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THEY SAID IT

Obama plainly embodies that mindset of liberal elites. America is flawed. America has no distinct message or values, and its interests are entitled to no more weight than Belgium's or Cuba's. It's wrongheaded to assert our national interests. We should be seeking consensus and righting the great wrongs that America has done to other nations—both its stinginess in redistributing wealth and its failure to cater to other nations' geopolitical and psychological concerns. Russia needs reassuring. The Arabs need validation. And it's the president's job to lower America's profile so as to not incur the wrath of hostile powers.

Average Americans don't buy into any of this. They have the notion—ridiculed by Obama and his supporters—that America is unique, both in its attributes and in its role in the world. They might grow weary of the burdens and prefer shorter and less costly wars (what democratic people do not?), but the notion that we should simply go along with the crowd, avoid hurting Russian sensibilities, or accede to false historical narratives of Arab nations in contravention to our own interests and those of our allies are alien and off-putting to them. If Iran is a threat to the world, ordinary Americans expect their president to do something about it, not merely call another meeting to talk with thugs spouting genocidal nonsense.

Jennifer Rubin, "Wanted: Defender of American Interests,"
Contentions (the *Commentary* blog), September 27, 2009.

POST-WESTERN OBAMA.

Several years ago, in the run-up to the war in Iraq, we predicted that international relations in the post-9/11 world would eventually be characterized not by alliances, but by interests. Given the resistance to both American means and goals in Iraq posed by traditional allies – namely France and Germany – we concluded that the world would henceforth be different, with longstanding friendships carrying far less weight in geopolitical calculations than specific, case-by-case national concerns, including trade, personal connections, natural resource management, and the like.

In the Iraq example, France had a longstanding relationship with the Baathist regime, having traded with it for years and having built Iraq's nuclear reactor, the infamous Osirak plant destroyed by the Israelis in 1981. Moreover, the two countries' presidents were old and reasonably close friends. And those specific interests were enough to override the erstwhile solid NATO bond. Likewise, Germany too had strong trade ties to Iraq (and to Iran, for that matter) and couldn't see what it stood to gain from American intervention, which would all but certainly destroy those ties and thereby damage its trading relationship.

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In a uni-polar world, we concluded, such self-interested hedging would be the rule, rather than the exception. There would be less need for conventional alliances on the part of most erstwhile American supporters and thus less cause to observe them. When it was in a country's interests to ally itself to the United States, it would do so. But in the absence of an omnipresent menace – such as the old Soviet Union – most nations would feel free and perfectly comfortable to plot their own destinies free from foreign, namely American, pressure.

What never occurred to us when we were formulating this prediction for a “post-allied” world was the possibility that an American president, of all people, would be the one to make it a reality. Even today, as we watch this new world order coming into being, we are not sure what, exactly, we are witnessing. For all our time and experience as Washington-watchers, we still can't tell if this is the stupid and uninformed bumbling of an inexperienced and starry-eyed fool, the calculated and deliberate machinations of a modern-day Machiavelli, or something in between. What we do know, though, is that this is something neither we nor anyone else actually contemplated and which therefore is likely to have historic and unpredictable consequences.

Over the past several weeks and months, the list of foreign policy blunders committed by the Obama administration has grown. And grown. And grown. In fact, it has grown so much and so consistently that one might reasonably conclude that the list's items aren't blunders at all, but planned statements of adjustment in the nation's foreign policy direction; that this is the *change* that we were promised.

President Obama's shifts, slides, and leaps on foreign policy have covered quite a bit of ground – both metaphorically and geographically. In just a few months, he has made serious, direction-changing decisions affecting Great Britain, continental Europe, the Middle East, the Far East, Central Asia, and South America, just off the tops of our heads. These decisions have occurred under varying circumstances and have taken varying forms. But there have been a few unifying traits.

The first and most obvious of these is, as we have noted before, the fact that America's historical allies have suffered the brunt of the Obama team's “changes,” while its enemies have generally gained. Or, as Abe Greenwald put it over the weekend, “the U.S.'s most reliable democratic partners see the administration's decision for what it was: a historic shift in America's priorities. Adversaries' wishes now enjoy equal baseline footing with the needs of friends.” In Central America, Obama abandoned a democratic ally fighting for its democratic life to back a Chavez-inspired (and funded) dictator-in-waiting. In the Middle East, he has offered the Palestinians all the carrots and smacked the Israelis around with his sticks. In Central Asia and Central Europe, the Russians have gained mightily from the President's advances, while the Poles, the Czechs, and the Georgians have been lied to and forsaken.

And is it possible even to imagine a closer ally and friend than Great Britain? Likewise, is it possible to imagine a friend more spurned and rebuffed than Great Britain has been over the last nine months? Just this past week, as the United Nations and the G20 held their meetings, Obama once again did his very best to make the Brits understand that he has little or no use for them, despite their dedication and the purported continuation of the “special relationship” between the two countries. As David Hughes of *The Telegraph* of London put it on Thursday:

The juxtaposition on our front page this morning is striking. We carry a photograph of Acting Sgt Michael Lockett - who was killed in Helmand on Monday - receiving the Military Cross from the Queen in June, 2008. He was the 217th British soldier to die in the Afghan conflict. Alongside the picture, we read that the Prime Minister was forced to dash through the kitchens of the UN in New York to secure a few minutes “face time” with President Obama after five requests for a sit-down meeting were rejected by the White House.

What are we to make of this? This country has proved, through the bravery of men like Acting Sgt Lockett, America's staunchest ally in Afghanistan. In return, the American President treats the British Prime Minister with casual contempt. The President's graceless behaviour is unforgivable. As most members of the Cabinet would confirm, it's not a barrel of laughs having to sit down for a chat with Gordon Brown. But that's not the point. Mr Obama owes this country a great deal for its unflinching commitment to the American-led war in Afghanistan but seems incapable of acknowledging the fact. You might have thought that after the shambles of Mr. Brown's first visit to the Obama White House - when there was no joint press conference and the President's "gift" to the Prime Minister was a boxed DVD set - lessons would have been learned. Apparently not. Admittedly, part of the problem was Downing Street's over-anxiety to secure a face-to-face meeting for domestic political purposes but the White House should still have been more obliging. Mr Obama's churlishness is fresh evidence that the US/UK special relationship is a one-way street.

The other unifying characteristic of Obama's foreign policy actions is that they are, like everything else in his political life, all about him. The United States has its faults, he'll concede - and quite willingly, at that - but at least it had the good sense to elect him, which is to say that all will soon be right with the world.

Recall that this spring, at the Summit of the Americas, President Obama "joked" that he was grateful that Nicaraguan President (and former Sandanista dictator) Daniel Ortega had not blamed him in his rant against the United States, noting that one of the events that made Ortega unhappy (the Bay of Pigs, in this case) took place "when I was 3 months old."

This past week, Obama was at it again, apologizing to the United Nations (and its collections of dictators, tyrants, punks, and murderers) for his nation's past failings, but asking that the world judge him and the country today by "the concrete actions we have taken in just nine months." It was all too much for *The Washington Post's* Michael Gerson (also a former Bush speechwriter), whose exasperation spilled forth yesterday:

Obama's rhetorical method in international contexts -- given supreme expression at the United Nations this week -- is a moral dialectic. The thesis: pre-Obama America is a nation of many flaws and failures. The antithesis: The world responds with understandable but misguided prejudice. The synthesis: Me. Me, at all costs; me, in spite of all terrors; me, however long and hard the road may be. How great a world we all should see, if only all were more like . . . me.

On several occasions, Obama attacked American conduct in simplistic caricatures a European diplomat might employ or applaud. He accused America of acting "unilaterally, without regard for the interests of others" -- a slander against every American ally who has made sacrifices in Iraq and Afghanistan. He argued that, "America has too often been selective in its promotion of democracy" -- which is hardly a challenge for the Obama administration, which has yet to make a priority of promoting democracy or human rights anywhere in the world.

The world, of course, has its problems, too. It has accepted "misperceptions and misinformation." It can be guilty of a "reflexive anti-Americanism." "Those who used to chastise America for acting alone in the world cannot now stand by and wait for America to solve the world's problems alone." Translation: I know

you adore me because I am better than America's flawed past. But don't just stand there loving me, do something.

I can recall no other major American speech in which the narcissism of a leader has been quite so pronounced.

Over the past several months, many commentators have described Barack's presidency and his foreign policy in particular as "post-American," in that he seeks to move beyond American hegemony, beyond America's super-power status, to a "multi-polar world." When the President says, as he did last week, that "no nation can or should try to dominate another nation" or that he is "not interested in victory" in the nuclear standoff with Iran, he reinforces this perception.

We'd argue, however, based on the two consistencies noted above, that Obama is less post-American in his approach to foreign policy and more "post-Western," which is all but certainly far, far worse.

Years ago, when we formulated our original "post-alliance" theme for global affairs, we assumed that there would be some exceptions to the new rule. We figured, for example, that the Anglosphere would remain fairly solidly united, that the United States would remain strongly tied to the nations whose democracy it helped shepherd (e.g. Japan, South Korea), that Israel and the United States would remain united in their quest to preserve the Judeo-Christian tradition in its birthplace, and that the West in general would remain bound by certain commonalities. This only makes sense – especially in the case of the Anglosphere and the American mini-empire – in that nations and peoples with similar cultures, similar heritage, similar ideology, and similar values would likely also have similar interests, which is to say that their bonds would transcend the shift to the post-9/11 world.

Again, what we simply didn't anticipate at the time was the idea that the United States would elect a president who would be intellectually hostile to the cultural,

governmental, and religious bonds that encourage the supremacy of common interests among the United States and its closest allies.

During the campaign last year, a handful of conservatives charged that Obama simply didn't understand the "real" America, that he did not share the values of most "average" Americans. We're not sure what this charge was supposed to mean – whether it was a thinly-veiled racist slap at the first potential American president with non-Western heritage, as many critics claimed; whether it was a poorly articulated charge of elitism; or if something else was behind the accusation. Whatever the case, there is little question that part of this feeling about Obama was self-inflicted (e.g. "typical white person," clinging to God and guns). But an even larger part was derived from the fact the candidate was associated, both personally and intellectually, with the strains of American leftism that have always tended to see the United States and its Western progenitors as forces for evil rather than good in the world, the pseudo-intellectual types whom the late Ambassador Kirkpatrick famously described as the "blame America first" crowd.

Unfortunately, these intellectual strains have been all too evident in Obama's foreign policy. When Obama takes the world stage – whether in Cairo or Turtle Bay – his instinct is always to apologize for his country, to plead for forgiveness on our behalf. Moreover, when he makes decisions about how to proceed on the global stage, one can rest assured that he will take special precaution to ensure that traditional American or Western interests are not advanced, that the nations of the West are not allowed to "dominate" any other country.

It is nearly universally believed that President Obama's current wobbliness with regard to Afghanistan is based almost exclusively on his unwillingness to make the Democratic base unhappy. He can't increase troop levels, as requested by General Stanley McChrystal, because he would therefore open himself up to criticism and political hostility on his left wing.

Maybe.

Far more likely, in our opinion, Obama just doesn't want to fight the war in Afghanistan the way his generals are telling him it needs to be fought. It's not that he is afraid of the left-wing, anti-war, blame-America-first base. He *is* the left-wing, anti-war, blame-America-first base. And, as we have argued, his foreign policy is exclusively about him, what he wants, and what he believes is necessary.

The consequences of this self-absorbed, post-Western foreign policy are monumental, too great even to contemplate, in some cases. Does anyone really wonder any longer why the Japanese chose to elect a new government that promised principally to seek less engagement with the United States and greater engagement with regional powers? Does anyone really wonder why it is that Benjamin Netanyahu felt it necessary to make a secret trip to Russia three weeks ago? Does anyone really not know why the Shi'ite dominated government of Iraq feels it necessary lately to cozy up more and more to the Mad Mullahs of Iran? Does anyone question the Polish prime minister Donald Tusk for refusing to take the midnight call from Team Obama disclosing its about-face on missile-shield deployment in his country? Finally, does anyone, anywhere in the world – any ally or potential ally – feel that Obama can be trusted, given what we now know about his foreknowledge of the second Iranian uranium enrichment facility “revealed” last week?

The fact of the matter is that Barack Obama's post-Western foreign policy is all but certain to render our original post-alliance prediction completely useless. Sure, the United States will be friendless. Would you trust a nation currently governed by the whim and personal predilection of a man whose intellectual foundations lead him to that which distinguishes the West from the rest? The rest of the world, by contrast, will be compelled to maintain strong alliances – the only differences from the pre-Obama era being that these alliances will be designed specifically to *counter* rather than support the remaining global super power.

In the short-term, that means that the Israelis will look for solutions to the Iranian and Palestinian problems that don't involve the United States and don't expose them to the risk of Zbig Brzezinski trying to shoot their fighters down over Iraq. It means that the Japanese will move closer to the Chinese and likely to the Australians, both of whom have vested interests in East Asian tranquility. It means that Hugo Chavez – and his Russian and Iranian patrons – will have the support of struggling Latin American leaders now unsure about American dedication to democracy. And it means that the West will be led on matters of security and human rights by the French, of all people.

The hapless Gordon Brown will continue to chase Barack Obama through restaurant kitchens, hoping that the cool kids will let him hang out with them for a few minutes – or at least he will until he is drubbed by his electorate and replaced by a “conservative” prime minister who has no choice but to pull away from Obama and from the “special relationship,” perhaps integrating further into a Europe that suddenly seems less self-absorbed and less self-satisfied than its American cousin.

As for the rest of the world, Abe Greenwald again sums it up nicely:

Small democracies, like Poland and the Czech Republic, may fall prey to aggressive, expansionist neighbors like Russia. Rogue and autocratic regimes will go unchecked as they ratchet up various proscribed initiatives. The U.S. will lose access to valuable partnerships, thus halting our ability to roll back dangers and maintain global stability. Already fading is American credibility. How can the U.S. hope to shame China out of abetting totalitarian North Korea when President Obama himself has just agreed to snub the pro-Democracy Dalai Lama out of deference to China? One-time allies will be forced into expedient relationships with our ideological antagonists. Democracy may see worldwide retreat.

The key test of all of this will, we suppose, come soon, when Obama is finally forced to make a decision on Afghanistan. If he yields to General McChrystal and pursues victory in that blighted nation, then he will have demonstrated his ability to transcend his ego and fulfill his promises to American allies and wards. If, however, he fires McChrystal or opts for the status quo, then the proverbial die will be cast, irrevocably.

And we, of course, will be proved correct in our expectation that the post-9/11 world will be a post-alliance world.

Well . . . sort of. But not in a good way.

FAITH, HOPE AND CHARITY.

Last week, a long-time reader of our musings asked how we could reconcile our recent optimistic view that liberalism is in for a rough time in the face of the dwindling resources and borrowing power of the federal government with our seemingly contradictory, long-held belief that American democracy is destined to give way to the kind of all-powerful “administrative state” that would seem, at first blush, to epitomize the liberal dream. So, he asked, which is it?

That’s a good question because it provides an excellent vehicle for discussing both the current state of American politics and several of the many interesting events that “alter and illuminate our times,” to borrow a phrase made popular by Walter Cronkite in the mid-1950s,

We will begin by reaffirming our long-held belief in the inevitability of the immense and omnipotent administrative state becoming the model for all modern governments in the 21st century, including the United States. The origin of this prediction can be found in Max Weber’s observation in his 1921 book entitled *Economy and Society* that the increasingly specialized and technical nature of modern society had created policy issues that require the input and action of a large contingent of highly trained, professional administrators and “experts.”

It was based on this contention that Weber made his well known observation that society would no longer be divided into two classes, capital and labor, as Marx maintained, but into three. Between capital and labor, Weber said, there would be a new, emergent middle class of white-collar, technical, and administrative personnel, “whose share in the economic product depended upon skill and educational status rather than on the ownership of property or the power of collective organization.

The quote in the preceding paragraph is from the *Oxford Companion To Politics of the World*.

The following quote from the same volume further explains Weber’s thoughts on this subject.

Weber’s most notable contribution, however, lay in identifying the importance of bureaucracy to modern politics. His definition of bureaucracy, not as a type of political system, but as a continuous, professionalized, and rule-governed form of administration, showed it to be increasingly prevalent-- thanks to its being uniquely equipped to handle increasingly various and complex organizational tasks – in all spheres of modern life.

Weber, himself, put it this way.

Once it is fully established, bureaucracy is among those social structures which are the hardest to destroy. Bureaucracy is the means of carrying “community action” over into rationally ordered “societal action.” Therefore, as an instrument for “societalizing” relations of power, bureaucracy has been and is a power instrument of the first order – for the one who controls the bureaucratic apparatus.

Under otherwise equal conditions, a “societal action,” which is methodically ordered and led, is superior to every

resistance of “mass” or even of “communal action.” And where the bureaucratization of administration has been completely carried through, a form of power relation is established that is practically unshatterable.

It is easy to associate the on-going Weberian movement toward a large, omnipotent, bureaucratic Leviathan as complementary to liberalism, since liberals view a large, growing and ever-more-powerful federal government as an essential tool in their efforts to build a utopia.

But it is important to note that Weber himself did not define the bureaucratic state as either liberal or conservative. His concerns were related almost exclusively to the concentration of so much influence in the hands of what amounted to a non-political entity. He put his concerns this way:

The objective indispensability of the once-existing apparatus [i.e., the bureaucratic state], with its peculiar, “impersonal” character, *means that the mechanism . . . is easily made to work for anybody who knows how to gain control over it.* [emphasis added] A rationally ordered system of officials continues to function smoothly after the enemy has occupied the area; he merely needs to change the top officials. This body of officials continues to operate because it is to the vital interest of everyone concerned, including above all the enemy.

This led to Weber’s warning that this new bureaucratic state must be “checked . . . within a framework of mutually limiting power structures,” and, “subordinated to the control of individual leaders selected on the basis of non-bureaucratic principles and acting under such principles.”

In other words, the nature of Weber’s bureaucratic state depends upon the nature of those who run it. It is natural, in this day and age, to assume that the

American Leviathan will be run by liberals, since they are and always have been the principal promoters of it. But, on reflection, as the song goes, it ain’t necessarily so.

Yes, liberals run it now. And yes, they will continue to do so for some time. But the fact of the matter is that they will fail. Why? Because Marxism and all its many derivations and offshoots, including American liberalism, are based on appallingly defective economic theories, a deeply flawed grasp of human nature, and a collectivist mentality that subordinates the importance of the individual to the state, which in turn makes the leftist state inherently unstable.

Indeed, when one looks closely at any of the leftist models in action, from the post-revolutionary experiences in France, Russia, and China, to America’s almost total immersion in liberal claptrap for the past half century, one sees a clear pattern, namely, that in the absence of the discipline of a free market and a meaningful moral framework, collectivism inevitably leads to both social and economic collapse.

Indeed, American liberalism is failing as we speak, or to be more specific, as we write. Financed entirely with huge amounts of borrowed money, it has set the nation on a path to *de facto* bankruptcy from which the only exit is some sort of catastrophe. We put it this way last week:

There is no check or balance, no moral or practical barrier, no group of individuals extant within the existing structure of the present government that is capable of protecting the value of the nation’s currency against the metastatic growth of the federal Leviathan . . . So, where does it all end? Well, the one thing that we know for certain is that fiscal order in the United States will not be restored by a sudden surge of parsimony among the nation’s elected officials or by a return to the gold standard. Thus, we know that either this nation is destined to become the

largest banana republic in the history of the world or an outside force will compel its citizens to come to terms with their addiction to the false joys of living far beyond their means.

What we didn't say last week, but should have, is that the federal deficit in this fiscal year is expected to top \$1.5 trillion – that's *trillion* – which is just over 11% of GDP, the highest level since 1945. Moreover, it seems highly likely that these annual deficits will remain in the trillion-plus range for “as far as the eye can see,” to borrow an expression from the good old days in the early 1980s, when the magic-max number used by fiscal pessimists was \$200 billion. The national debt next year for this, the world's last remaining “superpower,” will reach just under 100% of the nation's GDP, which, as the *Wall Street Journal* put it recently, “makes Argentina look good by comparison.” And this, the *Journal* notes “is *before* [emphasis in the original] the first baby boomer hits retirement age next summer, to say nothing of the liabilities coming from Obamacare.”

So, as we see it, the bottom line on all of this is that the liberal establishment that currently runs things in Washington will, at some point, get the boot and be replaced by some other entity, which subscribes to a non-Marxist ideology.

Russia's communists were replaced by parasitical thugs who were more interested in looting the nation than in developing and implementing a successful new

governing model. China's communists were also replaced by thugs, but its thugs had the good sense to take a somewhat more imaginative approach to the development of a post-Marxist governing model than the Russians did.

We here at the Political Forum choose to believe that, when the time comes to replace its lefties, America will make better choices than the Russians and the Chinese did. We believe that, in response to the hard times that will accompany America's upcoming rendezvous with reality, Americans will demand that their new leaders return to honoring the traditional virtues, which were responsible for American greatness, including 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.

In short, we believe that America will eventually heed Weber's warning that the upcoming bureaucratic state be “checked . . . within a framework of mutually limiting power structures,” and, “subordinated to the control of individual leaders selected on the basis of non-bureaucratic principles and acting under such principles.”

In the meantime – and this meantime could last a longtime – we believe that the good old U.S. of A. faces some very tough times as the bill comes due for many decades of liberal mismanagement.

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