mullen, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, which is to say that he would hardly be an American adversary. This fact also suggests that Kiyani is a professional who is dedicated not just to his country, but to the security of the region as well. Moreover, there are far, far worse outcomes for Pakistan than a reversion to military rule, whether Ignatius, Obama, and Clinton realize it or not.

The fact of the matter is that Pakistan is, indeed, on the verge of collapse, but the threat comes not from the military. It comes from Islamist extremists. We're not sure if the Baby Boomers running American foreign policy still have visions of Augusto Pinochet dancing in their heads, or what exactly their problem is. But having the Pakistani military in charge of the nation's nukes would be no change from the current situation. By contrast, if the Islamist extremists get control of those nukes, it would be, well, a REALLY big deal.

In his Senate testimony earlier this month, General David Petraeus, now the Commander of the United States Central Command, described Pakistan's "democracy" as truly "fragile" and at serious risk from Islamist extremists. "It is in Pakistan that al-Qaeda senior leadership and other transnational extremist elements are located," Petraeus testified, and "Extremists . . . pose a truly existential threat" to the country.

And Petraeus isn't the only one. According to Tony Blankley, a syndicated columnist and editorial page editor of *The Washington Times*, Petraeus's former advisor on counter-insurgency is deathly afraid of the situation in Pakistan as well. To wit:

Last week, David Kilcullen, a former Australian army officer who was Gen. Petraeus' senior counterinsurgency strategist and is now a consultant to the Obama White House, said Pakistan could collapse within months.

“We have to face the fact that if Pakistan collapses, it will dwarf anything we have seen so far in whatever we’re calling the war on terror now,” he said.

Kilcullen said time is running out for international efforts to pull both countries back from the brink. “You just can’t say that you’re not going to worry about al-Qaida taking control of Pakistan and its nukes,” he said. “The Kabul tail was wagging the dog.” He described the war in Afghanistan as a campaign to defend a reconstruction program. “It’s not really about al-Qaida,” he continued. Afghanistan doesn’t worry me. Pakistan does.” He said that maybe we can manage Afghanistan and Richard Holbrooke can cut an international deal, but there is also a chance that Washington will fail to stabilize Afghanistan, that Pakistan will collapse, and that al-Qaida will end up running what he called “Talibanistan.”

Unlike Cullen, we are not experts on “Talibanistan,” but we do know a couple of things for sure. First, we know that given the vulnerability of the Pakistani government, every effort must be made to isolate Taliban and al Qaeda militants and to keep them from the major and central cities, most notably the capital, Islamabad. Second, we know that the most practical and responsible way to balance a precarious Pakistan and/or to neutralize an Islamicized Pakistan is to maintain good relations and a close working relationship with India.

Unfortunately, it’s not entirely clear that anyone in Obama’s Washington knows either of these two things. Again, according to Blankley:

The radical Islamist threat to the already weak and unstable government in Pakistan has become acute because of the reconciliation of former adversaries Mullah Omar (the leader of the Taliban fighters who have left Afghanistan

for their new stronghold in Quetta, the capital of Pakistan’s Baluchistan province) and Baitullah Mehsud (the leader of the Pakistani Taliban in the tribal regions along the border with Afghanistan).

According to last week’s *Der Spiegel*, which is a weekly German magazine: “In late February, flyers written in Urdu turned up in the Pakistani-Afghan border region announcing the formation of a new platform for jihad. The Shura Ittihad-ul Mujahideen (SIM), or Council of United Holy Warriors, declared that the alliance of all militants had been formed at the request of Mullah Omar and (Osama) bin Laden. “There is a new quality to this,’ says Imtiaz Gul in his office at the Center for Research and Security Studies in Islamabad. “These groups are now the Pakistani face of al-Qaida.”

The problem is that the united radical Islamists are expanding the combat zone inside Pakistan, threatening the state itself. But our drone attacks on the united Taliban (and al-Qaida) are driving the radicals deeper into Pakistan, including its major cities. Also, the attacks inevitably also kill Pakistani women and children (or are claimed by the radicals to have done so), which serves as a recruiting tool for new jihadists.

Thus, this is what Kilcullen was quoted as saying by *Der Spiegel*: “I am against the drone attacks. Even if we could kill half of the al-Qaida leaders, what does it help us if we cause an uprising by the population of Pakistan?”

Kilcullen’s quote raises the strong inference that because the Obama administration has increased the George

W. Bush administration's level of drone attacks into Pakistan and Gen. Petraeus' top counterinsurgency adviser publicly opposes the attacks, *there must be a major policy fight going on within the administration.* [emphasis added]

As for India and its relationship with the United States, that's not exactly going swimmingly either. *The Jerusalem Post's* Caroline Glick recently wrote the following:

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.

The Indians, it seems, are about as unhappy with new American president as an ally could be. Not only is said president siding with Pakistan and refusing to press the issue of Mumbai terrorist attacks, which all of India would dearly appreciate, but his obsession with carbon and carbon emissions threatens India's newfound prosperity and its ability to increase and spread that prosperity. There is a reason that developing nations like India were exempted from last decade's Kyoto Protocol on global warming, namely that the restriction of carbon emissions is a death sentence for rapidly expanding yet still underdeveloped economies. Obamam's fixation is direct threat to India and its ability to maintain its newfound status as a global player.

And it gets worse.

Late last month, President Obama proposed to deal with the growing threat of insurgency in Pakistan by tripling the amount of non-military aid to the country, pledging the United States to a \$7.5 billion contribution. Additionally, he has pledged \$2.8 billion in military aid – the proceeds of which could be used, presumably, to purchase more medium and long range missiles from China and North Korea or to protect and fortify the Line of Control in Kashmir. The Obama team claims that all precautions will be taken to ensure that any military aid will be used specifically for purposes of counter-insurgency. But all that this proves is that Team Obama is both unfamiliar with the nature of the Indo-Pakistan conflict and is completely clueless about the corruption that permeates Pakistan's governmental institutions.

Is it any wonder then that the Indians are not nearly as enthralled with the Rock-star President as much of the rest of the world appears to be?

The bottom line on all of this is that Pakistan is a failed state in the making and that the Obama administration seems, at the very least, to be perplexed about how to handle this fact. Two years ago, when the columnist Mark Steyn wrote that "Pakistan is not Persia," we agreed, adding:

He is right. Pakistan is what Persia aspires to be. Pakistan is a nuclear power. It has spread its nuclear knowledge throughout the anti-American world, offering to share its know-how with every terrorist and terror sponsor it could find. Pakistan is also most likely the current home of the terrorists who masterminded the 9/11 attacks on the United States (Osama bin Laden– or his corpse – and Ayman al-Zawahiri) and their erstwhile political patron (Mullah Muhammad Omar). And it is unquestionably the font from which most, if not all of Europe's present terrorist problems have sprung, including the London Tube bombers.

All of this remains true today. The only things that have changed are the precariousness of conditions in South-Central Asia and the government in Islamabad, which was formerly run by a general and is now run by a crooked neophyte whose only claim on power is that he is the widower of a former corrupt prime minister. The government of Pakistan has done its very best to make peace with the Taliban and, by extension, with al Qaeda, hoping that its agreements with the insurgents will keep them in their place, i.e. in the mountains and the ungovernable frontier provinces. But, as any schoolboy knows, such agreements rarely pan out, and the Pakistani government's show of weakness appears, to us at least, to invite trouble. Couple that with the fact that the Obama administration's plans for Pakistan appear half-baked at best and the threat that is Pakistan is magnified exponentially.

And so while David Ignatius, Hillary Clinton and the other purveyors of conventional wisdom will continue to worry about how awful things would be if the generals were running Pakistan again, the rest of us will worry about how much worse it will be if (or when) the Taliban is. Nuclear-armed terrorists seem to us to be the real threat in that part of the world, though apparently no one in either political party in Washington agrees.

Instead, they are propping up a corrupt system full of corrupt players, hoping that somehow the veneer of democracy will be enough to keep the insurgents out of Islamabad. Truth be told, we can't say we miss Pervez Musharraf, but we suspect that someday we might. If and when the shooting starts, better that he (or another general) be running the show than a handful of wannabes who may well sell their souls and America's security to its deadliest, most committed, and most blood-thirsty enemies.

WE DON'T MEAN TO SCARE YOU BUT . . . REDUX.

Eleven years ago, almost to the day, we published an article about the threat of terrorism from right wing extremists. It was entitled "We Don't Mean To Scare You, But . . ." It began as follows:

Okay, brothers and sisters. This week we're going to begin with a question. What do you get when the following things all happen at once over a relatively short period of time, say 20 years?

■ The government extends its influence far beyond the role of defending the shores, delivering the mail, establishing justice, ensuring domestic tranquility, and overseeing the economy, and takes on the task of altering the nation's culture, using its great judicial and executive powers in an attempt to significantly degrade the importance of religion, family, and virtually all of the traditional customs and mores around which society was ordered for over 200 years.

■ Immigration skyrockets to over one million illegal and legal individuals per year, boosting the percentage of the population that is foreign born from under 5% in 1970 to almost 10% in 1996, with an overwhelming majority of new arrivals coming from nations with sharply different cultures than that of America.

■ The government launches an attack on a fundamental principle of American democracy, namely legally guaranteed equal opportunity, with the primary target of this change being white males, the single most influential demographic cohort in the nation.

■ In the face of vociferous opposition from the nation's two largest religious congregations, the Catholics and the Baptists, all restrictions on abortion, both legal and ethical, are abandoned (including those relating to late term procedures), and the number of abortions performed skyrockets to

approximately 1.5 million per year, approximately 300,000 or so on teenagers.

We went on to answer our own questions by describing the then-ongoing conservative backlash during which the Republicans had gained control of both Houses of Congress, captured a record number of seats in state legislatures and governors' mansions, and were riding a wave of popular support for various reform initiatives in such important areas as welfare, immigration, taxes, public education, affirmative action, and abortion policy, all aimed at rolling back or stemming the liberal tide.

We observed that that was good news from the standpoint of the Republican Party, as well as welcome evidence that the American political system was reasonably vigorous, noting that in a healthy democracy, substantial social change is accomplished, usually slowly, via the ballot box, as each new generation asserts its values and beliefs and as the beliefs of older generations change as they mature.

At that point, we took off our happy face and addressed the fact that periods of sweeping political and social change, such as those were, more often than not are marked by some elements of violence.

We pointed out that there was a great deal of violence associated with the 1960s social "revolution," which ushered in the leftist policies that sparked the conservative reaction we were describing. Such groups as the Weather Underground, the Black Panthers, and the Yippies didn't just talk about inciting mayhem, they actually did it.

Among other things, some members of these and similar left-wing groups robbed banks, murdered policemen, stole weapons, kidnapped, precipitated riots, and actively disrupted the political process, all in the name of "social justice." Many prominent members of the left wing establishment at the time smugly described these groups as "liberals in a hurry," and argued that their violence and disregard for legal niceties was "understandable."

Then we provided a rather detailed account of various radical, right wing organizations that the federal government was at that time actively watching with an intense degree of interest and trepidation. Following that, we provided an account of some of the actual incidents in which groups of this type had been involved, including the following.

A list of crimes and serious confrontations with law enforcement officers which involve Patriot groups is long and frightening. Among the terrorist attacks credited to persons affiliated with Patriot groups are the April 19, 1995 bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City that left 169 people dead, and the October 9, 1995 derailment of Amtrak's Sunset Limited passenger train that killed one passenger and injured 83. . .

In March 1995, four members of the Minnesota Patriots Council, an extremist Posse Comitatus faction with ties to Identity, were convicted of conspiracy to produce and possess ricin -- one of the deadliest known toxins -- in order to kill IRS officials and law enforcement officers. The four had learned how to manufacture ricin through a manual marketed to Patriots.

The Tri-States Militia, comprised of militias from at least 30 states, was linked to at least five would-be terrorists whose bomb plots were thwarted by federal and state law enforcement. Oklahoma militia leaders and Identity "prophets" Ray Lampley and Larry Crow had been involved with Tri-States since April 1995. The two, along with Lampley's wife Cecilia and J.D. Baird, were arrested in November 1995 on federal explosives charges. The four were allegedly part of a terrorist cell that planned to blow up the Southern Poverty Law Center, offices

of the Anti-Defamation League, federal buildings, abortion clinics and sites in the gay community.

Our final paragraph read as follows:

As we said in the title, our purpose here isn't to scare anyone. But we think too few people know about this frightening crowd, whose members travel under such organization titles as the Posse Comitatus; The Order; The Covenant, The Sword, and The Arm of the Lord; and the Freemen of 'Justus Township,' Montana. They are armed. They are dangerous. They are serious. And if experts who have studied them are to be believed, they are coming to your town soon, if they aren't already there.

Looking back, it is difficult to say whether we and those whom we quoted in that article were exaggerating the threat or whether the subsequent paucity of any further attacks of headline-making magnitude by the "right wing extremists" was the result of excellent police work on the part of the FBI. We'd guess that it was a little of each.

What we do know is that the threat did indeed exist. There was a great deal of evidence of this. There were real names of groups and of individuals involved. There were incidents of violence and descriptions of foiled plots. One could visit a variety of right wing websites dedicated to the task of stirring up hatred against the government. And there was a narrative explaining the hatred. And while this narrative didn't justify the hatred, it made it understandable, and thus made the threat real.

One of most famous of the hate mongers was the "liberal intellectual" Gore Vidal, who wrote an article in *Vanity Fair* in November 1998 charging the government with "shredding our Bill of Rights," raving about "examples of I.R.S. seizures of property without due process of law, warrantless raids and murders committed against innocent people by various drug-enforcement groups, government collusion

with agribusiness's successful attempts to drive small farmers out of business, and so on," and then went on to discuss "the illegal but unpunished murders at Ruby Ridge, Idaho (a mother and child and dog had been killed in cold blood by the F.B.I.); then, the next year, Waco."

Interestingly, as we read through some of our old files from those days, we found no examples of anyone on either side of the controversy who claimed that ordinary, everyday critics of government, military personnel, and Americans who believe that abortion is an abomination represented a large pool of potential terrorists, or even that they were potential terrorist sympathizers.

In fact, we can find no evidence that Gore Vidal himself was ever cited as a potential terrorist, even though his sympathetic treatment of Timothy McVeigh ("Every pancake has two sides.") so impressed the mass murderer that he requested that Gore be allowed to attend his execution. (Gore didn't attend the festivities because, he complained, "the attorney general had given me too short a time to get from here to there.")

So why, you ask, are we bringing this up now, 11 years later? Well, because in a recent report issued by the Department of Homeland Security entitled "Right-wing Extremism: Current Economic and Political Climate Fueling Resurgence in Radicalization and Recruitment," the government says that the right wing terrorists "may" be back and "may" pose a serious threat to the nation. And if this is so, we would like, as we did 11 years ago, to help the government and the law enforcement community call the public's attention to this fact and help to explain the threat.

Of course, it won't be as easy for us this time. You see, the assertion by the Homeland Security folks is that "rightwing extremists *may* [emphasis added] be gaining new recruits" and that "the consequences of a prolonged economic downturn—including real estate foreclosures, unemployment, and an inability to obtain credit—*could* [emphasis added] create a fertile recruiting environment for rightwing, although they say that have no hard evidence that this happening.

In fact, the best they could offer as a “recent example” of “the potential violence associated with a rise in rightwing extremism” is the “shooting deaths of three police officers in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, on 4 April 2009,” noting that the gunman’s reaction “*reportedly* [emphasis added] was influenced by his racist ideology and belief in antigovernment conspiracy theories related to gun confiscations, citizen detention camps, and a Jewish-controlled ‘one world government.’”

We have tried our best to help fill this deficiency of hard information, and aside from the single demented gunman in Pittsburg cited by Homeland Security, we can’t find a single recent example of a serious terrorist act or a serious attempt at committing a serious terrorist act by any “right wing extremists,” or by anyone claiming to be or accused of being such a person.

Moreover, we don’t have any names of individuals or groups upon which to do further research. Web searches of organizations such as the Minnesota Patriots Council, the Tri-States Militia, the Posse Comitatus, The Order, the Covenant, The Sword, and the Arm of the Lord, and the Freeman of ‘Justus Township,’ Montana, and the names of the men who were involved in these and other terrorist organizations a decade and a half ago read like ancient history. They are all written in the past tense. As far as a modern threat is concerned, one may as well read about Jesse James or Machine Gun Kelly, or the group with which our lovely Secretary of State was once enamored, the Black Panthers.

Adding to the difficulty of getting a handle on the extent of the threat is the fact that, unlike 11 years ago, the government now maintains that the recruiting ground for right wing terrorists has expanded vastly beyond the fringes of polite society and now potentially

includes all those Americans who “reject federal authority in favor of state or local authority,” who “are dedicated to a single issue, such as opposition to abortion or immigration,” who are upset that the President of the United States is black, who are concerned about “proposed impositions of firearms restrictions and weapons bans,” and who have recently returned from areas of the world where they have been involved in the risky task of protecting and defending the freedom of their fellow Americans.

We got some help from the website of the Southern Poverty Law Center, which was the source of much of the public information available on right wing extremists groups in the 1990s. This group says that there are 926 active hate groups extant in the United States today. But when we looked most of them up on the Internet, we determined that one would be hard pressed to mine the information on the websites on these groups for a scary story on the threat from right wing terrorism, which probably explains why the Homeland Security report was so vague.

Our conclusion then is that while there may be a real and serious threat of right wing extremism in the United States today, there is no evidence that such a threat exists. In fact, a much greater threat to the public order and to the continued enjoyment of traditional American freedoms *may* be the on-going politicalization of the Department of Homeland Security by Janet Napolitano. We don’t mean to scare you, but . . . this woman is so full of prejudices and apparent hatred and disdain for those who don’t share her left-wing political views that she herself should be considered a *potential* danger to society. Indeed, our humble opinion is that she would be better suited to be the leader of a left wing terrorist group than to be in charge of America’s national security apparatus.

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