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## THEY SAID IT

There is nothing racist or morally wrong with having serious doubts about the potential success of a plan to instill “democratic values” into a group of nations whose citizens subscribe to a religion that is intrinsically hostile to both capitalism and democracy, with their emphasis on such things as universal suffrage, separation of church and state, a secular legal system, the payment of interest on capital, respect for the rights of individuals *qua* individuals, and religious tolerance. And this not to mention that these societies are home to dozens of large, well organized and well financed groups of murderous zealots who are bent on assuring that Western values are kept out of their homelands.

And finally, although it might be somewhat chauvinistic to bring it up, there is nothing racist or morally wrong with questioning whether it would be in the best interests of the United States if these nations actually become democracies. What pray tell would be the U.S. position if some murderous, radical Shiite cleric is elected High Potentate of Iraq? Does America cheer? Do American oil companies cheer? Do American oil consumers cheer? Do Iraqi woman who cherish freedom cheer?

Mark Melcher and Steve Soukup, “Over the Edge with Condi,” The Political Forum, *Politics Et Cetera*, August 11, 2003.

## THE ARAB SPRING AND THE COMING ANARCHY.

At some point, it will become incumbent upon the members of our political class to concede that the Great Arab Spring is anything but, being neither great nor particularly spring-like. We don’t expect the current administration to admit this anytime soon, of course, which should come as no surprise. Indeed, as the President himself noted during a State Department address a few weeks ago, he is “all in” in support of the current round of upheaval there. And he is not one to admit being wrong about anything. Still, someone, somewhere, at some point in time is going to have to state the obvious: The so-called Arab Spring is not a remarkable, positive, and encouraging evolution of the political order in the Middle East. It is, rather, a disaster in the making. And the longer our political class pretends otherwise, the greater the magnitude of the damage that will be wrought by the inevitable collapse of their illusions.

It seems like only yesterday that the woman who claimed that she was better equipped than Barack Obama to handle the “3 A.M. phone call” on matters of national security was telling us that Assad the Younger was a potential “reformer” with whom the diplomats of the United States could work and on whom the people of Syria could depend. In truth, it wasn’t yesterday. But it was just a few days before.

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In any case, until very recently American policy was predicated on the notion that Syria was in the capable hands of a reform-minded potential ally. Ummmm . . . whoops? Normally, we'd make some joke about the hilarity of the Obama administration's "smart diplomacy," but somehow this "gaffe" doesn't strike us as particularly funny today. Moreover, we doubt that those who are mourning their friends and family members shot down and bludgeoned in the streets by Assad's soldiers think it's particularly funny either.

Not that anyone could have seen this coming. It's not like the "Assad" name is synonymous with the willingness to slaughter one's own citizens in the pursuit of protecting personal political power and privilege. Unless, that is, you count the 25,000 to 40,000 civilians massacred at Hama by Bashar Assad's father, Hafez al-Assad. Another whoops, we suppose?

Sadly, the fact that Assad is slaughtering his people as they protest what has become a pathetic Iranian puppet government is only the beginning and a warning of things to come. If Assad is to retain control of his country and thereby to resist the forces currently roiling the entire region, he will have to intensify the on going massacre, which would create a humanitarian crisis of monumental proportions, wreaking havoc on Syria's borders with Turkey and Iraq. Assad would, undoubtedly, use the border bottlenecks as an opportunity to increase the efficiency of his slaughter, and has, indeed, already begun to do so. Additionally, there is no guarantee that refugees would be welcomed across the border, particularly in Turkey, again creating the potential for mass exterminations. All things considered, if Assad decides to fully reassert his power, Syria will, unquestionably, devolve into chaos.

But most Syria-watchers don't actually believe that Assad can regain control, regardless of how desperately he may try. And while no one should shed a tear at the likelihood of the fall of the House of Assad, we should keep in mind that neither Bashar nor his Alawite ruling minority is likely to go gentle into Dylan Thomas's good night.

The only thing worse, therefore, than the restoration of the murderous Assads would be the collapse of the regime, which would, all but certainly, make the mass murder that is already under way look like child's play. A recent *Reuters* analysis gives just a flavor of what many foreign-affairs analysts are expecting once it becomes clear that Bashar Assad and his corrupt ruling class have little option but to fight for their lives:

The risks of a slide into sectarian war are significant, most Syria-watchers nonetheless say, believing Assad will fight to the end, and start to regionalize the conflict by inciting violence in Lebanon, Turkey and across the borders with Israel . . . .

Analysts say the risks are high that Syria, an ally of Iran and Lebanon's Shi'ite Hezbollah guerrillas and with a sectarian and ethnic mix of Sunni, Kurdish, Alawite and Christians, could slip into war.

Syria, they add, can make trouble in the region by trying to incite another war between Hezbollah and Israel. Recent demonstrations on the Israeli-Syrian frontier, which had been quiet for 38 years, were encouraged by Syrian authorities in an attempt to broaden the conflict.

"The Syrians have their fingers in many pies. They have many levers to put pressure on their neighbors and create problems between Hezbollah and Israel, between Sunni and Shi'ites in Lebanon and the PKK (Kurdistan Workers Party) and AKP (Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan's party) in Turkey," the diplomat said.

We note additionally that almost all of this analysis presumes that Assad will be allowed to sink or swim on his own, which is to say that it presumes that

his chief allies, the Mullahs in Tehran will not lend him a hand in preserving his rule and their *de facto* regency. We, by contrast, are not so confident in such an outcome. Already there have been near constant reports that among those shooting Syrian protestors on the streets of the nation's cities are a handful of Iranian Republic Guards. We would not be surprised if this is, in fact, the case. And we would be even less surprised if the Mullahs step up their assistance to Assad in the event that his regime is truly and direly threatened. The Mullahs' Assad regency gives them dominion not only over Syria and its borders with Turkey, Iraq and Israel, but also gives them direct control over Hezbollah and, by extension, Lebanon and its troublesome and dangerous boundary with the Jewish state. The loss of this control and this easy and ready access to most of the rest of the Middle East would be devastating to the Mullahs' dreams of regional hegemony.

Either way, though, whatever happens in Syria is bound to be bloody and bound to be even more destabilizing to an already incredibly destabilized region.

Not that this is the only destabilizing variable. Corn prices continue to inch higher and higher; grain stocks have fallen to their lowest point in nearly two generations; and flooding in the American Midwest continues to make conditions exceptionally difficult for farmers and threatens to send corn to record highs; all of which makes the near-to-medium-term outlook for the grain-importing Middle East look very grim. Additionally, over the weekend, al Qaeda officially named Ayman al-Zawahiri as the successor "emir" to Osama bin Laden, thereby putting an Egyptian extremist in charge of the world's foremost Islamist terrorist organization at a time when the newly "free" Egypt appears likely to fall to Zawahiri's erstwhile brethren in both the Muslim Brotherhood and Egyptian Islamic Jihad.

Almost fourteen years ago exactly, when we were toiling away happily for the first of two now-defunct big shot brokerage houses, we wrote a piece detailing the arguments made by the journalist and foreign affairs scholar Robert Kaplan in his then-new book,

*The Ends of the Earth: A Journey to the Frontiers of Anarchy*. Kaplan's tome, we noted, was an outgrowth of his renowned column for (what was then) *The Atlantic Monthly* titled "The Coming Anarchy." And though Kaplan's article dealt in detail with the degradation and societal collapse in West Africa, it envisaged a bleak future for most of the "developing world," including – or even especially – as we noted in our analysis of his bok, the Middle East.

Whether he knew it at the time or not, Kaplan was, among other things, predicting the rise of al Qaeda, the Islamist corruption of the state apparatus in places like Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia, Sudan, and now Yemen, and the eventual demise of the Third World nation state and the concomitant rise of the sub-state global actor. In short, Kaplan was rather accurately and rather vividly predicting the last decade in world history, the period since bin Laden and his murderous thugs attacked the Twin Towers and the Pentagon. Specifically, he put it this way:

To appreciate fully the political and cartographic implications of postmodernism—an epoch of themeless juxtapositions, in which the classificatory grid of nation-states is going to be replaced by a jagged-glass pattern of city-states, shanty-states, nebulous and anarchic regionalisms—it is necessary to consider, finally, the whole question of war . . . .

"Just as it makes no sense to ask 'why people eat' or 'what they sleep for,'" writes Martin van Creveld, a military historian at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, in *The Transformation of War*, "so fighting in many ways is not a means but an end. Throughout history, for every person who has expressed his horror of war there is another who found in it the most marvelous of all the experiences that are vouchsafed to man, even to the point that he later spent a lifetime boring his descendants by recounting his exploits." When I

asked Pentagon officials about the nature of war in the twenty-first century, the answer I frequently got was “Read Van Creveld.” The top brass are enamored of this historian not because his writings justify their existence but, rather, the opposite: Van Creveld warns them that huge state military machines like the Pentagon’s are dinosaurs about to go extinct, and that something far more terrible awaits us . . .

The book begins by demolishing the notion that men don’t like to fight. “By compelling the senses to focus themselves on the here and now,” Van Creveld writes, war “can cause a man to take his leave of them.” As anybody who has had experience with Chetniks in Serbia, “technicals” in Somalia, Tontons Macoutes in Haiti, or soldiers in Sierra Leone can tell you, in places where the Western Enlightenment has not penetrated and where there has always been mass poverty, people find liberation in violence. In Afghanistan and elsewhere, I vicariously experienced this phenomenon: worrying about mines and ambushes frees you from worrying about mundane details of daily existence. If my own experience is too subjective, there is a wealth of data showing the sheer frequency of war, especially in the developing world since the Second World War. Physical aggression is a part of being human. Only when people attain a certain economic, educational, and cultural standard is this trait tranquilized. In light of the fact that 95 percent of the earth’s population growth will be in the poorest areas of the globe, the question is not whether there will be war (there will be a lot of it) but what kind of war. And who will fight whom?

Debunking the great military strategist Carl von Clausewitz, Van Creveld, who may be the most original thinker on war since that early-nineteenth-century Prussian, writes, “Clausewitz’s ideas . . . were wholly rooted in the fact that, ever since 1648, war had been waged overwhelmingly by states.” But, as Van Creveld explains, the period of nation-states and, therefore, of state conflict is now ending, and with it the clear “threefold division into government, army, and people” which state-directed wars enforce. Thus, to see the future, the first step is to look back to the past immediately prior to the birth of modernism—the wars in medieval Europe which began during the Reformation and reached their culmination in the Thirty Years’ War.

Van Creveld writes, “In all these struggles political, social, economic, and religious motives were hopelessly entangled. Since this was an age when armies consisted of mercenaries, all were also attended by swarms of military entrepreneurs. . . . Many of them paid little but lip service to the organizations for whom they had contracted to fight. Instead, they robbed the countryside on their own behalf. . . .”

“Given such conditions, any fine distinctions . . . between armies on the one hand and peoples on the other were bound to break down. Engulfed by war, civilians suffered terrible atrocities.”

Back then, in other words, there was no Politics as we have come to understand the term . . .

Also, war-making entities will no longer be restricted to a specific territory. Loose and shadowy organisms such as Islamic

terrorist organizations suggest why borders will mean increasingly little and sedimentary layers of tribalistic identity and control will mean more. “From the vantage point of the present, there appears every prospect that religious . . . fanaticisms will play a larger role in the motivation of armed conflict” in the West than at any time “for the last 300 years,” Van Creveld writes.

Unfortunately, as with the slaughter in Syria, this is “just the beginning and a warning of things to come.” In our piece on Kaplan 10 those many years ago, we noted the following passages from his *Atlantic Monthly* article, which described conditions in West Africa, but which could be expected to describe almost any Third World nation in the not-too-distant future:

I got a general sense of the future while driving from the airport to downtown Conakry, the capital of Guinea. The forty-five minute journey in heavy traffic was through one never-ending shantytown: a nightmarish Dickensian spectacle to which Dickens himself would never have given credence. The corrugated metal shacks and scabrous walls were coated with black slime. Stores were built out of rusted shipping containers, junked cars, and jumbles of wire mesh. The streets were one long puddle of floating garbage. Mosquitoes and flies were everywhere. Children, many of whom had protruding bellies, seemed as numerous as ants. When the tide went out, dead rats and the skeletons of cars were exposed on the mucky beach. In twenty-eight years Guinea’s population will double if growth goes on at current rates. Hardwood logging continues at a madcap speed, and people flee the Guinean countryside for Conakry. It seemed to me that here, as elsewhere in Africa and

the Third World, man is challenging nature far beyond its limits, and nature is now beginning to take its revenge.

Of the approximately 12 million people worldwide whose blood is HIV-positive, 8 million are in Africa. In the capital of the Ivory Coast, whose modern road system only helps to spread the disease, 10% of the population is HIV-positive. And war and refugee movements help the virus break through to more-remote areas of Africa. Alan Greenberg, M.D., a representative of the Centers for Disease Control in Abidjan, explains that in Africa the HIV virus and tuberculosis are now “fast-forwarding each other.” Of the approximately 4,000 newly diagnosed tuberculosis patients in Abidjan, 45% were also found to be HIV-positive. As African birth rates soar and slums proliferate, some experts worry that viral mutations and hybridizations might, just conceivably, result in a form of the AIDS virus that is easier to catch than the present strain.

When we say that the Great Arab Spring is going to prove to be neither great nor particularly spring-like, what do we mean? Frankly, we mean exactly what we say – and exactly what we said 17 years ago in praise of Robert Kaplan. The Middle East, as a whole, is a fiction, created from the wreckage of World War I and based on very little more than the whims of cartographers. The peoples of the region – with the notable exception of its single non-Islamic, non-authoritarian, non-abortive state – have no experience with the tools and institutions of democracy, liberty, or industry. The notion that the purging of longstanding tyrannies would result in anything other than complete collapse and utter chaos has always been little more than complete fantasy, utter intellectual laziness, or some combination of the two. Certainly the human spirit yearns for and is entitled to the blessings of freedom and self-governance, even in the Middle East, but the culture there is ill-prepared for it, as anyone

with even the slightest bit of insight could have told you several weeks ago and someone with a great deal of insight, such as Robert Kaplan, could have told you as long as seventeen years ago.

We're not the only ones to have noticed Kaplan's prescience, of course. Indeed, it was a post by Stanley Kurtz at *National Review's* group blog "The Corner" that reminded us of Kaplan and our long ago exploration of his expectations for the future. Kurtz contends, among other things, that the current American military action in Yemen not only bears out Kaplan's predictions, but also hints that the entire neo-conservative effort of the last decade has been a failure and that "conservative" foreign policy needs to be reworked by the Republican presidential aspirants.

And while we wouldn't go quite as far as Kurtz, we have never made a secret of our discomfort with the notion that the United States military should be running around the world deposing Muslim dictators and trying its damndest to turn nations with no history of popular governance into models of democracy. In fact, in the article titled "Over the Edge With Condi" and cited in the "They Said It" section above, we described the former National Security Advisor and Secretary of State's outline of the Bush strategy to spread American values through Iraq and Middle East "much as it transformed Europe in the second half of the 20th century" as "insane."

Our position then, as it is now, is that such an effort would require generations-long commitments on the part of the conquering forces, and that the American people's tolerance for commitments such as these are bound to be limited, given their understandable unwillingness to part with their human capital (i.e. their sons and daughters) and their fiscal inability to part with any more financial capital.

All of which is to say that the idea that "democratization" could possibly be a reasonable or legitimate response to the current upheaval in the Middle East is absurd. Democracy is a lovely word. And elections are a really neat. But they don't mean a damn thing unless they are sustained over time by

institutions that intrinsically value the concept of self-governance and are capable of instilling in the people an appreciation for the rights and responsibilities inherent in the exercise of liberty. None of this exists in the Middle East. And the Arab Spring is going to end not with "democracy" but with chaos and old night, to borrow a phrase from Milton. And the American political class, which right now is united in its expectation to the contrary, is going to be caught completely by surprise, rendering the devolution into chaos that much more destructive.

We can't say for sure what spark will ignite the collapse into anarchy. It may be the takeover of the Egyptian government by Islamist radicals. It may be starvation in the streets of Egypt, Tunisia, and a half-dozen other Arab nations due to an inability to pay for imported grains. It may be the collapse of – or even the restoration of – the Assad regime in Syria. Who knows?

What we can say, though, is that the future of this region is bleak indeed. And anyone who does not acknowledge that now is both foolish and, frankly, ignorant of all that has happened over the last two decades. Robert Kaplan wasn't right about everything. Far from it. He missed, for example, on his predictions about India. But unlike the Middle East, India had the benefit of the same institutional and colonial history as the United States, Canada, Hong Kong, and Australia, to name just a few of the world's most successful capitalist-democracies. The Middle East is not prepared for what comes after the revolution.

And as best we can tell, neither is the American political class.

## THE OBAMA RECORD.

As the economy continues to flounder, as the IMF downgrades its growth prospects for the United States for the remainder of 2011 and for 2012, and as the related political pressure mounts on the man who would like very much to win re-election to the presidency in seventeen months, it occurs to us that

the principal problem with nominating and then electing a man like Barack Obama was not, as many Republicans fretted back in 2008, his inexperience, but rather the fact that he had never before been held accountable for anything.

It was not, in short, his lack of experience that should have concerned Americans, but rather his lack of accomplishments. Born in 1961, Obama is a member of what is loosely called Generation Jones, making him the first post-Boomer president. He is also, without question, the first post-modern president: a man who has achieved a great deal without really doing anything at all. The historian and classicist Victor Davis Hanson explains:

At no point in his past soaring *cursus honorum* (Occidental, Columbia, Harvard Law Review, Chicago Law School, Chicago politics and organizing, the U.S. Senate) did anyone hold him to account, as in saying, “First, let us see exactly what you achieved that might justify yet another honor or promotion” — as in a stellar GPA, high LSAT score, brilliant law-review essay, a seminal tenure-winning book on the law, an award-winning law course, a landmark new community-organizing program, or a hallmark piece of senatorial legislation.

The classic example from the Obama biography, of course, is the tale of *Dreams from My Father*, the President’s “first” memoir, which he began writing just after finishing law school. Long story short, Obama was an unpublished and unproven writer who nonetheless attracted the attention of a Simon and Schuster imprint simply because he happened to have been elected president of the Harvard Law Review. Despite never having published a word, he was given a six-figure advance to write his story, half of which he took and spent, though he never delivered the book. The contract was terminated, though the advance was “forgiven.” The contract was, of course, purchased by another publisher, who, naturally, gave the unpublished alleged writer (and welsher) another \$40,000 advance,

which he then used to go to Bali to “unblock.” Nice work if you can get it, we suppose. (And despite over half-a-century of professional writing experience between us and more than three-hundred pages of manuscript, we can’t.)

For the first two years of his presidency, avoiding accountability for the economy was easy. Hey, look what I inherited! It was a mess. Give me a break! And time. Bush did it, in short. The President prattled on unpresidentially — and endlessly — about cars driven into ditches, slurpees, and the responsibility of the opposition to shut up and get in the back seat, out of his way.

Now, of course, with the Bush bogeyman long gone, with the economy faltering again and threatening to slip back into recession, and with Obama’s policies clearly being responsible for any number of hindrances to growth, the President is having to be a little more creative with his attempts to avoid being held to account. Now, instead of Bush, the problem, quite clearly, is Europe, which is creating a “headwind” for the United States that is nearly inescapable. Or, worse and more bizarrely yet, the culprit is ATM’s, which make it possible for banks to avoid hiring real people, thereby artificially inflating the nation’s jobless rate and prolonging its economic misery. Never mind that such explanations range from the childish to the absolutely neo-Luddite insane. They are explanations, excuses, opportunities for this president to avoid taking responsibility for his policies.

It should not be lost on those who worried about this president’s lack of experience that he surrounded himself with some of the most experienced and most respected economic hands in Democratic circles, including Larry Summers, Christina Romer, Austan Goolsbee, and the man widely credited with ending stagflation himself, the eminent former Fed chairman, Paul Volcker.

It should not be lost on those who marvel at this president’s incapacity to be held accountable that of this impressive, initial economics team, the only one who has still not fled this sinking and stinking ship is

the tax-cheat Treasury Secretary, who, alone among his colleagues, might find securing outside employment challenging, if for no other reason than his inability to run the simplest tax-return software.

Last November, when the Republicans reversed the seeming tide of destiny and rolled to the largest midterm victory by the out-of-power party in nearly a century, most pundits and analysts – ourselves included – could not help but compare the early stages of the Obama presidency to those of the Clinton presidency. The parallels, after all, were too powerful to ignore.

The question then was whether Obama had the capacity to adapt his governing style and ideology to the will of the people and the necessities of governance. Clinton did adapt, of course, and he rebounded from his midterm trouncing not only to win re-election but to lead the most successful Democratic presidency since Roosevelt. Obama, by contrast, does not appear to share this flexibility. And the most obvious explanation for his rigidity is his belief that there is no need for him to change; that his “failures” have never hurt him before and there is no reason for him to believe that they will hurt him now.

The problem with this is that while Obama seems perfectly willing to gamble that he will be rewarded – or at least not punished – for his mistakes, and thus maintains a strict ideological rigidity even in the face of accumulating evidence of failure, the rest of us will indeed be punished, as jobs, growth, and market gains dry up, even as inflation inches ever higher. Obama may have guaranteed employment through January 20, 2013 and may believe that he will have guaranteed employment through January 20, 2017, but in that, he is in a distinct minority.

All of this has combined to create a rather nasty case of the jitters even among erstwhile Obama supporters. Last week, for example, the liberal academic and one-time Obama voter Walter Russell Meade suggested that there is a precedent for Obama’s ideological rigidity and personal insularity in American history and it is a precedent that should strike fear into the hearts of all thinking men and women. To wit:

Midway through 2010, President Obama looked less like Lincoln *redux* and more like a Clinton *manqué*. By the end of that year, the penultimate dissing of the President began; friends and foes began to ask whether President Obama might not be, gasp, the new Jimmy Carter.

Instapundit maestro Glenn Reynolds has been saying for some time that from where he sits, the Carter comparison looks like a *best* case scenario for this President. For all our sakes, I hope Glenn is wrong, but increasingly there’s another specter frightening the Obama administration: the ghost of Herbert Hoover.

Like Obama, Hoover was the child of a broken home with an unconventional background. He was far more widely traveled than most Americans in his day, and his time overseas made him a globalist in his thinking in many ways. His wife (Lou Henry Hoover) was unusually well educated and assertive — at a time when few women went to college, she graduated from coeducational Stanford with a degree in geology. Hoover was an unconventional candidate who came into office on a tidal wave of support. Hoover, Secretary of Commerce during the Roaring Twenties, had never held elected office before winning the presidency. His campaign went deep into enemy territory, winning over solidly Democratic states in what was still the deep blue South including (like Obama) Florida, Virginia and North Carolina. Hoover was the great progressive hope of his day — he had supported Teddy Roosevelt’s 1912 Bull Moose campaign and was seen as much more forward looking and progressive than the party machine. He ran on the most diverse presidential

ticket until Barack Obama's own election in 2008; Hoover's running mate, Kaw Nation member Charles Curtis, was the first Native American and the first American with significant non-European ancestry to serve as Vice President of the United States . . .

What worries — or should worry — the White House is this: despite his long record of progressive politics, his personal appeal and his sympathy for the downtrodden, President Hoover is best remembered for failing to master the Great Depression. Six months into his term, the stock market crashed; for the next three and a half years the economy continued to deteriorate. By the time of the 1932 presidential election, Hoover was so widely discredited in the minds of shell shocked voters that Franklin D. Roosevelt swept into office, ending a Republican domination of national politics that dated back to the Civil War.

The problem was not that Hoover didn't try. He had long been known as a leading progressive, and in the face of the Depression he was ready to countenance a significant expansion of the government's role. His Reconstruction Finance Corporation would be taken over by FDR; it lent money to distressed companies in an effort to jump start the economy. He proposed the creation of a federal Department of Education; he was willing to countenance significant budget deficits and supported important public works projects (like Boulder Dam) as a way of stimulating employment and rebuilding confidence in the economy.

None of it worked. The economy was suffering from a combination of domestic and international maladies that were not

well understood at the time — at least not by the President and his closest advisers . . .

President Hoover brought some convictions with him to office about how the economy worked, how government worked, and what his role as President should be. As the Depression deepened, he did the best he could within those limits, but nothing seems to have made him reconsider the mix of progressive ideas that he brought with him to the White House. As months of failure and disappointment grew into years, he doesn't seem to have questioned those core ideas or to think about ways in which the economic emergency might require steps that in normal times would not be taken. He not only failed to end the Depression; he failed to give people a sense that he understood what was happening. Over-optimistic forecasts issued in part to build confidence came back to haunt him. To the public he seemed fuddled and doctrinaire, endlessly recycling stale platitudes in the face of radically new economic problems.

That's beginning to sound a little like the current President's predicament.

In our opinion, the key bit here is the bit about Hoover's inability to question his own core ideas. Obama too seems incapable of doing so, which is hardly surprising, but nevertheless frightening.

In a follow-up essay, Meade pondered the question of whether, given all of this, the Obama presidency could be saved. It's an interesting question and one that we will address ourselves at some point in the future. But what concerns us most at this point is whether — or rather how well — the American economy can survive, given all of this. Everyone knows how

things worked out for Hoover. And it would be irresponsibly hyperbolic of us (or anyone) to suggest that they will work out similarly for Obama. That said, we can't help but worry what kind of damage can or will be done to the economy in the near-to-mid-term and to the nation's fiscal standing in the long-term while Obama sticks stubbornly and uncompromisingly to his beliefs about the economy and a president's role in it, regardless of the outcome of those beliefs.

As the "soft patch" in the economy grows longer and softer, the President of the United States appears testier and more querulous. The examination of his record is troubling for him, not just because it should portend coming electoral difficulties but because it is a horrifyingly unprecedented experience. How dare he be evaluated based on his record! Who are they (or we) to judge him?

Time will tell if the American people will, collectively, judge the man on this record. And in the meantime, we can only hope that any further damage he does will be minimal.

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