

Mark L. Melcher Publisher
melcher@thepoliticalforum.com

Stephen R. Soukup Editor
soukup@thepoliticalforum.com

THEY SAID IT

At this point, Obama appears to be hesitating for reasons of both substance and politics. Last spring, he could hope for an Afghan government run by someone other than Karzai; now that hope is gone. He has read the history of the Vietnam War, so he's worried about getting in deeper without an off-ramp in case things go bad. He doesn't think he can sell escalation to skeptical Democrats without that off-ramp.

Eliot Cohen, a military historian who worked in the George W. Bush administration (and who supports sending more troops), described the dilemma this way: "If he goes ahead with this decision, he's basically going to be a war president." That means devoting more budget money – and even more important, more of his own time and political capital -- to waging the war. It could also mean paring back his domestic agenda, already slowed by economic and political adversity. It's no wonder he's hesitating.

Doyle McManus, "Obama Must Rethink Rethinking Afghanistan," *Los Angeles Times*, November 15, 2009.

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OBAMA'S DILEMMA. AND OURS.

Barack Obama has a problem. Well, to be fair, the United States has a problem. But since Barack Obama is the official head of state and, as such, the man charged with ensuring the remedy of this problem, it's his baby, at least for now.

This is, it should come as no surprise, a complicated problem. It is exacerbated by the very foundations of American society and could well test those foundations in new and treacherous ways. It is a problem that will pull the President in many different directions at once and which, if he screws it up or leans too far in any direction, could cost him his presidency.

Obama's problem, of course, revolves around the central question of how best to deal with the Islamic terrorists in our midst. Pretending that Major Hasan, the Ft. Hood murderer, was not motivated by his religion won't make the problem go away. Pretending that he was a "lone wolf" – a one-off event not to be repeated – won't make the problem go away. And insisting that the overwhelming majority of Muslims, both here and abroad, are peaceful and open-minded won't make the problem go away. People are being killed in this nation. And they are being killed by Islamists. And if it doesn't stop, eventually someone is going to insist that something be done about it.

We would, as a society, do well to remember that Hasan's descent into Islamism and his subsequent act of violence were not isolated. His terror attack may have been the deadliest in this country since 9/11, but it was hardly the first, as the military historian and classicist Victor Davis Hanson noted last week:

The Fort Hood murders fit into a now familiar pattern of radical Islam-inspired violence that manifests itself in two principal ways.

First are the formal terrorist plots. Radical Muslims have attempted, in coordinated fashion, to blow up a bridge, explode a train, assault a military base, and topple a high-rise building — in ways al-Qaeda terrorist leaders abroad warned us would follow 9/11.

This year alone, three terrorist plots have been foiled.

Najibullah Zazi was indicted for plans to set off a bomb in New York on the anniversary of 9/11.

Daniel Patrick Boyd and Hysen Sherifi were charged with conspiring to murder U.S. military personnel at the Quantico, Va., military base.

Hosam Maher Husein Smadi — a 19-year-old Jordanian in the U.S. illegally — was arrested after being accused of placing what he thought were explosives near a 60-story office tower in Dallas.

In all these cases, the plotter (or plotters) either had ties to terrorists or voiced Islamic-fueled anger at the U.S.

More than 20 other domestic terrorist plots have been stopped by law enforcement agencies since 9/11. On average, in the 98 months since the

World Trade Center and Pentagon attacks, a radical Islamic-inspired terrorist plot has been uncovered every four months.

There have also been “lone wolf” mass murders in which angry radical Muslims sought to channel their frustrations and failures into violence against their perceived enemies of Islam.

Since September 11, several Muslim men have run over innocent bystanders or shot random people at or near military bases, synagogues, and shopping malls . . .

Naveed Afzal Haq is currently on trial for going on a murderous rampage at the Jewish Federation of Greater Seattle building. A survivor said Haq stated his attack was a “personal statement against Jews.”

Mohammed Reza Taheri-azar ran over nine students at the University of North Carolina. Officers said he told them afterward he wanted to avenge the deaths of Muslims worldwide.

Omeed Aziz Popal struck 18 pedestrians with his car near a Jewish center in San Francisco. Witnesses say he said, “I am a terrorist,” at the scene.

Why haven't we heard more about this? Why haven't we been made aware of the ongoing threat to Americans *in America* from Islam-inspired terrorists?

There are several answers to these questions, some far more important than others.

For starters, the mainstream press has generally maintained the position that Islamic terrorism is a figment of the right-wing imagination. Terrorism was George Bush's excuse to destroy civil liberties; to listen

in on your phone calls to grandma; to see what books you checked out from the library; to be, in short, typically “right wing,” but without having to justify it. Bush and Cheney exploited a tragedy and created a myth that allowed them to do whatever they wanted. Or so we’ve been told.

A second, far more relevant reason for the general silence on Islamic terrorism since 9/11 is the fact that this is America. And America and her residents are tolerant almost to a fault.

This is not, we should emphasize, a rant about “political correctness.” Political correctness probably played and continues to play a role in how some people view Muslims in this country. But not, in our opinion, as big a role as do the founding principles of the country. It is worth remembering, as we near Thanksgiving, that the Pilgrims who landed at Plymouth were, by and large, refugees – *religious* refugees, seeking only a place to practice their faith in peace. And thus has it always been in this country, more or less. Some notable bouts of anti-Semitism, anti-Catholicism, and others notwithstanding, Americans are generally willing to let others worship as they wish. From Plymouth to the Establishment Clause to the People’s Temple, Americans are, historically, loath to stick their noses into others’ religious beliefs, however kooky they may seem – no matter what your sociology instructor might tell you about the manifestly intolerant “religious right.”

But that can change, at least where certain religious beliefs translate into violence against other Americans. The uniquely American conception of tolerance has thus far been preserved, but that may not always be so. As the columnist and business professor Tunku Varadarajan wrote last week, eventually, the country will reach a breaking point:

Muslims are the most difficult “incomers” in the ongoing integration challenge, which America has always handled with pride – and a kind of swagger. *We’re the salad bowl/melting pot. Drive through Queens to see how we do this.*

America differentiates itself on integration from Western European countries, which are far more cringing and guilt-driven in their approach. But can the American swagger persist if many Americans come genuinely to view Muslims as Fifth Columnists? The integration compact depends on a broad trust that the immigrant’s desire to be American can happily co-exist with his other forms of racial/cultural/religious identity. Once that trust doesn’t exist, America faces a problem in need of urgent resolution.

Have we reached that point of breakdown in trust? Not yet, I think, and not by some distance; but a few more murderous incidents of the Maj. Hasan variety – a few more shouts of “Allahu Akbar” as Americans are shot dead – will push many Americans on to a dangerous cusp.

To date, that “dangerous cusp” has been avoided by a confluence of circumstances. First, it has been this country’s good fortune that many of its enemies, many of the would-be terrorists have been truly stupid and have been easily spotted by law enforcement. Additionally, and more importantly and controversially, the contentious domestic intelligence procedures have undoubtedly paid big dividends. Terrorists, it turns out, are easier to spot if you’re actually looking for them.

Lastly, as we have written before, we strongly suspect that many of the young Muslim men that the Bush administration “rounded up” after 9/11 were not “suspects,” but were, rather, informers or potential informers. It is our guess – and obviously no one can know this for sure – that most of the tips that American law enforcement has received about Muslim terrorists has come from within the Muslim community. Muslim-Americans are Americans. And the overwhelming majority of them love America just as you and we do, despite the “integration challenges” noted by Vardarajan.

But to reiterate, this is not guaranteed always to remain so. If attacks increase; if the death toll increases; if the targets are larger and more prominent, then eventually there will be some sort of blowback. Non-Muslim Americans will grow more and more leery of their Muslim neighbors. And Muslim Americans will therefore grow more and more leery of their Non-Muslim neighbors. And cooperation with law enforcement will cease, leading, in turn, to less intelligence and an increased likelihood of attacks by the small but by-then growing minority. And the vicious cycle will repeat itself.

In the Bush-hating trance that enveloped the mainstream media over the last eight-plus years, one of the most critical aspects of the war on terror was overlooked, largely because it was inconvenient and didn't fit the media-established story line. By waging war on terrorists at home and abroad, the Bush administration's singular goal was to prevent further attacks like 9/11, which everyone assumed were inevitable. But they weren't inevitable, at least not on such a massive scale. And by preventing further large-scale attacks – through a combination of taking the war to the terrorists and aggressive domestic intelligence gathering – Bush et al. were protecting Muslims as well, at home and abroad.

Imagine, if you will, the screams for blood that would have followed a second, third, or fourth 9/11-type attack. Imagine the similar screams that would have followed the detonation of a dirty-nuke in downtown Chicago. Imagine the aftermath of a suitcase nuke in Lafayette Park.

It would have been ugly – again, at home and abroad.

By fighting the war on terror vigorously and seriously, George Bush kept the country away from the “dangerous cusp.” He kept his constituents away from the all too human quest for vengeance. In short, he helped preserve that unique American tolerance.

The only question now is whether Barack Obama understands this and is able, politically, to do the same. As we said at the top of this piece, Obama has a

problem. How he handles this problem will determine the fate of his presidency and, in the short term, of the country he has been charged with leading.

If you had asked last Wednesday whether President Obama understood all of this and likewise understood the threat that the Ft. Hood massacre posed to the essential domestic tranquility of the nation, we'd have said yes, most definitely. This was, we should note, the day after the President gave an address at the memorial service for those killed at Ft. Hood.

We understand that many in the conservative press were upset by the speech, although we're not sure that we understand why. Among other things, President Obama acknowledged that Hasan's treachery was a part of the global war on terror and had, in fact, brought the war home to Texas. More to the point, Obama specifically addressed and specifically dismissed the jihadis' view of the world and the afterworld. In one of the most controversial portions of his address, Obama said, “This much we do know. No faith justifies these murderous and craven acts. No just and loving God looks upon them with favor. For what he has done we know the killer will be met with justice in this world and the next.”

Apparently, some commentators were upset that Obama presumed to speak for God. But this passage is actually more subtle than that and more subtly brilliant.

What Obama actually says is that he (and by extension we) believes that a *just and loving* God would reject the acts perpetrated by Hasan (and by extension all jihadis), which is to say that any God who would not reject such acts is *not* just and loving and must therefore be himself rejected. And that is an unmistakable, if subtle, denunciation of jihadism and a reiteration of the war against the jihadists.

Unfortunately, just two short days after that denunciation and reiteration, the President's Attorney General (acting on the President's behalf) announced that three terror suspects from the camp

at Guantanamo, including the admitted mastermind of 9/11, will be tried in civilian court in New York. To call this a profoundly unserious act for a nation at war is akin, we suppose, to calling Mt. Everest “a hill.” Words cannot do justice to the stupidity and lack of seriousness involved here.

Combine that with Obama’s inability to make a decision about how to proceed in Afghanistan and it is clear that the President is conflicted. The unofficial word is that he is looking not at strategies for victory, but strategies for ending the war, what some have termed “off ramps.” He professes to understand that the war is necessary, yet he seems unwilling to get serious about it.

If you asked why that would be, we’d say that he is afraid of the left wing of his party and what it, in its ignorance, will do to him if he prosecutes the war vigorously. Like Candidate Obama, the moonbats on the left have neither the knowledge to make informed statements about the war on terror nor the responsibility for making decisions that could cost countless American lives. *President* Obama, by contrast, knows better.

Hence his dilemma.

Does he prosecute the war as vigorously as President Bush did, hoping to keep the attacks to an acceptable minimum, knowing that such a course of action might cost him the support of his erstwhile most ardent supporters? Or does he play politics with the war, hoping to beat the odds, aware that his bad luck could tear the country apart and bring interminable suffering to countless Muslims at home and abroad?

To us, the choice is obvious. But then, we don’t care what the moonbats think.

The choice is not so obvious to President Obama. He and we can just hope and pray that circumstances don’t make that choice for him.

POLITICAL LIGHT AT THE END OF THE RECESSION.

A common theme among political writers of all persuasions is that the Republican Party has a serious demographic problem. Details differ from author to author, but the idea is that the future belongs to the Democratic Party because it has a lock on the nation’s fastest growing population cohorts, which are commonly defined as minorities, youth, non-church goers, moderates, and suburbanites. In contrast, the theory goes, the largest groups in the Republican base, i.e., white, southern, gun toting religious fanatics and rednecks, are going the way of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker.

Another method of presenting what is essentially the same theme is via a red state-blue state breakdown. Once again, approaches vary, but the essence of the theory is to note that the great majority of the largest, most heavily populated, fastest growing, urbanized states went for Obama in 2008; that indeed, the six largest of these Obama states, namely California, New York, Florida, Illinois, Pennsylvania, and Ohio together comprise a total of 175 of the 270 electoral votes that are needed to win. In contrast, McCain took only five states with 10 or more electoral votes. They were Texas (34), Georgia (15), Tennessee (11), Missouri (11), and Arizona (10) for a total of 81.

Now this is all well and good for Democrats, but the question that holds the key to America’s political future is what happens when the big states, like the above-mentioned California, New York, Florida and Illinois, and their somewhat smaller but still large partners in fiscal irresponsibility, such as Michigan, New Jersey, and Rhode Island, go bankrupt, broke, flat broke, which is a valid question given that all of these bastions of urban liberalism and numerous others are currently flirting with financial collapse and seem to have neither the collective will nor the collective brains to do what it would take to restore fiscal soundness.

What happens when unemployment continues to skyrocket among “the youth” and “the minorities,” when reduced salaries and layoffs cut past the fat and into the meat of the tens of thousands of bureaucrats

and school teachers in these states; when the hordes of “moderates,” “suburbanites,” and “non-church-goers” find themselves struggling to pay ever higher taxes in order to maintain the liberal agenda that is the primary if not sole source of their sense of moral worth?

What happens when the above-mentioned “population cohorts” that tend to favor a liberal agenda begin to shift? Indeed, what political party in its right mind would, during what appears to be an extended period of very high unemployment and economic hard times, want to be dependent on a voting block made up primarily of angry minorities, crooked labor unions, a huge surplus of overpaid, underworked state and federal bureaucrats, another huge surplus of overpaid, underworked, unionized school teachers, a gaggle of unemployed and disillusioned “youth,” and a badly overtaxed population of “moderates,” “suburbanites” and “non-church goers” who are rapidly losing their faith in the secular religion of liberalism?

What happens, we believe, is that the entire liberal agenda gets put on hold, that’s what. State by state, region by region, individual by individual, Americans begin telling their representatives in Washington, in

no uncertain terms, that they need to stop worrying about such claptrap as global warming, whether some low-life drifter has health insurance, and the salary of some bonehead in New York City who’d be selling pencils on the street if the government hadn’t bailed him out of the mess he got himself into in the first place; to stop playing doctor, banker, automobile maker, and, yes, Messiah; to tell the top guy to stop wandering around the world like some sort of mental case apologizing to every Tom, Dick and Harry that he meets on the street for things that happened before he was even born; and for heaven’s sake to get off the Robin Hood kick and leave people’s income and assets the hell alone.

Now, we are not saying here that Barack Obama and his radical brand of liberalism are on the ropes. A great many battles remain to be fought, some of which are likely to be lost. But recently we began to see fear creeping into the words and actions of some of Washington’s leading liberals and we thought this would be an opportune time to restate our growing belief that the feverous economic times the nation has been going through may turn out to be cure for the underlying illness.

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