

**Mark L. Melcher** Publisher  
melcher@thepoliticalforum.com

**Stephen R. Soukup** Editor  
soukup@thepoliticalforum.com

## THEY SAID IT

And the strangers came and tried to teach us their ways  
And scorned us for being what we are  
But they might as well go chasing after moonbeams  
Or light a penny candle on a star

Dr. Arthur Nicholas Whistler Colahan, Galway Bay, 1947.

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## NO SHAME? OR NO BRAINS?

Okay, here's the deal. Pray every day for the lives, health, and safe return of the American men and women fighting in Afghanistan. May God bless them for their patriotism and their bravery. But if you're worried about the war itself, focus your attention not on Afghanistan and Barack's "surge," but on what is happening in Pakistan, because that's where the outcome of this conflict will be decided. Indeed, Barack himself made this clear in his recent speech at West Point when he said "our success in Afghanistan is inextricably linked to our partnership with Pakistan."

Last week, blogger/journalist Matthew Rosenberg expanded upon this reality in a *Wall Street Journal* article entitled "Pakistan Resists Role Across The Border" in which he quoted "senior U.S. officials" stationed over there as saying that "the success of the U.S. surge in Afghanistan hinges, to a significant extent, on whether [we] can persuade Pakistan to crack down on Afghan insurgents on its side of the border."

Despite this agreement between Barack and Rosenberg over the importance of Pakistan to America's war in Afghanistan, there appears to be some difference between the two over how well the Pakistani "partnership" is going.

Barack acknowledges that at one time some Pakistanis believed that "the struggle against extremism was not their fight and that Pakistan would be better off doing little or seeking accommodation" with the Muslim extremists. But he says that that has now changed. He put it this way: "In the past, we too often defined our relationship with Pakistan narrowly. Those days are over. Moving forward we are committed to a partnership with Pakistan that is built on a foundation of mutual interests, mutual respect, and mutual trust."

Rosenberg is somewhat less sanguine about Pakistan's commitment to the combined effort. He notes that while "Pakistan's military has been driving against the Pakistan Taliban – an offshoot of the Afghan movement -- in the tribal areas of South Waziristan," the Afghan Taliban havens in Pakistan's northwestern tribal areas and southwestern province of Baluchistan haven't been attacked." He explained the significance of this thusly:

With those sanctuaries intact, "our fear is that no matter how many boots we put on the ground [in Afghanistan], the enemy still has a place from where it can regroup, rearm and strategize," said a senior U.S. military commander overseeing operations in Afghanistan.

To change that, "there will be a concerted diplomatic effort to address the sanctuary problem," said a senior U.S. official in Afghanistan.

"It would be very helpful if additional pressure could be put [by Pakistan] on the leadership elements that are causing problems in Afghanistan," Gen. David Petraeus, the chief of the U.S. Central Command, said Sunday in Bahrain.

But Pakistan so far has no plans to move against Afghan Taliban havens in its territory. Pakistani officials say their first priority is to consolidate control in South Waziristan – and doing so will weaken the Afghan Taliban taking refuge in neighboring areas. They also fear the U.S. surge could further destabilize Pakistan by angering the 27 million ethnic Pashtuns who straddle the border. The Taliban is overwhelmingly a Pashtun movement.

The U.S. wants the Pakistani military to fight all Taliban factions . . . without

an understanding of the ground reality, complained a senior Pakistani military official.

So, what is going on here? Was Barack confused when he asserted in the above-mentioned West Point speech that "public opinion [in Pakistan] has turned;" that there is not longer any doubt in Pakistan that we "share a common enemy?"

For an insight into these questions, we will turn to an article entitled "The New U.S. Policy in Afghanistan: Evading the Root Problem," written by Tufail Ahmad and Yigal Carmon for the December 2, 2009 issue of the Middle East Media Research Institute's (MEMRI) publication *Inquiry & Analysis*.

Ahmad is the Director of the MEMRI's Urdu-Pashtu Media Project. He is a widely traveled British intellectual of Indian origin with extensive experience in the Middle East as a journalist.

Carmon is the President of MEMRI. He is a former colonel in Israeli military intelligence, and acted as a counterterrorism adviser to both Israeli Prime Ministers Yitzhak Shamir and Yitzhak Rabin. We are pleased to say that he has been a friend of ours, here at The Political Forum, since the mid-1990s when we began writing about the threat of Islamic terrorism. The following are clips from the article.

The current situation in the Pakistan-Afghanistan region has been largely shaped by the Pakistani army's support of militant organizations over the past three decades. This ongoing support is rooted in the Pakistani identity and in Pakistan's perception of its role as an Islamic state ever since its creation in 1947.

For more than half of its 62 years, Pakistan was ruled by military officers. But even when it was ruled by civilians, in the debate over Pakistan's identity, secularists and liberal forces have always lost, while the military

and the religious groups have always set the nation's agenda and defined its future course . . . The shaping of the Pakistani identity on the Islamic path has over the years turned Pakistan into an expansionist state, which has translated into the military's policy of "strategic depth." In practical terms, this policy meant a constant concerted effort by the military-led Pakistani establishment to go beyond its borders into India (not only in Kashmir but also the mainland India) and in Afghanistan through the use of militant groups.

The Pakistani military is bound to pursue a policy which broadly runs between a) playing a double game with the militant groups by on the one hand attacking them, on the other hand providing them with early warnings and escape routes during various security operations, and b) coddling the militant groups as it does with the favored militant commanders and the Sunni jihadist organizations in the Punjab province, whom the military refrains from attacking . . .

The current Afghan crisis was caused by the military-led Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), which is the final arbiter of power in Pakistan. In mid-1990s, the ISI organized and used the Taliban to remove the warring Afghan mujahideen and warlords from Kabul, and to serve as Pakistan's long arm in Afghanistan. However, after 9/11, the U.S. dislodged the Taliban from Afghanistan, throwing the Pakistani military's Afghan strategy of using the militants in Afghanistan into disarray. The Taliban, and with them Al-Qaeda, retreated to their home base in Pakistan.

Between 2002 and 2004, there was relative peace in Afghanistan because the Pakistani military did not dare to confront America after its invasion of Afghanistan following September 11. However, in 2005 the ISI finally resumed its policy of strategic depth.

The Taliban and Al-Qaeda militants began moving back into Afghanistan via the Pakistani tribal region . . .

To this day, it is the Pakistani military which is the key supporter of the militants in Afghanistan. The militants continue to travel freely across the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. The key militant groups in Afghanistan, i.e. the Haqqani Network, Al-Qaeda, Hizb-e-Islami and the Afghan Taliban, have formed a strong working relationship, with the direction of the militants' strategy in Afghanistan being controlled by the Quetta Taliban Shura, which is the executive council led by Mullah Omar. That body is protected by the ISI, Pakistani intelligence . . .

An overall assessment of the battle in Afghanistan on the one hand, and the U.S. drone attacks and the Pakistani army's show of force against the militant groups on the other hand, reveals that the militants are definitely not losing ground. In fact, in Afghanistan, the Afghan Taliban, the Hizb-e-Islami militants, and Al-Qaeda are present in all provinces. Moreover, in Pakistan, the Sunni militant organizations based in the Punjab province are not touched by the military. Instead, they are not only growing in number and strength, but are now beginning to hatch international terror plots.

In short, according to Ahmad and Carmon, the ISI, which, they say, holds the real power in Pakistan, does not share Barack's noble goal of creating a "free Afghanistan," but seeks instead to expand Pakistan's influence in Afghanistan on the backs of their friends the Islamic militants there.

Fair enough. But does ISI really have the power to thwart Barack's new Afghan "surge?" We don't know, of course. But Ahmad and Carmon are so certain that it does that they say unequivocally in the conclusion to their article that "the U.S. is locked in a conflict it cannot win."

Interestingly enough, we have arrived at the same conclusion from a different direction. Ours is based on the belief that, given America's heavy indebtedness and the economic hard times that it faces, the public simply will not support the war for as long as it would take to win it. And, as we said two weeks ago in these pages, while "it is theoretically possible . . . that Barack can convince the American people that they have no choice but to continue the war in Afghanistan," when his self-imposed time limit runs out, we don't think he will even try. His heart just isn't in it.

So it's a matter of time. Right? Exactly. Barack know this. Indeed, he himself set the timetable. And so does the enemy. And so does America's "partner," Pakistan and the de facto rulers of that nation, the ISI. And so does the Chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Adm. Mike Mullen, who was in Afghanistan a week ago, accompanied by the *Washington Post's* well known Associate Editor and columnist David Ignatius, who had this to say in an editorial that appeared in the paper yesterday. It was entitled "Race Against the Clock."

Traveling with Mullen, I had a chance to see up close the opportunities and pitfalls of Obama's decision for a short-term escalation. The strongest impression was that the administration's plan to begin transferring responsibility to the Afghan army and police in July 2011 is overly optimistic. If all goes well, the Afghan security forces will be stronger by then, but they will still need a lot of American help.

Let's start with Obama's desire to rush in the 30,000 additional troops by next summer. It ain't likely to happen. Lt. Gen. David Rodriguez, the U.S. deputy commander, cautions that they may not all arrive until November. Mullen says that he's confident the first 16,000 will arrive by July, but he warned a meeting of logistical planners at Bagram: "I just hope you have a Plan B. Life doesn't turn out to be perfect."

The logistical buildup may be the most complicated part of the surge. To transport all those troops means, among other things, tripling the number of beds at a transit base in Kyrgyzstan, adding facilities at three airports in Afghanistan and constructing new quarters around the country that are solid but not too solid . . .

Then there's the challenge of improving the Afghan security forces. Sometimes it has a make-believe quality: At a base near Gardez, Afghan officers are giving their own PowerPoint presentations and staffing a joint operations center with banks of computers and even a screen to display the camera feeds from U.S. unmanned aerial vehicles.

But the temptation to have the Afghans mimic the American military is a mistake. As Mullen told U.S. soldiers at a base north of Kandahar, the Afghans "need to take care of their security at a level they're capable of, which is 'good enough.'" And reaching even that middling level will take a while.

Another reality check here is the corruption of the Afghan government. When Mullen held a "shura" with tribal leaders in Kandahar, they all agreed this was the No. 1 problem. "Corruption in Afghan society is like cancer," said one bearded elder. "It has spread all over the body. It's that bad. We must bring them to justice." Mullen promised action, but that's complicated by the allegations that Kandahar's most notoriously corrupt figure is the brother of President Hamid Karzai.

"How much time do we have" to regain the trust of people in Kandahar, Mullen asked the elders. One cautioned that the fact that only half of those invited to the shura had come was a sign that "people have lost faith."

In our opinion, the bottom line on all of this is, as we've said before in these pages, that Barack's half-hearted, short-term escalation of the war in

Afghanistan is deeply flawed, both strategically and in practice, and will cost the United States dearly in the long run.

The military brass and the men and women they command are doing what they are paid to do. They are following orders. And, as we said in the first paragraph of this piece, may God bless them all. But the damn fool in the White House who is giving the orders is guilty of willful ignorance, and that's not just a shame it's cowardly, it's buying time and paying for it with the nation's most precious asset, the blood of its fighting men and women.

## THE WAGES OF IGNORANCE.

For the better part of three decades now, we have lamented in these pages (and their various predecessors) the state of the American educational system. Always, we bemoan the lack of actual education taking place in said system. Usually we cite some study or survey that shows that today's students are being failed by their educators, with most believing that Benjamin Franklin was a drug-store magnate or being unable to find the world on a globe. And often we quote from the report of the 1983 National Commission on Excellence in Education as follows: "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."

Although we'll gladly concede that education – and humanities education in particular – is a hobby horse of ours, we also think that the education system and the students it produces are overpoweringly relevant to the study of politics and to any reasonable understanding of the current state of political and social discourse in this country. An ignorant electorate is a dangerous electorate, not simply because its own ignorant passions can become inflamed and lead to political disaster, but also because those passions can be manipulated by equally ignorant or unscrupulous politicians, who exploit the public's lack of knowledge to their own benefit – and to the country's detriment. Or, as we put it six months ago:

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.

Once upon a time, democracies limited the franchise to those voters who could be presumed to have some formal education – landholders – and who could thus also be presumed to have some understanding of history and civics and their responsibility in the historical continuum of democratic action. Today, in the age of universal suffrage and universal education, it can no longer be presumed that any voter has the requisite knowledge to perform his democratic duty responsibly. The problem is not that the franchise has been expanded to the uneducated. It's that the uneducation has been expanded to include virtually everyone with the franchise.

But while we once fretted over all of this, worrying about how clever politicians would manipulate the rubes, we now have a second, perhaps more significant fear. How does a nation survive when its politicians are not all that clever, when they too are the products of an education system that has "taught" them little more than platitudes and propaganda? How does a nation manage, much less thrive, when its president knows little or nothing of history, of law, of human behavior? After four, much less eight years of policy and regulation based on rubbish and ignorance, how difficult will it be to recover?

These are not, we should note, mere hypothetical questions. Our brilliant and finely educated president is nonetheless painfully uninformed, particularly about history. And he has demonstrated this time and time and time again. As the historian and classicist Victor Davis Hanson pointed out last week, Barack Obama's demonstration of his historical ignorance is one of the few constancies of his presidency. To wit:

President Obama has given a number of major speeches touching on world affairs since he announced his bid for the presidency. All have invoked historical examples — usually for moral purposes, but often at the expense of both literal and figurative truth . . .

In these minor and major historical distortions, there are two recurrent themes. The most obvious is that George W. Bush has been culpable, and that a far more sensitive and astute Obama is here to set things right. Historical citations will be crafted, in deductive fashion, to support that thesis.

But there is a second sort in which the self-proclaimed global healer Obama marshals history for noble purposes. And in service to his inspirational global ecumenism, the president apparently feels free to twist and fudge the past in order to suggest that our cultures are all roughly equal, with pasts that are likewise both good and bad, and thus we now need to bond and unify with appreciation of one another's differences.

Obama feels that reverence for both the facts and spirit of history is not as important as that noble aim.

It is interesting and useful, we believe, that Hanson mentions George Bush in his deconstruction of Obama's historical ignorance. Bush, for obvious reasons, provides a handy and instructive point of comparison.

We don't need to tell you that nearly the entire political ruling class considered George W. Bush to be "not very smart," to put it nicely. We disagreed with that assessment, of course. But for our purposes here, Bush's actual intelligence is irrelevant. The left (and many on the right) insisted that he was dumb and that he was therefore embarrassing and inept as President.

But they all conceded that he surrounded himself with smart people, like Dick Cheney, who made up for what GWB lacked in smarts with their own evil brilliance.

That is not the case we are making against Obama. We don't think he's dumb, not by any stretch of the imagination. He's no smarter than Bush, of course, but as we note above, we think Bush is a bright guy. Moreover, like Bush, Obama has a top-notch education: Ivy League undergrad and Harvard professional degree.

No, the charge we level at Obama is different. It reflects the differences between him and Bush with regard to age, with regard to rearing, and with regard to political and social predilections. Specifically, Obama is ignorant of history because he was educated in an era after the education system had been effectively dismantled and in an educational atmosphere in which "truth," knowledge, and literacy, took a back seat to "awareness" and "righteousness." Consider, if you will, the following lines from Professor Hanson, which follow immediately after the paragraphs cited above:

If, for example, Muslims can be assured that the West has been just as culpable as they have been, and if they can be praised by unduly exaggerating their past cultural achievements, then perhaps the Islamic world will see that the United States is a broker of good will.

The alternatives to Obama's constant historical revisionism would be to be quiet about history's often disturbing truths — or to admit that the present globalization, in terms of economics, politics, culture, and military affairs, is largely an embrace of Westernization and the result of the unique dynamism and morality of Western culture itself.

Hanson seems to think, or at least implies here, that Obama's distortions are purposeful and calculated. We're inclined to think otherwise. After all, this is a

man whose entire career is steeped in associations with and affection for individuals whose post-modernism is at the root of the destruction of this nation's humanities education. Indeed, of all the radical associations that caused Obama trouble during the 2008 campaign, the most problematic were those who had made their names and reputations peddling post-modern historicist nonsense. Indeed, some were even actively working to "reform" education by further subjugating truth and knowledge to feeling and "will."

As we have noted before, we have long been troubled by Obama's associations with the likes of William Ayers and Rashid Khalidi, not because of their views on politics (or not *just* because of their views on politics), but because of their views on education and the implicit effects that the type of education they advocate has had on the American public, including, it would seem, Obama himself.

In October of last year, education researcher Sol Stern wrote the following about Ayers and his impact on education:

As one of the leaders of a movement for bringing radical social-justice teaching into our public school classrooms, Mr. Ayers is not a school reformer.

He is a school destroyer. He still hopes for a revolutionary upheaval that will finally bring down American capitalism and imperialism, but this time around Mr. Ayers sows the seeds of resistance and rebellion in America's future teachers. Thus, education students signing up for a course Mr. Ayers teaches at UIC, "On Urban Education," can read these exhortations from the course description: "Homelessness, crime, racism, oppression – we have the resources and knowledge to fight and overcome these things. We need to look beyond our isolated situations, to define our problems globally. We cannot be

child advocates . . . in Chicago or New York and ignore the web that links us with the children of India or Palestine."

The readings Mr. Ayers assigns to his university students are as intellectually diverse as a political commissar's indoctrination session in one of his favorite communist tyrannies. The list for his urban education course includes the bible of the critical pedagogy movement, Brazilian Marxist Paulo Freire's "Pedagogy of the Oppressed"; two books by Mr. Ayers himself; and "Teaching to Transgress" by bell hooks (lower case), the radical black feminist writer.

Two years ago Mr. Ayers shared with his students a letter he wrote to a young radical friend: "I've been told to grow up from the time I was ten until this morning. Bullshit. Anyone who salutes your 'youthful idealism' is a patronizing reactionary. Resist! Don't grow up! I went to Camp Casey [Cindy Sheehan's vigil at the Bush ranch in Crawford, Texas] in August precisely because I'm an agnostic about how and where the rebellion will break out, but I know I want to be there and I know it will break out." (The letter is on his Web site, [www.billayers.org](http://www.billayers.org).)

America's ideal of public schooling as a means of assimilating all children (and particularly the children of new immigrants) into a common civic and democratic culture is already under assault from the multiculturalists and their race-and-gender-centered pedagogy. Mr. Ayers has tried to give the civic culture ideal a *coup de grace*, contemptuously dismissing it as nothing more than what the critical pedagogy theorists commonly refer to as "capitalist hegemony."

In the world of the Ed schools, Mr. Ayers's movement has established a sizeable beachhead – witness his election earlier this year as vice president for curriculum of the American Education Research Association, the nation's largest organization of education professors and researchers.

What we have, then, is a President who believes that to acknowledge the West's manifest accomplishments is to engage in cultural bullying or, worse yet, to ignore "the other side" – be it the other side of the argument or the perspective of the "other" in post-modern phraseology. All of which is to say that he all but certainly believes the historical "errors" that have become the defining characteristic of his outreach to the global community and, in turn, his foreign policy.

To take just one example, in the above-cited piece, Professor Hanson notes the historical inaccuracies in Obama's much-heralded Cairo speech, delivered earlier year:

1) The following can be said of Obama's Islamic mythology: a) Islam did not pave "the way for Europe's Renaissance and Enlightenment." To the extent Islam was involved at all, it was Greek scholars fleeing Ottoman pressure at Byzantium who sparked the Western Renaissance, while the Enlightenment's Romantic movements proclaimed a desire to free classical lands from supposed Ottoman backwardness. b) Breakthroughs in navigation, pens, printing, medicine, etc. were largely Western or Chinese innovations. c) "Islam has a proud tradition of tolerance. We see it in the history of Andalusia and Córdoba during the Inquisition." Córdoba had few Muslims when the Inquisition began in 1478, having been reconquered by the Christians well over two centuries earlier. d) Left unsaid was that the great colonizers of the Middle East were

not the Europeans, but the Ottoman Muslims, who were far harsher and ruled far longer.

2) "No system of government can or should be imposed upon one nation by any other." Would that include postwar Japan, Italy, and Germany? Should we not have attempted to impose a system of government in Iraq or Afghanistan?

3) "For centuries, black people in America suffered the lash of the whip as slaves and the humiliation of segregation. But it was not violence that won full and equal rights." During the 1860s, more than 600,000 Americans died over slavery in America's bloodiest war, which resulted in universal citizenship; during the 1960s and 1970s, racial turmoil over matters of racial equality was not nonviolent.

Each of these errors in history could conceivably lead a President to make errors in judgment and action that would have disastrous consequences. As befits a representative of today's left, Obama appears not to understand that the "human rights" and "progress" he purports to value are directly tied to specific cultures and specific circumstances under which that "culture" and its bedrock values can be transmitted.

As Hanson and others have noted, human rights may be universal, but they are not universally observed. Man may be endowed with them by his creator, but he is allowed to enjoy them by the virtue of his association with those cultures that value them more than others and that are willing to use force to defend them.

In his Nobel Peace Prize speech two weeks ago, Obama declared himself to be a supporter of the just use of force, i.e. not a pacifist, but a supporter of "just war theory." This makes sense, of course, given that he has also long insisted that his favorite political

philosopher is Reinhold Niebuhr, whose contributions to the 20<sup>th</sup> century understanding of just war were immense.

Yet one wonders if Obama fully understands what that means, steeped as he is in post-modern leftism and ignorant as he is of cultural and political history.

If there is anyone more important to the modern American conceptions of “just war” than Niebuhr, it is undoubtedly the Catholic scholar George Weigel, who last week weighed in on “just war” and Obama’s Nobel.

Among other points, Weigel stressed the importance of the understanding that “just war” is not a checklist of hurdles that leaders must overcome in order to wage war with a clear conscience. It is, rather, a model for promoting and protecting justice.

The classic just-war tradition did not begin with a “presumption against war.” Augustine didn’t begin there; Aquinas didn’t begin there. And indeed, no one in the tradition began there until the late 1960s (surprise!), when a Congregationalist moral theologian (James Gustafson) sold a Quaker moral theologian (James Childress) the idea that the just-war way of thinking began with a *prima facie* moral duty to do no harm. Childress then successfully sold the notion to J. Bryan Hehir, the Catholic theologian and political theorist who was the chief architect of “The Challenge of Peace.”

In fact, however, the classic just-war tradition began, not with a presumption against war, but with a passion for justice: The just prince is obliged to secure the “tranquility of order,” or peace, for those for whom he accepts political responsibility, and that peace, to repeat, is composed of justice, security, and freedom. There are many ways for the just prince (or prime minister, or president) to do this; one of them is armed force.

To a rather great degree, this understanding of “just war” is in keeping with the philosophy promulgated by Obama’s hero Niebuhr. But one may legitimately wonder if Obama himself understands this or, more to the point, would be willing to put that into practice.

In the above piece, we strongly suggest that he would not, is not, and could not. Yet he still insists that he favors “just war” and is a devoted follower of Niebuhr. Somewhere, there is a disconnect. Somehow, he is either dishonest or ill-informed. We presume the latter.

A smart man with a golden tongue (and a hard-working teleprompter) can do a great deal of damage. One who is also ignorant and yet ignorant of his ignorance can do a great deal more.

And that is what Americans have to fear in the next few years.

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