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THEY SAID IT

First they came for the Jews
and I did not speak out because I was not a Jew.

Then they came for the Communists
and I did not speak out because I was not a Communist.

Then they came for the trade unionists
and I did not speak out because I was not a trade unionist.

Then they came for me
and there was no one left to speak out for me.

Martin Niemoller, "First They Came," 1946.

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THE WAR IS OVER. LONG LIVE THE WAR.

For years, a handful of critics and commentators on both the left and the right have argued that the term "war on terror" is a misnomer, a contradiction. Terror, after all, is a tactic, not an enemy. It can be employed by anyone, anywhere, at any time. It does not denote a specific adversary, a specific guiding ideology, or suggest that victory is even possible. Even if one defeats the current terrorists, others will replace them. And so on.

We have always agreed with this point. But to what end? It was the accepted phrase. The term took on a meaning of its own. Yes, America is not engaged in a "war on terror." It is engaged in a "war on Islamofascism." Okay. Whatever.

But call it what you like, if you take seriously the arguments that we made in last week's newsletter – and clearly we take them seriously and think that you should as well – and add to those arguments this past weekend's events on and around the Arab world's borders with Israel, then it is clear, to us at least, that the notion of a "war on terror" – or whatever you want to call it – is now obsolete.

Or, to put this in another way, with the killing of Osama bin Laden, the "war on terror" as we have come to know it over the last ten years, is over. With persistence, military might and skill, and dogged determination, the United States armed forces kept the promises made by President Bush in the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. Bin Laden is dead. His jihadist force is broken. His enclave has been sacked. His network has been exposed and is under intense fire from every global asset that the United States has in its formidable arsenal.

There are still loose ends to clean up, of course, including bringing justice to the other ranking members of al Qaeda and the Taliban, most notably Mullah Mohammed Omar, the spiritual leader of the Taliban and therefore the *de facto* head of state that harbored bin Laden when he was a fugitive war criminal. But for the most part, the “war on terror” is over. America won. Mission Accomplished.

That is not to say that there will never again be terrorist attacks against American targets both at home and abroad. But “terrorism” as the chosen tactic by which America’s Islamic enemies intend to remove “the great Satan” from Islamic soil is, we believe, passé. That is to say that the war with the Islamists has moved into a different phase, one that is radically different from the one just completed, the one that occupied American efforts for the entirety of the last decade; one that is more conventional in military and diplomatic terms; and one that will sorely try the skills and dedication of American politicians, diplomats, and military leaders over the next several years.

Last week, Amr Moussa, the current head of the Arab League, the most popular politician in Egypt, and thus the frontrunner for the new Egyptian presidency, told the *Wall Street Journal* that “if he was elected he would break with former President Hosni Mubarak’s reliably amenable policies toward Israel.” More to the point, we suppose, the *Journal* continued:

Mr. Moussa, in an interview . . . also described a political landscape in which the Muslim Brotherhood, outlawed under Mr. Mubarak, is dominant. It is inevitable, he said, that parliamentary elections in September will usher in a legislature led by a bloc of Islamists, with the Brotherhood at the forefront.

Catch that didjya? The future president of Egypt, who thinks Mubarak was too nice to the damn Jews, fully expects the Muslim Brotherhood to win a majority in the parliamentary elections, which is to say that they will hold a majority in the writing of the new Egyptian constitution.

Now, technically speaking, the Brotherhood has sworn off terrorism, but does that make it any less threatening? It believes in enforcing Sharia law as a guiding principle of society. And it believes in expanding the reach of Islam and Sharia. And it is, according to the frontrunner for the Egyptian presidency, likely to be the largest Arab country’s majority party in four months. And, moreover, said presidential frontrunner unashamedly tells the American press (in the form of the *Wall Street Journal*) that his highest aspiration as president will be restore “Egypt’s status” and help it “reclaim its rightful place as the Arab world’s most powerful nation.” The journalist Barry Rubin expands on this:

The Brotherhood is a radical Islamist group that supports genocide against Israel and violence against the United States. It is anti-Christian and wants to keep women as second-class people. It favors killing homosexuals. Here is Egypt’s foremost politician predicting that they will be to a large extent in control of the country, making its laws, and writing its constitution . . .

In October 2010 I warned that the Muslim Brotherhood was going on the offensive and its leader declared jihad against the United States. I didn’t say this because of something I thought up. I was quoting a speech made by the leader of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Well. That’s just awful. But it’s just Egypt, right? Well . . . no. As *The New York Times* reported over the weekend, even in normally calm, moderate, Western-friendly Tunisia, the dung is about to hit the fan:

Accused as subversives or terrorists, they bore the repressive brunt of the Tunisian dictator’s reign — two decades of torture, prison or exile.

But since the dictator, President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali, fled in January, the Islamists of the once-banned Ennahda Party have

emerged from obscurity, returned from abroad and established themselves as perhaps the most powerful political force in post-revolution Tunisia.

Ennahda, for the record, is Muslim-Brotherhood-esque. And like the Brotherhood, it is now expected to win a majority in the first post-dictatorial elections. Which, in all likelihood, also means that they will win the *last* post-dictatorial (and *last pre*-dictatorial) elections.

As most of you know, over the weekend, Israel was attacked on three of its borders by its Arab “neighbors,” – still upset more than 60 years later about having to live next to damnable Jews. The “Nabka Day” attacks, which are to “commemorate” the “catastrophe” of the founding of the Jewish state are an annual occurrence, naturally (because when *isn't* a good time to hate a Jew?). But this year, they were particularly violent and particularly widespread. Still, Israeli officials comforted themselves with the notion that the virulence of the attacks had nothing to do with them and everything to do with the shaky Assad regime in Syria. As the Israeli journalist Allison Kaplan Sommer reported:

Israeli politicians and pundits quickly theorized that the infiltration was a Bashar Assad production. Israel was clearly being used in a public relations exercise, they said, deliberately orchestrated by the Assad regime in an effort to take the spotlight off of their brutal suppression of protest movements in Syria and draw attention instead to the border with Israel.

That's a nice theory, we guess. But we wish we could be as sure as the “Israeli politicians” claim to be. The fact of the matter is that Israel was attacked from Lebanon, which is controlled by Hezbollah; from Syria; and from Gaza, which is controlled by Hamas. Now, all three entities – Hezbollah, Assad's Syria, and Hamas – are funded and directed, in part, by the Iranian regime, which is also openly discussing sending a new “humanitarian” aid flotilla to Gaza. Hamas,

incidentally, is also the beneficiary of a recent truce with its Palestinian rival, Fatah, which was facilitated in part by the new interim Egyptian regime. This new Egyptian regime, by the way, is also, you may recall, being supported publicly by the same Mad Mullahs in Iran who control Syria and Lebanon and who continually promise to wipe Israel off the map.

You see where this is going, don't you?

Last week, we wrote the following:

If we had to guess, we'd guess that bin Laden's death means that the central front will shift again, this time to Egypt, then to the Arabian Peninsula and on to Israel. And this time, the shift will come as a result of the Islamists' will.

The Taliban will be allowed, we suspect, to fend for itself and to protect its meaningless “sanctuary” alone, while the real prizes – Cairo, Giza, Alexandria, and the Nile – will be up for grabs. From there, control of the Hajj, Islam's holiest sites, and the world's largest oil reserves will be on the table. And in this effort the alleged mortal enemies – Shia and Sunni Islam – will work together to advance Islam and to destroy the infidels.

This week – between Moussa's comments, the developments in Tunisia, the ongoing slaughter of Egypt's millennia-old Coptic Christian population (which we haven't even mentioned, but which continues apace), and the events surrounding “Nabka Day,” we are even more convinced of this.

What worries us, of course, is that the people who are responsible for mobilizing the Western world to deal with the threats posed by the Islamist enterprises being undertaken throughout the Middle East are unaware or, worse yet, likely to be unconcerned about this shift in the battlefield.

Barack Obama, for one, has never been particularly insightful on any foreign affairs matter and doesn't strike us as likely to put two-and-two together here.

And even if he did, why would he care? He promised to win in Afghanistan and to get bin Laden. And if he can do that, why should he expand the scope of his nation's war with Islam? It's uncomfortable for him as a product of the leftist academy, and it distracts from his more pressing political goals, namely remaking the domestic political realm. The Third World Muslims are the good guys in the post-colonialism morality tale, after all, and how is he going to muster support for his schemes and plans at home if he keeps fighting and killing the good guys like some Wolfowitzian crusader?

And as for the Europeans, you will forgive us if we're more than a touch skeptical. It's one thing to try to knock off a tin-pot dictator who offends everyone and slaughters his own people. It's something else altogether to get involved in a broad Middle Eastern dispute and potential war in defense of Israel, a country which every good, right-thinking European knows is the cause of all of the world's troubles anyway. Israel, you say? Let them have it!

Of course, the enlightened Europeans, for many of whom it is a crime to deny the Holocaust, have never learned the real lessons of that dark and ghastly episode in their history. They have not, in short, read their Neimoller seriously enough, or often enough.

While it is true that the Islamists will come for the Jews first and Europe may not care because it is not Jewish, the Islamists will not stop there. They will next come for the oil fields that power the Western world. And then for the Muslim slums of Europe itself.

This is a *global* jihad. The Islamists say so repeatedly. To ignore them is foolish at best. And to pretend that their imminent ascension to power in Egypt, Tunisia, and perhaps elsewhere is "no big deal" is suicidal.

The war is over. Long live the war.

Perhaps if George Bush and the rest of us had listened to those who many years ago had argued in favor of dropping the phrase "war on terror" in

favor of war against global jihad, we'd be a little better prepared for the shifting field of battle. Or perhaps not. Who can say?

In any case, though, the war on terror is won, while the "next" war – against the same foe – is only just beginning.

BARACK OBAMA, RATIONAL ACTOR?

All of the relevant evidence – anecdotal and data-driven – demonstrates that the voters are shocked and horrified by the level of debt that he and his "Progressive Revival" have accumulated in just two years and are scared to death of both the short and long-term consequences of that debt.

Americans are scared about their kids' futures. They're scared about rising interest rates. They're frightened about national default in light of the problems that profligacy has caused in Europe. They're feeling the pinch of inflation at the gas pump and at the grocery store checkout line. They remember well or have heard stories about the horrors of stagflation and worry that the nation's beleaguered past offers a foreshadowing of its future. An overwhelming majority tell pollsters that the country is "on the wrong track" and blame, among other things, debt, deficits, and out-of-control spending. The latest evidence of this fear came over the weekend in the form of a poll and an accompanying editorial from *Investor's Business Daily*, which noted the following:

The latest IBD/TIPP Poll finds Americans have hit a ceiling of their own, this one on patience with a government that's run up an inconceivable \$14.3 trillion debt. They want spending restraint.

Asked to what extent they support or oppose legislation raising the debt ceiling, 40% of 917 adults surveyed May 1 to 6 were strongly against increasing the debt limit, while another 23% opposed it somewhat. Only 18% said they "support somewhat" raising the ceiling, while just 10% strongly support doing so.

Even “if Congress promises not to increase federal government spending as a precondition,” anti-debt increase fervor remained. Some 51% were still opposed to raising the debt ceiling — including 30% strongly opposed. Only 40% support raising the limit, including just 13% strongly in support.

Most of those polled see through Bernanke’s and Geithner’s hysterics.

The premise that understandably undergirds the opinions of folks like the editors of IBD is that the next election will be fought principally over the size and function of government. The ramifications of the horrendous growth in the Leviathan simply can no longer be passed off as a figment of the collective imaginations of conservatives and libertarians. To all but the very stupid or those who think they might reap some benefit from a fiscal disaster (read George Soros, et al.), it is clear that something must be done to kill the beast, or the question that Lincoln asked at Gettysburg will be answered in the negative.

The editors at IBD, the Tea Party and its supporters, the editorial board of the *Wall Street Journal*, Ron and Rand Paul, Budget Committee Chairman Paul Ryan, the majority of “movement” conservatives, and, of course, your humble correspondents — just to name a few — believe that the American people have, over the last two years, expressed clearly, explicitly, and repeatedly their desire to see the size and power of the government pared back and its spending curtailed.

Barack Obama ignored the expressed will of the people in 2009. One result was the congressional members of the Democratic majority were besieged by angry constituents in their home districts. Another was the birth of the Tea Party movement. The Democratic stronghold of New Jersey elected a budget-cutting Republican governor; the freshly Obama-painted purple Commonwealth of Virginia returned quickly to red, electing its own budget-cutting Republican governor; and even the “Kennedy

Seat” in the deepest of Blue Massachusetts flipped to red in fear of the Obama-Pelosi-Reid government spendathon.

Yet it continued.

Barack Obama ignored the expressed will of the people in 2010, and the Tea Party grew stronger, bolder, and more aggressive, while the “permanent” Democratic majority, elected a mere four years previous, collapsed in one of the greatest and bloodiest midterm routs ever. The Republicans took the House in their most remarkable surge since before the Great Depression, made significant gains in the Senate, and nearly destroyed the Democrats in state and local races. And the field on which these battles were fought, without question, was that of domestic policy, and particularly the size and scope of government.

Yet it continued.

Barack Obama ignored the expressed will of the people in 2011, in February submitting the most bloated, overreaching, reflexively spendthrift budget in recent memory, and S&P responded by downgrading the long-term U.S. debt outlook. And who can blame them? The American government spends one out of every 10 dollars it collects, just to pay the interest on the debt it has accumulated. Two months ago, as it sold its remaining bonds, PIMCO suggested that 70% of all new debt issued by the Treasury is being purchased by . . . the Federal Reserve, which is to say that nobody else will buy it. Late last week, the government conceded that the two biggest anchors around the collective neck of the American people — the Ponzi schemes known as Social Security and Medicare — will be broke sooner than was expected; that is, sooner than the estimate provided just last year! And so it goes . . .

Yet it continues.

All of this is to say that everyone knows that spending is out of control, that government is out control, and that something must be done about it. Everyone,

that is, except Barack Obama. Even now, he refuses to do little more than pay lip service to the notion of cutting spending or controlling the expanse of government. And anyone who does more than that; anyone who is serious or demands seriousness is dealt with harshly. When S&P attacked, Obama's surrogates fired back – *at S&P!* When Paul Ryan proposed a budget-reduction plan and asked the President to engage in discussion, the President himself fired back – *at Paul Ryan!* – whom he called disingenuous. When Obama agreed in December to extend the Bush tax cuts indefinitely, Barack himself fired back – *at Barack Obama!* – insisting that taxes must be hiked to make up any revenue shortfalls, and that spending should not and *could* not be cut in any serious way, particularly where entitlements are concerned.

Now, we don't know what all of this says about Obama personally . . . or psychologically . . . or . . . even ideologically. But we do know that politically, one of three things is happening here.

First – and least likely in our opinion – is the possibility that Obama is really as stupid as it would appear. A couple of weeks back we said that we doubt that his intellect is as formidable as his friends and allies insist. But we didn't say we thought he was stupid. Yet in order for him to believe that he can get away with this continuing and unrepentant profligacy, he'd almost have to be. Right? He reads the same polls the rest of us do. He sees the same dissatisfaction we do. He knows what drives voters crazy. And he still doesn't care, apparently thinking his charm and (alleged) charisma will eventually overwhelm voters' worries, which really is stupid.

Second, and only slightly more likely in our opinion, is the possibility that Obama's campaign advisors are the stupid ones. We've never really thought that Obama campaign guru David Axelrod was particularly bright – and certainly not as talented or clever as Karl Rove – but in order for him to be pushing his client in this direction intentionally, he'd have to be even more obtuse than his record suggests. And his record is abysmal, by any measure.

Recall that in 2004, Rove's strategy for Bush's reelection campaign was more than a bit unorthodox. Unlike most incumbents, Bush ran hard to the right and willingly conceded the middle, knowing that his base could, if sufficiently enthused, provide all the support necessary to deliver victory over the hapless John Kerry. It did, and Rove looked brilliant for having pushed his client in that direction.

It is possible, we suppose, that Axelrod is pushing his guy in a similar direction, hoping to keep the left-wing base sufficiently fired up on domestic matters to save the day, even in the face of a plethora of broken promises to these people on the foreign policy front. If this is the case, though, Obama should terminate Axelrod immediately, lest he lose his reelection bid handily. For while self-identified "conservatives" make up a plurality of the electorate, self-identified "liberals" comprise only a rather small minority, which is to say that while Bush could be re-elected president with the full support of his base, Obama's base, even if fully engaged, could barely get him elected dog catcher. As the Democrats learned in the 2010 midterms, when the "independents" go Republican, everything goes Republican. And if Axelrod is willing to give up the independents, then Obama should be willing to give up Axelrod. Yesterday.

The third, and in our estimation the overwhelmingly most likely possibility, is that Obama is continuing to spend like the proverbial drunken sailor because he knows that he has no choice but to do so and that to do otherwise would doom him. Consider the following.

The economy, while technically in recovery, is only in recovery technically, which is to say that this recovery is rather pathetic compared to those that have followed previous steep recessions. More to the point, what recovery there has been has generally not filtered down to the "average American" who continues to believe that the economic state of the nation is far worse than it actually is, and this in spite of the media's best efforts to convince him or her otherwise. Economic conditions – or the perception of economic conditions, more accurately – matter

a great deal come election time, and if the election were held today, Obama would be in serious trouble, regardless of his opponent. Last week, Peter Wehner, who worked for each of the last three Republican presidents, including one who lost his reelection bid, and who was a speechwriter for George W. Bush, insisted that the economy will likely make Obama the easiest incumbent to beat since Jimmy Carter. He put it thusly:

What will matter most in the forthcoming presidential election are the objective conditions, and most especially the objective economic conditions, of the nation.

We are now in the fifth month of Barack Obama's third year in office. Unemployment is at 9.0 percent. We're about 7 million jobs short of where things stood when Obama took office. Economic growth in the first quarter was 1.8 percent. Housing prices have fallen for 57 consecutive months. Only one in three Americans approve of the way Obama is handling the economy, the lowest point since he took office, and nearly eight in 10 American are less optimistic about the economy than they were a few months ago.

David Axelrod is anxious, and he's right to be. His friend, the president, is caught in a political tractor beam from which few, if any, public officials escape. The only way to likely overcome it is if the economy shows signs of a strong recovery. That has yet to happen, and one cannot help but think it may never happen, in the Obama presidency. If that ends up being the case—if a year from now the economy is more or less in the same condition as it was two years ago, last year, and what it is now—Obama will be the easiest incumbent to beat since 1980. It's not impossible for Republicans to lose such an election, but it would be mighty hard.

Of course, if Obama and Axelrod and the rest of Team Obama are sweating it out now, then they really have to be scared to death of the possibility of budget

cuts. Because budget cuts would be an absolute, unmitigated disaster for the Obama economic "program."

If you look at the data – all of the data, not simply the economic growth numbers – a very disturbing picture emerges; one that shows that the preponderance of the economic impact of the exceptionally weak recovery has, by and large, been hidden from the American public by extraordinary government spending. Were that spending to disappear – i.e. to be cut back to normal levels – then the public's assessment of Obama's performance would be even worse than it is, as difficult as that may be to believe.

Last week, President Obama told a town hall meeting that the high unemployment rate was the result of "huge layoffs of government workers." This is, to put it mildly, the most dishonest thing a president has uttered in office since Bill Clinton wagged his finger at us and told us that he did not have sexual relations with "that woman, Miss Lewinsky."

As *National Review's* Jim Geraghty noted in the wake of Obama's claim, private-sector employment in this country has recovered by almost four million jobs since the recent low point in January 2010. But it is still roughly eight million jobs off of its pre-recession high, recorded in July 2007. Public-sector employment, by contrast, is actually UP by nearly half-a-million over July 2007 and is today at or near its highest level ever. Federal employment has grown; state employment has grown; and local-level employment slipped, but only very mildly.

On the same day that Obama made his statement about the "cause" of unemployment in this country, two economists, Timothy Conley, of the University of Western Ontario, and Bill Dupor, of The Ohio State University, released a study assessing the impact of the American Recovery and Investment Act, Obama's "stimulus" bill and the centerpiece of his economic platform. This report too gives lie to Obama's claims:

Our benchmark results suggest that the ARRA created/saved approximately 450 thousand state and local government jobs

and destroyed/forestalled roughly one million private sector jobs. State and local government jobs were saved because ARRA funds were largely used to offset state revenue shortfalls and Medicaid increases rather than boost private sector employment. The majority of destroyed/forestalled jobs were in growth industries including health, education, professional and business services.

Finally, as the inimitable statistician Jay Cost reminded us two weeks ago, roughly 15% of Americans are currently on food stamps, or, as Cost put it, “better than one out of seven Americans today requires government help to put food on the table.” That is an amazing statistic. And a sobering one. Cost continues:

Call it the American “food stamp recovery:” take away the government supports, and the economic picture looks very bleak indeed. Two sobering features stand out.

First, the ability of the private sector to provide people with a stable standard of living is in a long-term decline, one that has only eased, not reversed, in recent months . . .

What we see here is that the private sector wages and salaries are actually at a thirteen-year low point when measured on a per capita basis, and the most recent reading (from Quarter I of 2011) showed a continued decline. The only “good” news is that the slope of the descent has eased.

Second, the empty spot in the national wallet generated by the breakdown of private wealth has been filled by a socialization of personal income directed by the government.

As noted above, the “average American” already thinks the economy is in bad shape, largely because he or she isn’t seeing much personal recovery. If we were now to take away the extraordinary government assistance provided over the course of the Obama presidency – in the form of extended food stamps, extended

unemployment benefits, and deceptively “saved” or created government jobs – then average Americans would be even worse off and would be even more downbeat about the country’s prospects for the future.

Please, please, please don’t misunderstand what we are saying here. We know full well that the economy – the private economy; the economy that really matters – would be far stronger in the long run without the extraordinary government assistance. And indeed Conley and Dupor make that very same point. But over the short term, the next six-to-18 months, a great many people would suffer a great deal. And while this may be a necessary price to pay *economically* to salvage the future of the nation, it is not, apparently, a price that Obama can afford to pay *politically*.

So what does it all mean? Well, as best we can tell, there are two principal takeaways from all of this.

First, Obama is not stupid and neither are his advisors. He knows that the country wants spending to be cut. But he also knows that cutting spending right now would kill him politically. As hard as it may be to believe, political actors, like all humans, are rational actors. And Obama knows full well that if he is the easiest incumbent to beat since 1980 right now, then any cut to the extraordinary government assistance that favors his voters will make him the easiest incumbent to beat since 1932. Cutting spending would have consequences: positive consequences for the economy, long term; and negative consequences for Obama short term. And he cannot afford to make that trade-off.

Which brings us to the second takeaway, namely that Obama is willing to put his political ambitions above the best interests of the nation and, moreover, is willing to do so knowingly. We suspect that this makes him part and parcel of the ruling class, but it certainly adds to his misery and further destroys the myth he fashioned for himself in 2008. Not that we needed further confirmation, but Obama continues to demonstrate that he is nothing if not a typical, self-absorbed politician who is concerned about little other than his own well being. He can try to make the case

otherwise, but it's getting more and more difficult for him to do so with a straight face. If the Republicans nominate anyone other than a corpse – or the head of the IMF – next year, this is something he or she should be able to use to great advantage.

And if he or she doesn't, heaven help us all.

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