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## THEY SAID IT

Observation fully confirms what reflection teaches us on this subject: Savage man and civilized man differ so much in their innermost heart and inclinations that what constitutes the supreme happiness of the one would reduce the other to despair. The first breathes nothing but repose and freedom, he wants only to live and remain idle, and even the Stoic's ataraxia does not approximate his profound indifference to everything else. By contrast, the Citizen, forever active, sweats and scurries, constantly in search of ever more strenuous occupations: he works to the death, even rushes toward it in order to be in a position to live, or renounces life in order to acquire immortality. He courts the great whom he hates, and the rich whom he despises; he spares nothing to attain the honor of serving them; he vaingloriously boasts of his baseness and of their protection and, proud of his slavery, he speaks contemptuously of those who have not the honor of sharing it.

Jean Jacques Rousseau, *The Second Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, 1755.

## THE LEFT AND THE FETISHIZATION OF ISLAM.

Two weeks ago, in these pages, we argued that the modern American left has an affinity for radical Islam that is based exclusively on Islamism's status as the active leader of global opposition to American (or Western or Judeo-Christian) cultural, political, and economic supremacy. This kinship with radical, reactionary Islam defies common sense, political practicality, and basic decency. Nonetheless, it permits the disengaged and disingenuous a platform from which to voice their antagonism to the civilizational ethos that, for all intents and purposes, fashioned the modern world. Specifically, we wrote:

Islamism is to the nihilistic left today what Communism was in the 1960s and what radical environmentalism was in the 1990s, namely the locus of anti-American, anti-Western, and anti-Christian sentiment. If you hate America; if you hate the "rich, white patriarchy"; if you hate the dead white males who dominate the history of Western civilization; if you think that colonialism is the source of all modern evils; if you think that the world would be a better place if Americans would quit shoving their noses into everyone's business, quit using all the world's resources, and quit being so greedy and materialistic; then there is a good chance that you "support" the Islamists . . .

Over the years, the political left has had an affinity for Islamism that defies what might loosely be defined as "logic." All of the things the left claims to want – pluralism, multiculturalism, women's rights, gay rights, sexual license, etc. – are anathema to Islamists, and even to a great

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### In this Issue

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many non-Islamist Muslims. Yet because Islamism represents a threat to the Western order, because it is waging an actual war against the West and America in particular, it has earned the admiration, affection, and support of much of the left.

Today, we'd like to revisit this issue, but with a slightly different focus, concentrating on the egotism that underpins the leftists' kinship with radical Islam and the precariousness of the global climate it both condones and perpetuates.

The problem of the leftist fetishization of Islam and Islamism is more than just academic. It is a practical problem that exposes the political left to folly and commits it to aiding and abetting the oldest, vilest, and most destructive hatred in Western Civilization. In doing so, it makes the left complicit in the slaughter of innocents and precipitates a global clash of virtually unimaginable magnitude and impact.

We should, we suppose, issue the usual caveats – just as we did last time – noting that we mean no offense to Muslims and certainly do not aim to impugn all adherents or even the faith itself with the comments that follow. At the same time, we should also note that only those who are hypersensitive and borderline illiterate could even conceivably twist what follows into an indictment of Islam as a religion. The problem here, as it always is, is not religion *per se*, but the intersection of culture, politics, and religion. It is true that some religions maneuver that intersection better than others, and, in so doing, foster a far more politically tolerant and successful culture, but then, that is a thought for another day and another piece.

We should also note that when we discuss “Islam,” hereafter, we are not discussing the religion so much as a caricature of it – a caricature born of and permeated by the left's cultural condescension and ignorance. Nearly five years ago, in a piece titled “The State of Nature and the War on Terror,” we discussed the intellectual foundations of this caricature, arguing that the left's fascination with Islam and Islamism stems,

in great part, from its ongoing fascination with what the distinguished historian Norman Cohn has called the “Golden Age” myth. The left, as a general rule, is fascinated by the notion of an “egalitarian state of nature” and wants nothing more than to replicate that state of nature today. As Cohn noted: this social myth became a revolutionary myth over time as the “Golden Age irrecoverably lost in the distant past” was replaced by a Golden Age “preordained for the immediate future.”

This longing is, in many ways, the source of a great many of the left's gravest miscalculations. It is, via Rousseau, the intellectual font of the left's beliefs that it is not man who is imperfect, but his institutions, and the attendant belief that perfecting the institutions of society can thereby perfect society itself. This, obviously, has led to a great deal of social tinkering – on both small and grand scales – and a great deal of pain, destruction, misery, and death.

More to the point from our perspective today, the Golden Age/State of Nature myth has fostered, on the left, an unwavering and otherwise inexplicable fondness for pre-modern primitiveness. As we put it back in 2006:

In the 19th century this conception of savage man as ideal man was literalized, expounded upon, and eventually became a staple of the intellectual case against European imperialism. In the 20th Century, Rousseau's intellectual heirs continued to romanticize primitive man, and, indeed, they made his inherent righteousness a fundamental component of their self-loathing critique of Western society.

Much of the left's attack on Western civilization is premised on the idea that the institutions of society – and Western society in particular – are inherently corrupting. The revolt against globalization, the neo-Luddite attack on modern technology (most

especially on the internal combustion engine), the squishy left's fascination with organic foods and opposition to "genetically modified organisms," "back to nature communalism," the incessant degradation of America and American actions and motives, the unrelenting and ill-informed charges of economic exploitation and neocolonialism, and the irrational and brutal assault on Christianity are all, at least in part, underpinned by the idea that modern Western society is, by its very definition, corrupt and corrupting.

The natural outgrowth of this belief, of course, is the concomitant conviction that non-Western societies are, simply by virtue of being non-Western and non-Christian, less corrupt and therefore nobler.

What this has meant in practice is the fetishization by the left of any culture, civilization, or society that can be considered "primitive" or Third World by Western standards. The great "peasants revolts" of Russia, China, and especially Vietnam were revered for their "authenticity" and their pre-modern and anti-modern character. The left cheered on the Algerians in their war against the French. It cheered on Mugabe and his thugs in their Rhodesian rebellion against the Commonwealth. It cheered on Allende, Castro, Ortega, and every other Latin American thug who opposed American influence. It cheered on the Khomeinists in their revolution against the American "puppet" Shah. Most notably, it cheered on the Palestinians in their struggle for self-determination and "dignity." And, most recently, it cheered on the Muslim Brotherhood, among others, in the riots in Tahrir Square aimed at deposing a critical American ally.

Given all of this, President Barack Obama's behavior in office and especially of late has been instructive. From his embrace of Chavez and the newly restored Ortega, to his flirtation with the now-despised

Gadhafi, Obama has provided countless excellent examples of the left's bizarre and excessive veneration of the "primitive." And nowhere has he been more peculiar and more solicitous than with regard to Islam.

In June 2009, Obama gave his first major foreign policy speech and his first major speech abroad as President. The venue for the address, of course, was Cairo University. And Obama, a self-proclaimed "student of history," butchered the very concept of history and declared explicitly – and falsely – that Islamic culture was equal to and, in many ways, superior to that of the West. The classicist Victor Davis Hanson recounts the untruths:

Almost every one of his references was either misleading or incomplete. He suggested that today's Middle East tension was fed by the legacy of European colonialism and the Cold War that had reduced nations to proxies.

But the great colonizers of the Middle East were the Ottoman Muslims, who for centuries ruled with an iron fist. The 20th-century movements of Baathism, Pan-Arabism, and Nasserism — largely homegrown totalitarian ideologies — did far more damage over the last half-century to the Middle East than did the legacy of European colonialism.

Obama also claimed that "Islam . . . carried the light of learning through so many centuries, paving the way for Europe's Renaissance and Enlightenment." While medieval Islamic culture was impressive and ensured the survival of a few classical texts — often through the agency of Arabic-speaking Christians — it had little to do with the European rediscovery of classical Greek and Latin values. Europeans, Chinese, and Hindus, not Muslims, invented most of the breakthroughs Obama credited to Islamic innovation.

Much of the Renaissance, in fact, was more predicated on the centuries-long flight of Greek-speaking Byzantine scholars from Constantinople to Western Europe to escape the aggression of Islamic Turks. Many romantic thinkers of the Enlightenment sought to extend freedom to oppressed subjects of Muslim fundamentalist rule in eastern and southern Europe.

Obama also insisted that “Islam has a proud tradition of tolerance. We see it in the history of Andalusia and Cordoba during the Inquisition.” Yet the Spanish Inquisition began in 1478; by then Cordoba had long been re-conquered by Spanish Christians, and was governed as a staunchly Christian city.

In a far more telling and far less publicized decision, last year Obama appointed a man named Rashad Hussain to be his envoy to the Organization of the Islamic Conference. Now, a great many conservatives and other anti-jihadists have made quite a big deal about Hussain and his purported ties to the Muslim Brotherhood and his embrace of the Brotherhood’s agenda. We don’t mean to discount these concerns – which may well be valid and significant. What concerns us most, however, is the effusive praise the President heaped upon his designee as “a *hafiz* of the Quaran,” i.e. a “student” who has memorized the Quaran.

It is important in this context, we think, to understand what, exactly, is most often meant by Islamic “education.” We hear constantly about the schools in Pakistan and elsewhere throughout the Islamic world that are “teaching” young men (and occasionally young women) about Islam, but rarely are we told that for *most* students, this education is hardly educative and consist mostly of this memorization that Obama praises – the *hifz*. Boys are taught the holy scriptures and are able to recite them, but are nonetheless kept illiterate, which is to say kept in “their place.”

We would, we think, be hard-pressed to find a more palpable example of primitiveness in Third World civilization – the act of “education” through perpetuation of illiteracy. And yet Obama finds such accomplishment notable and even praiseworthy in his appointee to the OIC. As Martin Peretz, the editor-in-chief emeritus of the left-leaning *The New Republic* put it:

Being “progressives,” Barack and Michelle are more than likely to disapprove of rote learning in American schools. But since the president takes each and every opportunity he can to fawn over antiquarian Islam he has also made himself heard on this vexing issue of teaching and knowing.

Peretz continues, rather viciously eviscerating Obama, his administration, and his policies toward the Muslim world, which are founded on a sort of paternalistic conceit. Note as you read the following that while Peretz attacks Obama specifically, his critique can also be applied to Obama’s contemporaries on the left more broadly.

What is curious about Obama’s infatuation with Arab societies (and with non-Arab Muslim societies, too) is that he knows just about nothing about them. And I don’t just mean their histories or theology. What’s clear is that the president grasps pretty close to zero about the actualities of these states, their economic and social realities, the stratifications by tribe and sex, the race between literacy and population growth, the synchrony of tradition with bureaucracy, the stultification of education, the militarization of these polities, their abhorrence of liberal ideas. And the fact is that Obama is neither fast-spirited nor supple. He certainly was blindsided by the turbulence and torment that has wracked the region over more than two months now. Why could he

not see the new amidst the crumbling old? And why was he also not liberated a bit from the old order to which he had mysteriously attached himself?

The fact is that Obama is a victim of a certain sort of “orientalism” transmitted to him by his friend Rashid Khalidi carrying the message of Edward Said. Except that this form of the dogma, now hopefully on its last legs in the academy, does not idealize the vision of the imperials. It idealizes whatever Arab reality happens to have survived Western imperialism. Among them is the standing of the hijab or burqa. This is part of the civilizational conflict in the world of Islam and, as I have pointed out at least twice, Obama has spoken up for the looking-backwards end of the dispute. Why should he not, in Cairo and at the White House, have defended the modernizers instead? This would have put him on the side of the future, though if he didn’t want to intrude on an internal Muslim struggle he could have simply shut up. But no. This president thinks he speaks with authority on any topics he chooses to address.

Alright, so Obama patters on about Koranic theology or whispers arcane words, throaty or mellifluous, in Arabic.... As anybody current with the conflicts in Arab and Islamic culture understands, the place of memorization in the education of the young is right there at the top. Anybody who has read the various volumes of the United Nations Arab Development Report also understands why this is so. Well, the horrendous prevalence of illiteracy in these countries, where the Prophet’s scripture is hammered into the heads of boys (and now sometimes girls, too), testifies to the deformity of the entire system.

In short, then, Obama specifically and the left more generally consider Islamic backwardness “quaint.” They see it as “authentic” and counter-imperialistic. They see it, in short, as anti-Western, which to their minds is a *good* thing. What they never stop to consider about their little post-imperialistic fantasies is that what they consider good and decent and wholesome expressly because of its contrast to Western civilization is in so many ways precisely the opposite: bad, reactionary, and detrimental to social and economic progress.

The problem with all of this is the same problem that exists with much of what the Western left propagates, namely the fact there are real-world consequences to the application of the left’s theories and these consequences are felt most acutely by those whom the leftists purport to care about and admire but about whom they know next to nothing. In the case of economic policy, the victims are the poor, minorities, and women. In the case of foreign policy, for the most part, the victims are the same: the poor, minorities, and women – but with one critical addition, the Jews.

One of the most significant and least understood side effects of the left’s embrace of the Palestinian cause as its own – which is to say the embrace of the “noble,” if primitive Palestinians against the Westernized and “colonial” Zionists – is the shift in the position of anti-Semitism along the ideological spectrum. Once upon a time, anti-Semitism was identified as a uniquely right-wing phenomenon, the province of Nazis, fascists, the Klan, Christian radicals, Father Charles Coughlin, Charles Linbergh, and other assorted reactionaries. Since the 1960s, however, that has changed, slowly, but ever so surely. Today, the left is the home of the overwhelming majority of anti-Semitic sentiment. Those who despise Israel for its Palestinian policies and Jews in general for their “undue influence” on American foreign policy, wield great and ever-growing influence, and they do so exclusively within the confines of the Democratic Party.

As we have argued many times in these pages, the left's obsession with "neoconservatism" during the Bush years was, in many ways, anti-Semitic in its origins and motivations, if not always in its expression. The left and its intellectuals continue to this day to insist that Israel and its "agents" (i.e. American Jews) wield far too much power within the American foreign policy establishment and have far too much influence over policy makers, which renders American foreign affairs essentially a tool of Zionism, which is to say a "tool of the Jews."

It is no coincidence, in our estimation, that an overwhelming number of those arguing that the "damned Jews" are too powerful and too influential to permit a decent and fair American foreign policy are what might be described as "toadies" for various Palestinian-friendly regimes. Stephen Walt, for example, a foreign affairs professor at Harvard and the man who brought academic "legitimacy" to the notion of Jewish foreign policy conspiracies, just last month charged that Barack Obama, of all people, is under the "profound influence of the Israel lobby." What Walt failed to mention, though, is that just a year ago, he was writing about the overpowering wonderfulness of the Gadhafi regime and accepting "travel fees" from said regime for the production of said puff piece. Talk about a "profound influence."

All of this, in combination with the resuscitation of longstanding anti-Semitic sentiment among the political leftists of Europe and Great Britain, has created an atmosphere in which anti-Semitism is almost accepted or, at the very least, greatly tolerated among those on the left side of America's ruling class, who desperately seek to imitate their European brethren in thought and deed.

Last month, when NPR's fundraisers were caught by guerilla-journalist James O'Keefe disparaging average Americans, insulting Tea Partiers, and insisting that NPR and PBS do not need public support, the context in which they made these statements was very nearly lost in the public outcry. Yes, what these people said about average Americans was despicable. But what was more despicable was that they were said in a meeting between the NPR employees and a fictitious

Muslim group claiming to represent an American arm of the *Islamist Muslim Brotherhood*, which wanted desperately to donate \$5 million to the network in order to ensure ongoing favorable presentation of "Muslim" voices. And while NPR insisted that it adamantly refused the money, internal emails showed precisely the opposite; that the network was more than willing to take the money from domestic advocates of Sharia law.

Meanwhile, President Obama continues to insist that the key to peace in the Middle East is Israeli concessions and specifically Israelis ending their "insulting" and "unhelpful" building of settlements in the "occupied territories." Naturally, he never mentions that these settlements are, in fact, mere expansions of existing neighborhoods necessary to accommodate growing families.

In a recent piece, the inimitable Caroline Glick noted the tragedy that constitutes the left's ongoing descent into tolerance of anti-Semitism in the name of Palestinian fetishism. Whereas most Arabs yearn only to live their lives free from the oppression of their own tyrants, two groups continue to insist that nothing in this world matters more than the "Palestinian question" and the related question of a handful of apartments in traditionally Jewish neighborhoods of Jerusalem. Tellingly, these two groups are the jihadists and the Western left. Glick writes:

Who cares if the Arabs are ruled by tyrants, democrats, jihadists, or fascists? The only thing that matters is that "Palestine" is free of Israeli "occupation."

How can anyone get excited about the future of the oil-dependent global economy when Jews still reside in Jewish communities in Judea and Samaria and Jewish neighborhoods in Jerusalem?

The Left's essential indifference to the plight of hundreds of millions of Arabs and its significance for the West was

exposed in a news analysis by Brendan O'Neill in *The Australian* on February 16. O'Neill noted that whereas the demonstrators in Cairo were fairly silent on the issue of the Palestinians, anti-Mubarak demonstrations throughout the West prominently featured anti-Israel slogans and chants of "Free, free Palestine!"

O'Neill concluded that the contrasting messages, "reveals something important about the Palestine issue . . . [It] has become less important for Arabs and of the utmost symbolic importance for Western radicals at exactly the same time."

Actually, it is important to Western leftists and jihadists, which is why the Palestinians only became a salient issue in Egypt after the Muslim Brotherhood began taking control over the opposition movement with [Sheikh Yusuf] Qaradawi's [anti-Israel and anti-Jewish] sermon [in Cairo] on February 18 . . .

Whereas the EU cannot figure out a coherent policy regarding Libya even as Muammar Gaddafi massacres his own citizens and sets fire to his oil fields, Europe's leaders are unified in their firm conviction that the so-called "peace process" must be reinvigorated.

So too, the Obama administration remains incapable of lifting a finger to prevent an Iranian proxy from taking over Bahrain or a consortium of al-Qaida terrorists from taking over Yemen. Obama refuses to take any action to help the Libyan people overthrow Gaddafi. As for Iran, Obama maintains his steadfast refusal to take any action to help the Iranian people overthrow their nuclear-proliferating, terror-supporting regime.

But at the same time, the president and his advisors are absolutely committed to coercing Israel to block Jews from building homes in Judea, Samaria and Jerusalem and ensuring that everyone is clear that Jews have no legitimate right to our capital city and historic heartland.

The effects of all of this have been devastating for many average Jews in Israel, in the United States, and throughout the world. And these effects continue to grow more horrifying and more potentially dangerous as each day passes. Obviously, at this point, those most affected are those Jews who have felt the direct repercussions of the Palestinian fetishization, those who have been victims of attacks or slurs or intellectual malpractice. There are a great many such victims here in the United States. There are a great many more in Europe. And, naturally, there are more still in Israel itself, where only last week a bomb exploded near a bus stop, killing one and injuring at least 30 more.

Sadly, despite the fact that this bomb was packed with ball bearings and thus designed to inflict as much pain and mutilation as possible, it was hardly the most heinous recent upshot of the Western left's obsession with "Palestine" and with the dastardly Jewish settlements therein. That distinction belongs to the slaughter of the Fogel family, described here by the *Boston Globe's* Jeff Jacoby:

Last weekend in Itamar, an Israeli settlement in the Samaritan hills, terrorists infiltrated the home of Udi and Ruth Fogel and perpetrated a massacre of the innocents.

The killers started with Yoav, the Fogels' 11-year-old, and Elad, his 4-year-old brother. Yoav's throat was slit – as he was reading in bed, one report said – and Elad was stabbed twice in the heart. Then the attackers murdered Ruth, knifing her as she came out of the bathroom. In the next room they killed Ruth's sleeping husband, Udi, and their infant daughter, Hadas. Apparently they

didn't notice the last bedroom, where the two other boys, Ro'i, 8, and Yishai, 2, were asleep. It wasn't until half past midnight, when 12-year-old Tamar came home from a Friday night youth group, that the horrific slaughter was discovered. Much of the house was drenched in blood, and the 2-year-old was shaking his parents' bodies, crying for them to wake up.

The indescribable horror of this brutality is likely matched only by the fact that the reports of the massacre were met in the Palestinian territories by celebration. In Gaza, residents streamed into the streets cheering the slaughter, rejoicing in the deaths of Jews, and passing out candy to children.

If only this were the worst of it. But it's not. It is only the beginning.

Last month, when the Egyptian protesters were occupying Tahrir Square demanding regime change, we warned that the Obama administration's solicitousness of the anti-Mubarak forces would end badly, specifically by providing an opportunity for the Muslim Brotherhood to attain power and by allowing Egypt to become a way station in the shipment of arms from Iran and Syria to their proxies in the Palestinian territories.

Lo and behold, the Muslim Brotherhood has, according to the *New York Times*, struck an unofficial power-sharing deal with the ruling Egyptian military government. And, worse yet, the elections for the new parliament that will write the constitution are being rigged specifically to favor these well-organized groups and to ensure military and Islamist victory.

Moreover, weapons have indeed begun flowing across the border to the Palestinians and just two weeks ago, Israeli commandos intercepted a Syrian ship loaded with weapons on its way from Turkey to Egypt, where those weapons would have been delivered to Israel's enemies.

All of this, we should note, comes as the Iranian regime is flexing its muscles, capitalizing on the unrest throughout the region, fomenting revolution in Bahrain

and Saudi Arabia (to name just two countries) and insisting that the current chaos in the region is meant to presage the reappearance of the "Hidden Imam," whose return will signal Islam's global triumph.

Over the weekend, in reaction to all of this increased anti-Israel aggression and specifically in response to the renewed lobbing of missiles into Israel by Muslim-Brotherhood-affiliated Hamas, Israel deployed a new anti-missile "dome." More relevantly, as *AFP* reported last week:

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told US Defence Secretary Robert Gates Friday that Israel is ready to act with "great force" in response to a spate of rocket fire by Gaza militants and a deadly bus bombing in Jerusalem.

Israel had been "subjected to bouts of terror and rocket attacks," Netanyahu told reporters before going into a meeting with Gates.

"We stand ready to act with great force and great determination to put a stop to it," he added, with officials saying Israel had not been hit by any projectiles Friday morning.

"Any civilised society will not tolerate such wanton attacks on its civilians," he said.

All of this suggests that the Middle East is moving inexorably toward a major blow-up. The Iranians are intent on fomenting chaos and establishing hegemony. The Egyptians are moving away from the peace with Israel maintained for three decades by the now-ousted Mubarak regime. Jewish settlers are being slaughtered in their beds. Increasingly accurate and powerful missiles are being shipped to Palestinian terrorists and being fired at Israeli cities. And the rest of the region hovers on the brink of complete bedlam.

Meanwhile, in the West, the political left obsesses over the Golden Age, the noble savage, and the fantasy



of pre-modern utopia. Barack Obama, for his part, pushed out an American and Israeli ally in Egypt and is now providing air support for admitted jihadists and veterans of the Afghan war in Libya.

None of this is even remotely surprising. In fact, it was all too predictable. Not that that will stop the leaders of the world from professing shock when it all blows up in one enormous, world-changing, economy-killing, jihadist-enhancing explosion.

We only hope that our fetishist-in-chief will have the sense not to cheer the “revolution” then and will instead do what is in the best interests of the country. But you’ll forgive if we’re skeptical.

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