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THEY SAID IT

Right out of the box, Mr. Obama mischaracterized what is causing a “time of tension between the United States and Muslims around the world.” He attributed the problem first and foremost to “violent extremists [who] have exploited these tensions in a small but potent minority of Muslims.” The President never mentioned - not even once - a central reality: The minority in question, including the Muslim Brotherhood, subscribes to the authoritative writings, teachings, traditions and institutions of their faith, namely Shariah. It is the fact that their practice is thus grounded that makes them, whatever their numbers (the exact percentage is a matter of considerable debate), to use Mr. Obama euphemistic term, “potent.”

Instead, the President’s address characterized the problem as a “cycle of suspicion and discord,” a turn of phrase redolent of the moral equivalence so evident in the Mideast peace process with its “cycle of violence.” There was not one reference to terrorism, let alone Islamic terrorism. Indeed, any connection between the two is treated as evidence of some popular delusion. “The attacks of September 11, 2001 and the continued efforts of these extremists to engage in violence against civilians has led some in my country to view Islam as inevitably hostile not only to America and Western countries, but also to human rights. This has bred more fear and mistrust.”

Frank Gaffney, Jr., Center for Security Policy, “Deciphering Obama in Cairo,” June 5, 2009.

THE GATHERING STORM.

At the beginning of the Cold War, a group of nuclear scientists devised something called the “Doomsday Clock,” which purported to measure the amount of time left before some sort of “catastrophic destruction” would occur as a result of nuclear weapons. Twelve midnight on this clock represented the cataclysmic moment. In June 1947, when the clock was introduced, the scientists reported that it was 11: 53 p.m. Today, the clock reads 11:55, which means that the wise successors to the original group believe that we are now two minutes closer to the end times than we were 62 years ago.

You are probably wondering why these geniuses think we are closer to destroying ourselves today than we were when the nuclear powers were in the opening days of a state of belligerence that was so intense that the President of the United States routinely ran around with a “black briefcase,” inside of which were the Emergency War Order (EWO) authentication codes that would allow him to launch a thermonuclear missile or bomber attack at a moment’s notice and thus kill some 70 million people and destroy civilization as we know it.

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Well, it is because the scientific augers who run this project today have added several new worry beads to the divining charm bracelet, including, you guessed it, the dreaded “climate change.” Nevertheless, assuming the clock moves at a constant speed and 62 years equals two minutes, our descent into “Chaos and old Night,” to borrow a phrase from Milton, is still more than a century and a half away. So relax.

Now the terms “arbitrary” and “subjective” are grossly inadequate to describe the foolishness involved in this exercise in quantifying the unquantifiable. On the other hand, there is no doubt that the danger that “someone will set the spark off, and we will all be blown away,” to borrow a phrase from an old Kingston Trio song, does fluctuate over time, depending upon the inclinations, temperaments, ambitions, egos, intelligence, and yes, the common sense of the people who are vested with the power to make such things happen.

And with this in mind, we would argue that if there were a “Middle-East-Catastrophe Doomsday Clock,” it would be moving toward midnight at mach speed right now. This is just our *opinion*, of course. And it should be noted that it differs dramatically from that of the nation’s new president, who appears to believe that he is taking meaningful steps toward establishing both a lasting peace in the Middle East and a lasting rapprochement with radical Islam. Needless to say, the stakes involved in this difference of opinion are very high. So we will defend our position and leave it to you, gentle reader, to decide.

As we have said many times in these pages over the past two decades or so, our belief is that the prospects for a formal peace agreement between Israel and its neighbors is a chimera, a will-o’-the-wisp, an *ignis fatuus*, a product of the liberal dream world. In May 2003, we put it this way.

The Bush administration’s “road map” to peace in the Middle East is not going to work. It isn’t going to work for the same reason that the Camp David and the Oslo “road maps” didn’t work; that

reason being that it fails to address the fact that the land through which the designated road runs is infested with numerous large and murderous organizations that are bent on preventing any traveler from getting past them. This would be like giving Custer a “roadmap” that indicates he might encounter some tough weather on the Montana plains but fails to mention the presence of the Sioux and the Cheyenne.

What we suggested back then is that all parties interested in peace in the Middle East stop putting on public relations spectacles and recognize the cold reality that Israel’s enemies are not going to be cajoled, via “negotiations” and “peace talks,” into giving up their goal of destroying the Jewish state. It simply isn’t going to happen.

Hatred for Jews is as intrinsic to modern day Islam as the call to prayer. And why shouldn’t it be? Islamic schools all over the world, including those in the United States, routinely teach their children that Israel doesn’t exist and that Jews are descended from apes and pigs. Indeed, this contention is written in the “Holy Koran” and trumpeted in Mosques all over globe by the faith’s leading clerics. Get this from Memri.org.

In a weekly sermon in April 2002, Al-Azhar Sheikh Muhammad Sayyid Tantawi, the highest-ranking cleric in the Sunni Muslim world, called the Jews “the enemies of Allah, descendants of apes and pigs.”

In one of his sermons, Saudi sheikh Abd Al-Rahman Al-Sudayyis, imam and preacher at the Al-Haraam mosque – the most important mosque in Mecca – beseeched Allah to annihilate the Jews. He also urged the Arabs to give up peace initiatives with them because they are “the scum of the human race, the rats of the world, the violators of pacts

and agreements, the murderers of the prophets, and the offspring of apes and pigs.”

“Read history,” called Al-Sudayyis in another sermon, “and you will understand that the Jews of yesterday are the evil fathers of the Jews of today, who are evil offspring, infidels, distorters of [others’] words, calf-worshippers, prophet-murderers, prophecy-deniers... the scum of the human race ‘whom Allah cursed and turned into apes and pigs . . .’ These are the Jews, an ongoing continuum of deceit, obstinacy, licentiousness, evil, and corruption . . .”

In an August 2001 sermon, Sheikh Ibrahim Madhi, Palestinian Authority official and imam of the Sheikh Ijlin mosque, Gaza City’s main mosque, called on the Palestinian people to forget their internal disagreements and turn all weapons against Jews: “lances must be directed at the Jews, the enemies of Allah, the nation accursed in Allah’s book. Allah described [them] as apes and pigs, calf-worshippers, idol-worshippers . . .

Seeing Jews as “descendants of apes and pigs” is common also in Shi’ite Islam. Such statements appear, for instance, in a 1998 speech by Hizbullah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah on the occasion of the Shi’ite ‘Ashoura holiday. Nasrallah regretted that the holiday fell “on the 50th anniversary of the bitter and distressing historical catastrophe of the establishment of the state of the grandsons of apes and pigs – the Zionist Jews – on the land of Palestine and Jerusalem.” He closed his speech with these words: “. . . We reaffirm the slogan of the struggle against the Great Satan and call, like last year: ‘Death to America. To the murderers of the prophets, the

grandsons of apes and pigs,’ we say: . . . ‘Death to Israel . . .’”

Attila the Hun was a modern when compared to these creeps and their followers, who invariably include heads of state. So why, one wonders, would Israel trust any nation or group of nation’s that not only tolerates the spewing forth of this kind of garbage but whose governments actually promote and applaud it? Why would Barack Obama?

Does he really believe that this kind of “hate speech” can be explained and justified in the opening days of the 21st century by his contention that Islamic societies have been under “tension” of late. Does he really believe that they are not responsible for their gutter induced psychoses because it was fed to them by “colonialism that denied rights and opportunities to many Muslims, and a Cold War in which Muslim-majority countries were too often treated as proxies without regard to their own aspirations . . . [and] sweeping change brought by modernity and globalization [which] led many Muslims to view the West as hostile to the traditions of Islam.” As yes, the tragedy of 9/11 pales in comparison to the “tension” perpetrated on these poor people by colonialism, the Cold War, and modernity. Who knew? To understand is to forgive.

Barack claims to be a “student of history,” so one would think he might remember having read of the abysmal ignorance concerning his own race that prevailed among the “educated” classes just one hundred ago, when the Ninth Edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* reported the following under the heading “Negro.”

The cranial sutures . . . close much earlier in the Negro than in other races. To this premature ossification of the skull, preventing all further development of the brain, many pathologists have attributed the inherent mental inferiority of the blacks, an inferiority which is even more marked than their physical differences.

That was despicable then, just as the Islamic world's vile spewing of racism is today. The Israelis know it. Moreover, they know that Barack knows it too. And they know that he doesn't care. They also know that he is, for whatever reason, seeking a rapprochement with the Islamic world at the expense of America's long friendship with Israel. And they know that with him in the White House they are as close to being "on their own" as they have been since 1947 when the British left the region telling the Jews that if they wanted a state of their own that would have to buy it with the blood of their young men, which they did. And they know that their own version of the Doomsday Clock is moving quickly toward midnight.

Yes, of course, Barack may get some Arab leaders to promise to do various things in exchange for more concessions by Israel. But even if these "statesmen" are sincere, none would have the courage to act in the face of anger in the "Arab street."

In the final analysis, then, it remains as true today as it has been since the founding of the modern state of Israel in 1948, that true peace will prevail between Jews and Arabs in the Middle East when and only when one of two circumstances obtain: either Israel is defeated or its enemies are defeated.

With this in mind, it is necessary to recognize that the absolute worst of these two options, from just about any viewpoint, would be the defeat of Israel because such an event would almost certainly be accompanied by a nuclear attack by Israel on several Muslim states. This is not a widely discussed probability, but we have never doubted, and don't believe any thinking person should doubt, that somewhere in Israel there is a button connected to the nuclear option that is labeled, "Last one out, push this."

It is worth noting with regard to this option that it would not be exercised by the Israelis out of pique or revenge, but with the firm knowledge that a total military defeat of Israel would be followed by the mass slaughter and rape of Israeli civilians by the conquering army. History demonstrates that this is how Islamists celebrate victories in their "holy wars." And the Israelis know this too.

This leaves the second option, namely the defeat of Israel's enemies. Now before anyone gets his or her undies in a knot and charges that we are "taking Israel's side" here, let us point out that by advocating the extermination of those groups that are dedicated to the destruction of Israel, we are taking the side of peace, which would be as great a boon to the vast majority of Muslims as it would be to the Israelis.

In fact, if it is true, as everyone involved in the current "peace process," including Barack himself, seems to maintain, that the vast majority of Muslims everywhere in the world want peace rather than war, then we would argue that any opposition to a plan to rid the world of the radical, murderous, uncompromising Muslim extremists should be taken as *prima facie* evidence that the individuals involved in this opposition are the ones who have "taken sides," and indeed have taken the side of war.

In short, if true peace in the Middle East is the goal, then every peace loving nation in the world, including France, Germany, Russia and the so-called "moderate" Arab states should agree to participate in a concerted, unified, worldwide effort to make membership in an Islamic terrorist organization a decidedly unattractive option for a young man or woman. And, once again, this should not be seen as "choosing Israel's side," but as choosing the side of peace by neutralizing those groups that are dedicated to conflict.

Needless to say, this is not going to happen. And this leads to the only reasonable fall-back position, which we have described in these pages for years as "no war, no peace." We put it this way in an article we wrote in October 2000, just weeks before we were fired from Prudential for having a "difference in philosophy from that of firm management."

In fact, we believe that one of the best things that could happen is if the major players in the region, most especially the United States, would finally drop the belief that a formal peace accord between Israel and its neighbors is possible, likely, and desirable, and

concentrate instead on formulating a practical plan under which each side could live without open warfare.

Years and years and years of insistence by American presidents from both parties that Israel give up land that is crucial to its security needs in exchange for chimerical promises of peace from its neighbors have, in our opinion, had the predictable effect of weakening Israel and thus feeding the dangerous dreams of its enemies that they can destroy the Jewish state . . .

To put this another way, we think there is a good chance that the recent dashing of hopes for a formal peace accord could lead to a much more realistic approach to stability in the region, based on the doctrine that we have always described as “No war, No Peace.”

This doctrine, which was conventional wisdom prior to the Camp David accords, is based on the belief that the key to avoiding open warfare between Israel and its neighbors is to keep Israel strong enough militarily to discourage any efforts by its enemies to destroy it.

A corollary to this theory is that attempts to force the parties into formal peace agreements actually aggravate the situation, by riling the Arab masses, weakening the positions of the Arab leaders who are being asked to sign such agreements, and eventually weakening Israel’s strategic position.

We are not questioning here the intentions of most of the American presidents, beginning with Eisenhower, who have ventured into this arena since the formation of Israel in the aftermath of World War II. But we would refer to what Archbishop, poet, and philologist

Richard Chenevix Trench once called the “queen of all proverbs,” namely that “the road to hell is paved with good intentions.”

Now we have no doubt that Barack’s efforts are driven by good intentions, or least considered by him to be “good.” But we also have no doubt that these good intentions are more likely to lead to hostilities between Israel and its neighbors than would a deliberate and concerted effort to avoid war rather than to achieve peace, always keeping in mind the following.

■ That Israel is smaller than either New Hampshire or Vermont. On most world maps, it is too small to have its six-letter name written within it. Its population is approximately six million. It is surrounded by nations with combined land masses of millions of square miles and with greater combined populations than the United States. And most of these countries, at one time or another, in one way or another, with guns, tanks, terrorists, or oil money have tried to destroy it.

■ That the majority of the citizens in each of these nations still hate Israel, long for its destruction, and would look with extreme disfavor upon any leader who endorsed the Jewish state’s right to exist, unless that endorsement were seen as a strategic move in a long-term plan to destroy it.

■ That each of these nations contain large and well financed groups of terrorists who are devoted to the destruction of Israel and the killing of Jews and are answerable to no government, and don’t give a whit what any government thinks of them or their goals.

■ That Iran, which is ruled by religious fanatics desperately opposed to Israel’s existence, is 80 times larger than Israel with almost 12 times as many people and is about to have a nuclear weapon, the capability to deliver it to Israel, and apparently, the willingness to do so.

■ That because of all this Israel has no room, zero room, for error.

■ And most importantly, that if Israel should actually fall to its enemies, as many in the Arabs and Iranians believe is likely, and which no reasonable person can discount entirely, the region, along with its considerable oil supplies, would most likely look like a wasteland the following morning, given that Israel has nuclear weapons and would most likely use them in a last ditch effort to save its statehood.

■ And finally, that the new President of the United States has taken it upon himself to aggressively promote peace in the region by thrusting a stick into the beehive.

Ticktock, ticktock, ticktock.

AN ACT OF WAR INDEED.

The problem – or at least *one* of the problems – with the 24-hour news-cycle is the fact that the ratings-obsessed media types move from one “blockbuster” story to the next, never stopping to discern which stories really are huge and which are just tabloid filler, played up to prop up viewership, or readership as the case may be. What this means then is that stories that actually are huge, that really do matter and that may have significant political and social repercussions, are far too often abandoned too quickly, before their relevance can be fully realized,

One such story is that of the infamous Homeland Security report on “right-wing” domestic terrorism released earlier this spring to a chorus of criticism. The document, “Rightwing Extremism: Current Economic and Political Climate Fueling Resurgence in Radicalization and Recruitment,” was panned by the conservative press. It also provoked outrage among various veterans groups, and, in turn, prompted a partial retraction and apology on behalf of the Obama administration by Homeland Defense Secretary Janet Napolitano, who sent her deepest regrets to the nation’s fighting men and women for having characterized them as rubes, sadists, and terrorists-in-waiting.

The problem, from our perspective, is that after about a week of white-hot discussion and superficial analysis, the story went away. And with it went the most important angle, which indeed was never mentioned, much less investigated and properly addressed.

You may recall that our piece on the DHS report on “right-wing terrorists” (“We Don’t Mean to Scare You But... Redux,” April 20, 2009) focused principally on the lack of evidence supplied in support of its conclusions and on the amazingly brazen and unjustified causal leaps taken by the researchers and investigators who put the document together. Having done our own research on right-wing extremists and terror cells roughly a decade ago, we were disappointed at the pathetic quality of the research demonstrated by Homeland Security and, more to the point, at the fabrication of terrorist potential based on nothing more than prejudice.

The aspect of the report involving the most obvious lack of research and predominance of prejudice was that dealing with the presumed predilections of military personnel to participate in right-wing terrorist activities. According to the report, “A prominent civil rights organization reported in 2006 that ‘large numbers of potentially violent neo-Nazis, skinheads, and other white supremacists are now learning the art of warfare in the [U.S.] armed forces.’” The “civil rights organization” in question is the left-leaning Southern Poverty Law Center, which has long followed the movements and activities of various right-wing groups, but which, by and large, defamed American servicemen in its anecdotal and misleading report, cited so sympathetically by DHS.

DHS also cited a more legitimate authority in its effort to vilify America’s servicemen and women, the FBI. The DHS report notes that “the FBI noted in a 2008 report on the white supremacist movement that some returning military veterans from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have joined extremist groups.”

Fortunately, the good folks over at the Powerline blog – the same folks, by the way, who uncovered Dan Rather’s use of forged documents in his attempt to

smear George Bush in the run-up to the 2004 election – actually read what the FBI wrote and were able therefore, to translate what DHS means by “some.”
To wit:

So, how many are “some”? . . .
Notwithstanding the deliberate vagueness of the Homeland Security document, the FBI was actually very specific:

A review of FBI white supremacist extremist cases from October 2001 to May 2008 identified 203 individuals with confirmed or claimed military service active in the extremist movement at some time during the reporting period. This number is minuscule in comparison with the projected US veteran population of 23,816,000 as of 2 May 2008, or the 1,416,037 active duty military personnel as of 30 April 2008 . . .

According to FBI information, an estimated 19 veterans (approximately 9 percent of the 203) have verified or unverified service in the ongoing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

There you have it: a whopping 19 actual or alleged veterans of Iraq or Afghanistan have joined the “extremist movement.” (The FBI notes that some of these “may have inflated their resumes with fictional military experience to impress others within the movement.”)

So, if the “research” in question is not based on actual data or even on high-profile examples, then on what, exactly is it based? That’s an easy one. And a difficult one, all at once.

We can say, with a great deal of certainty, that the presumption that members of the military would be pre-disposed to hold beliefs that would make them easy marks for right-wing extremist groups is itself based on prejudice. Military folks are “those” kind of

people, after all, at least to those who have produced this document.

But from whence this prejudice springs, we can only guess, though educatedly so. As we have written countless times in these pages, we believe that a great deal of what takes place today in Washington – including this DHS report – is the result of efforts made at the grassroots level throughout the country to educate or *mis*-educate the nation’s masses. The composition of this education is, in part, traditional schooling, though it goes much further than that. As Claes Ryn – political philosopher extraordinaire, professor of politics at Catholic University, and old friend of The Political Forum – has written, the prejudices and guiding principles of a people are derived chiefly from the art, music, literature, television, movies and advertising to which said people are exposed. These, Ryn insists and we concur, are the symbols that inspire and shape the public’s imagination and its dreams for the future.

Is there any more pervasive myth in the popular, left-wing culture today than that of the American soldier as a loser? When depicted in popular culture at all, they are barely high-school educated. They have no other options. They are, as John Kerry so unwittingly put it, stupid. They are prejudiced, “white trash.” They carry the burdens of their hatred and are always on the verge of emotional collapse. They are oppressors or, worse yet, self loathing and therefore compelled to strike out because of their own infirmities. Consider, for example, the following, taken from the plot summary at the Internet Movie Database (imdb.com) for the film *American Beauty*, one of the most influential films of the last decade and winner of five Academy Awards, including Best Picture. Note, that Colonel Fitts is introduced in the film railing against the gay couple that lives in the neighborhood:

Col. Fitts, concerned over the growing relationship between Lester and Ricky, roots through his son’s possessions, finding footage of Lester working out in the nude (captured by chance while

Ricky was filming Jane through her bedroom window)- slowly bringing him to the conclusion that his son is gay . . . As evening falls, Ricky returns home to find his father waiting for him with fists and vitriol, having mistaken his drug rendezvous with Lester for a sexual affair. Realizing this as an opportunity for freedom, Ricky falsely agrees that he is gay and goads his violent father until he is thrown out . . .

Lester finds an emotionally fragile Col. Fitts standing outside in the pouring rain and attempts to comfort him, but is taken by surprise when Fitts kisses him. Lester gently rebuffs him, telling him he has the wrong idea. Fitts, shamed and broken, wanders back into the rain . . . In his final narration, Lester looks back on the events of his life, intertwined with images of everyone's reactions to the sound of the subsequential gunshot, including one of a bloody and shaken Col. Fitts with a gun missing from his collection.

Get it? The colonel hates gays because he *is* gay. He's repressed. And when he is found out, he has no other option but to kill the man who discovered him. That's it. That's the story. Bad, bad (but all too typical) army man.

Is it any wonder that the bureaucratic functionaries at DHS would be inclined to agree? Wouldn't you be surprised if they were not?

A similar phenomenon can be seen in recent public opinion surveys regarding the Speaker of the House and her ridiculous tap dance around the issue of enhanced interrogation techniques and her foreknowledge of them. As you may recall, in one of the dumbest, least eloquent, and most brazen attempts to escape responsibility for one's own actions, Nancy Pelosi recently blamed all her troubles on those lying SOBs at the CIA. And though her accusation, much

less the delivery of it, was absurd, the public at large didn't necessarily see it that way.

A Rasmussen poll taken shortly after Pelosi's charges were made showed that 43% of those surveyed thought that the CIA had, in fact, lied, while only 41% thought Pelosi was lying. The only possible explanation for this, given the facts of the story, the ridiculousness of Pelosi's changing tale, and the obviousness of her attempts merely to save herself, is a public prejudice against the CIA. And from where would such a prejudice come? Again, the likely culprit is the popular, liberal culture, the culture that derides as evil and destabilizing the very intelligence services dedicated to its protection, the culture that substitutes entertainment for education and that therefore leaves the entire population ignorant of the role of the CIA, the history of its relationship with Congress, and the nature of its duties and responsibilities with regard to elected officials.

What these two examples have in common and what they share with a host of other issues currently facing the nation is that they demonstrate the real tragedy that can and will befall this country as a result of its decades of educational malpractice. Once upon a time, the stories, myths, and classics to which America's youths were exposed were those that encouraged knowledge of and respect for the nation itself; for the culture, history, institutions, and principles on which its civilization is based; for the struggles involved in maintaining and dispensing the benefits of those institutions and principles. But no longer.

Last week, the columnist George Will wrote that "In the history of developed democracies with literate publics served by mass media, there is no precedent for today's media enlistment in the crusade to promote global warming 'awareness.'" Will is right about the media's role, but he misses the similar enlistment of the educational establishment in the same crusade. The media makes a difference, of course, but the educators are the truly culpable, given their role in shaping the myths of a society. And their dedication to the crusade is every bit as fervent as is

the media's, perhaps more so. Kids are "taught" from the very earliest of ages that man is responsible for the calamities that befall Mother Earth and that global warming is chief among them.

Those who seek to fight the President's "cap-and-trade" tax plan and the general ascendancy of global warmism would do well to remember this. The battle in Washington may or may not yet be won. But the battle for the minds of the masses is being won every day, as the curriculum of green faith replaces the curriculum of scientific knowledge. Eventually, that victory will translate into policy.

And ever shall it be so. The fact of the matter is that what we are witnessing in Washington today is, in large part, the victory of the evisceration of traditional educational curricula and the triumph of the left in dictating the culture, through popular media, education and, relatedly, miseducation, or to put this another way, by the debouching of the educational establishment via the process of politicization and propaganda.

Last week, President Obama gave an address in Cairo which was billed by the administration and its media enablers as an attempt to reconcile Islamic-American relations. Among other things, the President noted that:

Islam has always been a part of America's story. The first nation to recognize my country was Morocco. In signing the Treaty of Tripoli in 1796, our second President John Adams wrote, "The United States has in itself no character of enmity against the laws, religion or tranquility of Muslims."

What Obama failed to note, however, was that the treaty and Adams' related statement were made as part of an American effort to pay tribute to the Muslim power of the age and served simply to confirm America's status as dhimmi, subservient to the Sha'ria-governed polities of North Africa. With a hat tip to Andrew McCarthy, the following, written by Christopher Hitchens, explains the history:

In 1786, the new United States found that it was having to deal very directly with the tenets of the Muslim religion. The Barbary states of North Africa (or, if you prefer, the North African provinces of the Ottoman Empire, plus Morocco) were using the ports of today's Algeria, Libya, and Tunisia to wage a war of piracy and enslavement against all shipping that passed through the Strait of Gibraltar. Thousands of vessels were taken, and more than a million Europeans and Americans sold into slavery. The fledgling United States of America was in an especially difficult position, having forfeited the protection of the British Royal Navy. Under this pressure, Congress gave assent to the Treaty of Tripoli, negotiated by Jefferson's friend Joel Barlow, which stated roundly that "the government of the United States of America is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion, as it has in itself no character of enmity against the laws, religion or tranquility of Musselmen." This has often been taken as a secular affirmation, which it probably was, but the difficulty for secularists is that it also attempted to buy off the Muslim pirates by the payment of tribute. That this might not be so easy was discovered by Jefferson and John Adams when they went to call on Tripoli's envoy to London, Ambassador Sidi Haji Abdrahaman. They asked him by what right he extorted money and took slaves in this way. As Jefferson later reported to Secretary of State John Jay, and to the Congress:

The ambassador answered us that [the right] was founded on the Laws of the Prophet, that it was written in their Koran, that all nations who should not have answered their authority were sinners, that it was their right and duty to make

war upon them wherever they could be found, and to make slaves of all they could take as prisoners, and that every Mussulman who should be slain in battle was sure to go to Paradise.

Medieval as it is, this has a modern ring to it. Abdrahman did not fail to add that a commission paid directly to Tripoli—and another paid to himself—would secure some temporary lenience. I believe on the evidence that it was at this moment that Jefferson decided to make war on the Muslim states of North Africa as soon as the opportunity presented itself. And, even if I am wrong, we can be sure that the dispatch of the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps to the Barbary shore was the first and most important act of his presidency. It took several years of bombardment before the practice of kidnap and piracy and slavery was put down, but put down it was, Quranic justification or not.

What this means, then, is that last week President Obama was either making statements and developing policy based on his own ignorance or, more cunningly, doing so based on the justifiable presumption of the American electorate's collective ignorance. Once upon a time, a thorough understanding of American history was considered requisite for responsible citizenship and it was, therefore, a critical component of educational curricula. And as this episode demonstrates, the reasons for this are obvious.

Sadly, this same theme repeats itself over and over, and not just in the current administration's foreign policy. The general public's lack of education, its deficit of exposure to history, economics, philosophy, literature, poetry, etc. has a tremendous impact on the policies pursued in Washington, either because of the ruling class's similar ignorance or because it allows the elites to count on the electorate not knowing any better.

Expanding the reach of the state and scope of the governmental domain, for example, seems harmless enough to those unaware of the history of statist ideologies in the last century, those who presume that Che Guevara was just a t-shirt model or that Lenin was the guy from the Beatles who got shot. Circumventing the rule of law with regard to bankruptcy also seems harmless enough to those unaware of the economic and culture peril with such a move is fraught. Massive expansion of government borrowing, massive expansion in opportunities for corruption, massive expansion in spending and taxes – all of these seem harmless enough, but only to those who don't know any better, be they the legislators who approve them or merely the voters who approve the legislators.

We regret, in short, the departure of the right-wing terrorist report produced by Homeland Security from the public agenda, not because of the details of the specific issue, but because of the example and the warning that it provides. The American public, as a general rule, is no longer exposed to the types of influences that enable a functional society. Rather, its myths direct it toward other, less productive and less traditional ends and therefore away from the knowledge requisite to maintain the social and governmental standards to which we have all grown accustomed.

Twenty-six years ago, the folks at the National Commission on Excellence in Education declared that “if an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war.” Is there any longer any doubt how right they were?

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