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## THEY SAID IT

The dream of the right President surrounded by the right aides, governing the right Congress, promulgating all the right laws, ordinances, regulations, and decrees, to take effect in all sectors of society, with a now disenchanting multitude converted overnight into a militant and centralized democracy of eager citizens – this dream is presumably an ineradicable one.

Robert Nisbit, "The Restoration of Authority," Chapter 5 of *Twilight of Authority*, 1975.

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## ANGER AND THE AMERICAN ELECTORATE.

Americans, it seems, are angry. That's how they get sometimes. And when they get angry, they throw the bums out.

Well . . . hang on . . . let us rephrase that a bit. Americans, it seems, are angry. That's how they get sometimes. And when they get angry, they vote Republican, throwing the Democrats out, which is not to say that the Democrats are bums; quite the opposite, in fact.

How do we know that they are angry? Have you not been paying attention? Because they're voting Republican, that's how. Why else would they do that? That's how they deal with their anger. As the late ABC news anchor Peter Jennings said after the GOP took control of Congress in 1994, "the voters had a temper tantrum." They were angry then, and they're angry now.

How else do we know that Americans are angry? Well, mostly because the pundits and politicians are telling us so. Two years ago, when they elected Barack Obama president and ended eight years of Bush-Cheney tyranny, the voters were hopeful. And smart. And enlightened. And cute, clever, and really, quite advanced for their age. Two years before that, the voters were also quite smart and hopeful. They traded the "politics of fear," the "politics of division," and the arrogance and anxiety of the "out-of-touch" GOP for the love and understanding of Harry Reid and Nancy Pelosi.

What's interesting, we think, is that this time around, the pundits and the politicians are angry too. In fact, if you ask us, they seem a great deal angrier than do the voters. The voters, for all their dissatisfaction, actually appear to us to be pretty calm, rational, and determined. They may be frustrated, annoyed, and exhausted, but they really don't strike us as particularly angry.

Not that we can say the same for the politicians and the pundits – the ruling class, if you will. They are upset; really and truly fired up. And you know who they're angry at? Well, that's the best part. They are angry at the voters. And they are angry at the voters for, among other things, being angry. Even though the voters aren't really angry.

Let us explain.

As we noted last week, the most prominent example of the ruling class's anger with voters comes directly from the Obama administration itself, where both the President and the Vice President have been out on the campaign trail telling voters that they're a bunch of jerks for being unhappy. As Mary Kate Cary of *U.S. News and World Report*, noted about the President's interview with *Rolling Stone*, "What is most startling is how the interview ends – the president, 'repeatedly stabbing the air with his finger,' calls Democrats who sit out the midterms 'inexcusable' and 'irresponsible.'"

Obama, as is his wont, has decided to stick with this bizarre strategy, and has continued to blame voters for his problems and to call them names. Just this week, for example, he declared that voters are simply incapable of "thinking clearly" because they are scared and frustrated. Specifically, he said:

Part of the reason that our politics seems so tough right now and facts and science and argument does not seem to be winning the day all the time is because we're hardwired not to always think clearly when we're scared. And the country's scared.

Yikes.

Of course, Obama is not alone in being angry at the voters for being angry, irrational and just plain stupid. Hardly. Obama's predecessor as the Democratic presidential nominee, John Kerry, has made a habit lately of railing against the voters. Echoing Obama almost verbatim, last week Kerry declared that "This is a tough year . . . Facts, science, truth seem to be

significantly absent from what we call our political dialogue. It's hardly a dialogue. It's a shouting match, sloganeering."

Now, we doubt seriously if the good senator would know the truth if it jumped up and bit him on the backside of his BodyGlove windsurfing suit. But then, this is a recurring theme for Kerry, who just last month insisted that the problem with this country is that "We have an electorate that doesn't always pay that much attention to what's going on so people are influenced by a simple slogan rather than the facts or the truth or what's happening."

For sheer entertainment and drama, though, one must leave the politicians behind and take a look at what their supporters in the mainstream press are saying about the American voters and their plans for November 2<sup>nd</sup>. One of our favorite sources of amusement of late is *Time* magazine's Joe Klein, one of the deans of the Washington press corps and one of those most unhappy with the unhappy voters. Last week, after watching the debate between the two Senate candidates in Delaware, Chris Coons and Christine O'Donnell, Klein threw his own little temper tantrum. "There is something profoundly diseased about a society that idolizes its ignoramuses and disdains its experts," Klein railed, "It is a society that no longer takes itself seriously."

Klein went on to insist that Christine O'Donnell does not have "the qualifications to be a Senator" and "nor does Sharron Angle, nor does Ron Johnson in Wisconsin; nor does Carl Paladino have the qualifications to be governor of New York." These "know-nothings" (to use Klein's term) just aren't qualified enough to get their hands on the wonderful, powerful mechanism that is the American government. And if they do, presumably, they'll just screw things up. And the Americans who would vote for them? Well, as we've already noted, Klein thinks they're "diseased."

What separates Klein from your average, run-of-the-mill, the-people-are-revolting columnist, though, is that he takes his rant one step further and identifies

the source of the people's anger and the cause of their disease. And here's where it gets really fun. Klein wrote:

But they [the unqualified ones listed above] are all certifiably non-elite. Steve Rattner, on the other hand, is a card-carrying member of the financial elites – and his story may help explain why the public has so little time for the Establishment these days. Rattner is a journalist turned investment banker, an Ivy Leaguer, a denizen of Manhattan's happiest haunts and of summers on Martha's Vineyard, vacation spot of choice for Democratic Presidents. He did a fine job as Barack Obama's auto czar; the GM and Chrysler bailouts seem to be working brilliantly, saving thousands upon thousands of good American jobs. I know Steve pretty well; I've had dinner at his house; we've had good conversations; our kids have played together.

He also is lucky that he's not going to jail. The Securities and Exchange Commission has fined him \$5 million and banned him from finance, for a time, because he and his partners apparently attempted to bribe major pension funds in New York to invest with them. In addition to Manhattan and Martha's Vineyard, Rattner lives in Private Equity World, a particularly shady and opaque precinct of Wall Street, where gazillions have been made through leveraged buyouts that have caused nothing but pain in the middle-class neighborhoods of America. People like Steve have populated Administrations of both parties at the highest levels, especially in the Treasury Department (indeed, Rattner once hoped to be Treasury Secretary). From Bob Rubin to Hank Paulson, recent Presidents have turned to financiers who gained fame by

making deals rather than by making products (the current Treasury Secretary, Tim Geithner, never was a Wall Street dealmaker, but he comes from that world). Their disastrous chicanery is part of the reason – a good part of the reason – why voters are rebelling against expertise this year . . . .

I am not saying that Steve Rattner is directly to blame for Christine O'Donnell. But he is part of a generation of financiers, the most respected figures in our society, who have been disgraced utterly by their greed and shenanigans – and who have made the world safe for Mama Grizzlies. This is how a great power wanes. This is why Barack Obama's next Treasury Secretary has to be a successful business executive with an unimpeachable record of creating jobs, not financial parlor tricks.

God bless Joe Klein. Only an ego as bountiful and as boorish as his could manage to string together a sentence in which he shamelessly drops names and then proceeds equally shamelessly to throw those names under the bus, blaming them for all the country's problems. Good stuff.

In Klein's view of the world, then, what we have are brilliant elites who are, nonetheless, too greedy, too self-absorbed or, in Obama's case, too "abstruse" to develop good, solid, workable policies that direct the levers of government to noble ends. And because they never effectively use government to benefit the people and use their elite status only to benefit themselves, they make the people unhappy. This unhappiness turns to anger, which leads the people to turn to political candidates who are unqualified to manage the levers of government, creating a society that is, in truth, diseased.

Again, yikes!

Apparently, it never occurs to Klein that the problem might not lie with the elites or the voters or the "unqualified" candidates he so bemoans, but with

the people who foster ridiculously false expectations about what government can and cannot do and, by extension, ridiculously false notions about who is best suited for “service” in said government. People like Joe Klein.

Now, if Klein’s name is not all that familiar to some of you, there’s a reason for that. As it turns out, Joe Klein hasn’t always been “Joe Klein.” For a period in the 1990s, he went by the name “Anonymous.” And under that name, he wrote a book called *Primary Colors*, which was a thinly-veiled *roman-a-clef* that described the hope followed by disillusionment that characterized the campaign and presidency of Bill Clinton.

You see, Klein had himself a big ol’ mancrush on Bill and thought that Bill would be the man who would come to Washington, set right all that the ReaganBushes had set wrong and, in so doing, make government work for the people. Unfortunately, Bill had other plans, including feeding his own appetites, which made Klein sad. Poor Joe. Not only did he get his little heart broken by the hopeychanger who couldn’t deliver. But he did it again this last time around. And will all but certainly do it again. And maybe even again, before he figures out that the problem just might be with him and not with them.

In a very real sense, Klein and his frustration with the “elites” and with the “people” are emblematic of American liberalism today. He is, it would appear, simply incapable of even considering the prospect that the problem with Big Government is Big Government. No, he says, the problem with government is the people running the government. They’re too selfish. They’re too greedy. They’re too “abstruse.” If only they weren’t so self-absorbed, then government would function properly and the world would be a much better, much happier place

Klein reminds us of a cheap and intellectually bereft social science teaching assistant who insists that the trouble with Communism is just that it hasn’t been done properly yet. Lenin, Stalin, Mao, Pol Pot; these guys didn’t practice “real” communism. They messed

it up. But eventually someone will get it right, and it’ll be great! We just have to keep trying.

Klein actually thinks that candidates for higher public office need to be “qualified” for something. And he doesn’t mean in the constitutional sense. He actually thinks that there should be minimum governmental competence requirements. And he believes this because he believes that government should be in the business of solving problems.

Bill Clinton didn’t solve the world’s problems, but that was because he was chasing girls around town too much. “Steve” Rattner, “Bob” Rubin, “Hank” Paulson, and Timothy Geithner didn’t solve the world’s problems because they were too busy chasing cash around town. Barack Obama didn’t solve the world’s problems because he is too abstruse . . . or something. And the worst thing about all of them is that they ticked the people off, which made the people want to vote for even less qualified people. And on and on it goes.

Maybe – just maybe – the people of this country are angry. And maybe they’re angry because they’ve had all they can stand of guys like Joe Klein. And Barack Obama. And Steven Rattner. And maybe they’re angry because they know that whomever they elect, the next Congress is incredibly likely to be just like the last Congress. And the one before that. And the one before that.

Maybe the people are simply tired of hearing about Washington and of politicians and political pundits who tell them which candidates have the best policies and greatest political acumen to rule their lives more effectively. Maybe – just maybe – the people of this country are angry because they want Washington to just go away; to shut up and leave them alone.

Joe Klein thinks that America needs better elites. Barack Obama thinks Americans need to be spoken to more slowly. John Kerry thinks Americans need some counseling to deal with their anger and confusion so that they might submit more readily to the plans that their betters have designed for them.

We think the American just might want all of these people to get off their TVs and their radios and their computers.

We'll give old Joe Klein a little credit for something. He insists that Christine O'Donnell, Sharon Angle, Sarah Palin and the rest represent an American rejection of the "elite" and of the traditional politician who has thoughtful, plausible solutions to the world's problems. Maybe he's right about that.

The difference between us and Klein, then, is that we think that the American people may be on to something, that they may not be choosing such candidates out of anger and stupidity, but consciously, in the hope that they'll go to Washington and not try to develop thoughtful and plausible solutions to the world's problems.

Maybe they think that doing nothing couldn't be worse than the something that the present crowd is doing.

## THE AF-PAK QUAGMIRE.

Don't look now, boys and girls, but Afghanistan is falling apart.

Well, actually, Afghanistan isn't falling apart. That would imply that it had ever been put together. Moreover, where there is an American presence in Afghanistan, the country is actually doing well. The United States is beating the Taliban and putting some of the lessons learned in Iraq to good use. In Afghanistan.

Across the border in Pakistan, by contrast, the war is being lost. And as any schoolboy can tell you, winning Afghanistan won't mean very much if America manages to lose Pakistan at the same time.

So while some of the lessons of Iraq are apparently being applied in Afghanistan, some of the lessons of America's other war, the one over which the political left tends to obsess, are not being applied. This should not surprise anyone, of course, since lessons of that war – Vietnam – have never, despite the obsession, been properly learned.

As we have noted before in these pages, the left's fixation on Vietnam is not only ironic but deeply troubling, since the left's interpretation and (mis)remembrance of that war are also troubling. The left seems not to know anything at all about the war, about its progress, about its end, or about the repercussions of that end. In the liberal mythology, Vietnam was a "quagmire" that can be blamed on Nixon; it was a horrific violation of human rights on the part of the Americans, which can be blamed on the "war-criminal" Kissinger; and it was a war that mercifully came to an end only after the American people made their voices heard and forced their leaders to stop their ruinous violence-mongering. For a party that insists *ad nauseam* that we "learn the lessons of Vietnam" the Democratic Party seems not only clueless about what those lessons might have been, but what we might learn from them.

Now, we could all but certainly write an entire book about this subject. And, indeed, entire books have been written about this subject – by people far smarter and far more knowledgeable about it than we. But for our purposes today, the two lessons that matter most are those dealing with the problematic nature of cross-border safe-havens and the precariousness of leaving a war with those safe-havens intact and inflamed.

In a recent column, Arthur Herman, a visiting scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, summed up the scope of the problem that the United States currently faces with regard to the Taliban's cross-border home in Pakistan. To wit:

The photos showing NATO supply trucks being set ablaze by insurgents in Pakistan should send a chill up the spine of every American. So should the State Department's travel-alert warning on yet another Pakistan-inspired terror threat. President Obama's Pakistan policy is going up in smoke, just like those NATO trucks. The bitter irony is that even as Obama is trying to get out of the war in Afghanistan, he may be heading us into one in Pakistan. Consider:

\* In 2009, we launched 45 Predator drone attacks into Pakistan. In 2010, we may almost triple that number, with 22 in September alone.

\* US-led NATO forces in Afghanistan are now running crossborder raids into Pakistan to flush out Taliban insurgents, even though the Pakistan government has vigorously protested.

Islamabad even warns that the incursions threaten the alliance in the War on Terror. One raid last week killed three Pakistani border guards, which led the Pakistani government to close a key border crossing to a NATO supply convoy -- which militants then burned down to the tire rims.

\* Raids by the CIA's Counterterrorism Pursuit Team -- with its 3,000 Afghan troops -- into Pakistan are also becoming routine. According to Bob Woodward's book "Obama's Wars," CIA chief Leon Panetta wants even more powers to wage what is in effect a secret CIA war inside Pakistani territory.

All of this is compounded, of course, by the fact that Pakistan is now the central headquarters for the recruitment and training of young jihadis. Once upon a time, Saudi Arabia -- home to 15 of the 19 9/11 hijackers -- held that distinction. But no longer. As Herman notes, "Pakistan has increasingly become the epicenter of terror plots against this country, from the abortive Times Square bombing plot to the Mumbai-style attacks thwarted last week." Add to that the fact that the London Underground bombers were nearly all of Pakistani descent and that, according to *Newsweek's* Fareed Zakaria, "The British government has estimated that 70 percent of the terror plots it has uncovered in the past decade can be traced back to Pakistan," and clearly there is a problem.

Obviously, this problem is not of Barack Obama's making. And nor, for that matter, is it of George

Bush's making. If you're looking for someone to blame for this, then, you might start with Clement Attlee, the British Prime Minister who allowed the formation of an Islamic state and the partition of India. But even that is unfair, since the British never "ruled" the majority of Pakistan, which even in the days of the Raj was largely ungovernable.

Whatever the case, there is a problem in Pakistan, and Barack Obama appears bound and determined to make it worse. Obama, you may recall, entered office blustering about how he'd knock heads in Pakistan if necessary, which, we guess, must have been some of that "smart diplomacy" we heard so much about.

Obama has, as Herman notes, kept his promise, increasing cross-border raids and, in the process, upsetting the Pakistani government. Ambassador Ryan Crocker, who served in Pakistan from 2004 to 2007, concurs, noting last week that cross-border raids "are clearly counterproductive, and not just because we hit the wrong target. If NATO can carry out military actions in Pakistan from the west, Pakistanis wonder, what stops India from doing the same from the east?"

Worse than this, though, Obama appears unwilling to finish the job that he has started, in spite of the concerns of the Pakistani government. To go back to the Vietnam precedent, for a minute: the left insists that the American incursions into Laos and Cambodia were illegal, dangerous, criminal, and really, really naughty. But the real problem with them was that they ended before the Vietnamese, Laotian, and Cambodian Communists in those countries were sufficiently destroyed or defeated. And that, obviously, led to severe problems later in the conflict, including the participation of Communist forces from Cambodia in the Easter Offensive of 1972, in which the North nearly achieved its goal of domination of the South and defeat of the American military.

In the AfPak theater, Obama appears poised to make the same mistake. As Herman notes, "Obama doesn't see that his obvious eagerness to leave [Afghanistan] makes the Pakistanis more, not less, reluctant to help us against the Taliban, because

they may have to deal with the Taliban running the country again.” Meanwhile, Ambassador Crocker writes that “A nightmare for Islamabad is the prospect that the Americans and Afghans come to some accommodation with Taliban elements that would leave them hostile to Pakistan.” And this comes against the backdrop of the administration doing precisely what the Pakistani government fears. According to the *Wall Street Journal* last week:

U.S.-led forces in Afghanistan have facilitated the passage of senior Taliban leaders to Kabul for talks with President Hamid Karzai’s government, signaling a shift by the U.S. to more active support of Afghan reconciliation efforts.

The U.S. military has said in the past that Mr. Karzai’s efforts to broker peace with the Taliban were premature.

But a senior North Atlantic Treaty Organization official said the allied force was now offering direct help for preliminary peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban, which has strong influence in big swaths of the country.

All of this raises the prospect that Obama will repeat the mistakes made by the Nixon administration and the Democratic Congress at the tail end of the war in Vietnam, by leaving the country without concern for the ramifications for the region and for global security.

Once again, as every schoolboy knows, the death and destruction that took place during the war was nothing compared to that which followed the American withdrawal. Hundreds of thousand were killed, deported, or “reeducated” in Vietnam, and the results were, of course, even worse across the border in Cambodia, where Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge

took Phnom Penh and slaughtered roughly 1.5 million of their fellow countrymen, roughly one-third of the entire population of the country.

Given the brutality that they have already demonstrated, one can expect similar slaughter to take place in Afghanistan and Pakistan in the wake of premature American withdrawal. The only difference this time is that the people left behind in Pakistan – whether the current government survives or is overrun by Taliban – will possess a global network of terrorists, terrorist training camps, and NUCLEAR WEAPONS.

Throughout his campaign for president, Barack Obama insisted that Afghanistan was “the good war.” And that he would prosecute it far more vigorously than George Bush had. That was all well and good, we suppose, but as Bob Woodward has recently shown us, Obama never really believed it – which is how we ended up with the manifestly deficient Af-Pak policy we have now. Obama vowed to win this war, but doesn’t really want to. He vowed to give the military commanders what they need to win the war, but didn’t really do so. He’s vowed to leave this war next June, but isn’t really sure that he’s going to.

And on top of it all, he’s repeating the mistakes that he and his fellow ideologues had always sworn that they wouldn’t.

It’s no wonder, then, that many of those who fretted that Obama would be a replay of the Carter presidency have, of late, been preparing for something much worse, a replay of the Nixon presidency.

Nixon, obviously, didn’t start Vietnam, but he did manage to screw it up pretty well. And likewise Obama with Afghanistan.

If the left is going to obsess over the lessons of Vietnam, at least they can do something about learning the right ones.

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