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THEY SAID IT

Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, in order to assure the survival and the success of liberty. . . . To those peoples in the huts and villages across the globe struggling to break the bonds of mass misery, we pledge our best efforts to help them help themselves, for whatever period is required—not because the Communists may be doing it, not because we seek their votes, but because it is right. If a free society cannot help the many who are poor, it cannot save the few who are rich . . . In the long history of the world, only a few generations have been granted the role of defending freedom in its hour of maximum danger. I do not shrink from this responsibility—I welcome it. I do not believe that any of us would exchange places with any other people or any other generation. The energy, the faith, the devotion which we bring to this endeavor will light our country and all who serve it—and the glow from that fire can truly light the world.

John F. Kennedy, Inaugural Address, January 20, 1961

AMERICAN DECLINE. WHOSE PROBLEM?

We know we're a little late to the party here, but we think that the whole world should celebrate the official end of the heinous, murderous, and tyrannical rule of Moammar Qaddafi. Perhaps it's a little crass to revel so fervently in this miserable drag queen's death. Perhaps it's a little over the top to do a victory dance in the Rose Garden, as Barack Obama did. And even the Libyan rebels themselves seem to grasp that the manner of his death was perhaps a little too gruesome, since they've vowed to bring the dictator's killers to "justice" – whatever that means. Still, if anyone ever had it coming, Qaddafi did. Live by the sword, die by the sword, and all that. Additionally, regardless of the regime that replaces him in Tripoli, a known terrorist has been removed from power and will no longer be able to order any more jumbo jets blown out of the sky. And that is an unqualified good. Period.

Moreover, and perhaps most notably, the world should celebrate this operation because it is quite possibly the last of its type, at least for a long time, if not forever. Whatever you may think about the manner in which this mission was accomplished, which is to say with American military action decreed unilaterally by an aggressively power-hungry president; and whatever you may think about the notion of the American armed forces playing "policeman" to the world; and whatever the ultimate outcome of this "revolution" may be – and for the record, we are rather staunchly pessimistic about the prospects for the "new" Libya; none of that necessarily or entirely negates the fact that the old Mad Dog of the Middle East was slaughtering his own people by the thousands and the only force in the world that could stop him from doing so – the United States military – did so. There are countless Libyans alive today because of the brave young men and women of the American armed forces. Just as there are countless Bosnians alive today for the same reason. And Kosovars.

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Not to mention Iraqi Shiites, Marsh Arabs, Afghans, etc. etc., *ad infinitum*.

All of this, however, is about to stop, for better or worse.

Let us begin with the obvious: Qaddafi's ouster and death do, unquestionably constitute a victory *for* the Libyan people. But they constitute a victory *by* American power. As we put it just over two months ago:

Let us be honest. Were it not for American participation, NATO would not have been successful in aiding the Libyan rebels. And were it not for NATO, the rebels would have had no chance of taking Tripoli and, presumably, ousting Gadhafi and ending his forty-year reign of terror. All of which is to say that U.S. involvement was the critical variable here.

As for the likelihood of such a "victory" being achieved again, that's possible, we suppose, in the near term, but highly unlikely over the long-term, for a variety of reasons, most notably the fact the United States is the brokest nation that ever existed and getting broker every day. Or, as the inimitable Mark Steyn put it last week:

Washington, D.C., is also broke — way broker than York City School District. In fact, the government of the United States is broker than any entity has ever been in the history of the planet. Officially, Washington has to return 15,000,000,000,000 dollars just to get back to having nothing at all. And that 15,000,000,000,000 dollars is a very lowball figure that conveniently ignores another \$100 trillion in unfunded liabilities that the government, unlike private businesses, is able to keep off the books . . .

So how come the Brokest Jurisdiction in History is able to "give you some money" to hire back those teachers that had to be laid off? No problem, says the vice president. We're going to "ask" people who have "a lot of money" to "pay just a little bit more" in taxes.

Where are these people? Evidently, not in York, Pa. But they're out there somewhere. Who has "a lot of money"? According to President Obama, if your combined household income is over \$250,000 a year you have "a lot of money." Back in March, my *National Review* colleague Kevin Williamson pointed out that, in order to balance the budget of the United States, you would have to increase the taxes of people earning more than \$250,000 a year by \$500,000 a year . . .

So how about people earning a million dollars a year? That's "a lot of money" by anybody's definition. As Kevin Williamson also pointed out, to balance the budget of the United States on the backs of millionaires you would have to increase the taxes of those earning more than 1 million a year by 6 million a year.

Not only is there "no money in the city" of York, Pa., and no money in Washington, D.C., there's no money anywhere else in America — not for spending on the Obama/Biden scale. Come to that, there's no money anywhere on the planet: Last year, John Kitchen of the U.S. Treasury and Menzie Chinn of the University of Wisconsin published a study called "Financing U.S. Debt: Is There Enough Money in the World — and At What Cost?"

Don't worry, it's a book with a happy ending! U.S.-government spending is sustainable as long as by 2020 the rest of

the planet is willing to sink 19 percent of its GDP into U.S. Treasury debt. And why wouldn't they? After all, if you're a Chinese politburo member or a Saudi prince or a Russian kleptocrat or a Somali pirate and you switched on CNN International and chanced to catch Joe Biden's Fourth Grade Economics class, why wouldn't you cheerily dump a fifth of your GDP into a business model with such a bright future?

Is it any wonder, therefore that Steyn's new book is called *After America: Get Ready for Armageddon*? You can see the end from here. You take the lack of funds, you add in the natural paleo-conservative retreat into isolationism, and you sprinkle in the Left's desire to spend every dollar it can making the American people more reliant upon their federal government, and it only makes sense that adventures like the recent one in Libya – or the not so recent one in the Balkans – are soon to be relegated to the proverbial dustbin of history. Who has the time, the energy, or the money to worry about "them," after all – whoever "they" might be. America has its own problems.

This, unfortunately, is what we call the American "decline." America is exhausted – culturally, physically, and economically. And it lacks the leadership to do much about it. George Bush toppled two tyrants. Obama has toppled one and slaughtered several terrorist masterminds. But as a whole, the political class would much rather dicker about meaningless millions of dollars for this, or tens of millions for that, while the country slowly loses both its ability to stabilize and lead the global economy and its power to guarantee that belligerents, tyrants, and other global bad actors are unable to foment geopolitical chaos.

Two weeks ago, in what he almost certainly thought was a brilliant and measured essay, Gideon Rachman, late of *The Economist* and currently the chief foreign affairs columnist for the *Financial Times*, declared that the American decline is not only inevitable but that it is something that Americans should quit bitching about and learn to enjoy. To wit:

Recently I met a retired British diplomat who claimed with some pride that he was the man who had invented the phrase, "the management of decline", to describe the central task of British foreign policy after 1945. "I got criticised," he said, "but I think it was an accurate description of our task and I think we did it pretty well."

No modern American diplomat – let alone politician – could ever risk making a similar statement. That is a shame. If America were able openly to acknowledge that its global power is in decline, it would be much easier to have a rational debate about what to do about it. Denial is not a strategy . . .

Even after the US has ceded its economic dominance, America's military, diplomatic, cultural and technological prowess will ensure that the US remains the world's dominant political power – for a while. But although economic and political power are not the same thing, they are surely closely related. As China and other powers rise economically, they will inevitably constrain America's ability to get its way in the world. That is why America needs to have a rational debate about what "relative decline" means – and why the British experience, although very different, may still hold some valuable lessons.

What the UK discovered after 1945 is that a decline in national power is perfectly compatible with an improvement in living standards for ordinary people, and with the maintenance of national security. Decline need not mean the end of peace and prosperity. But it does mean making choices and forging alliances. In an era of massive budget deficits, and rising Chinese power, the US will have to think

harder about its priorities. Last week, Hillary Clinton insisted that America will remain a major power in Asia – with all the military expenditure that this implies. Very well. But what does that mean for spending at home? Few politicians are prepared to have that discussion. Instead, particularly among Republicans, they fall back on feel-good slogans about American “greatness”.

That’s great. He’s a regular old Bobby Knight, isn’t he?

The problem is that this guy Rachman does and doesn’t understand what the American decline will mean. The part he does understand is that the American decline is relative, meaning that, in the grand scheme of things, America and Americans will generally be okay. For a while, anyway. What he doesn’t understand – clearly – is that the part that will have to give, the “relative” part, is that which allows America to make *his* life comfortable. And to make the lives of the rest of the Brits comfortable. And those of the French. And the Belgians. And the Germans. And the Greeks. And the Italians. And . . . well . . . you name it.

Rachman writes “What the UK discovered after 1945 is that a decline in national power is perfectly compatible with an improvement in living standards for ordinary people, and with the maintenance of national security.” The UK discovered that, eh? What, pray tell, would the UK have discovered if the United States had not been there to drive the global economy and thereby to improve living standards worldwide, and to serve as Europe’s surrogate army, thereby relieving it of the responsibility of having to maintain its own national security? Have you had that discussion yet, Gideon? Because you should. And remember, denial is not a strategy.

The fact of the matter is this: the American decline will be ugly and vicious and bloody and impoverishing. But not for America. It will be ugly and vicious and bloody and impoverishing for everyone else. Rachman’s Great Britain included.

Over the past several weeks, we’ve given Ron Paul a hard time for being the GOP’s crazy old uncle in the attic. And while his views on some issues are indeed a little goofy (the Civil War, for example), he is also right about a great many things, including the future of NATO, which he says is doomed, largely because it is an unnecessary and expensive Cold War remnant.

The Obama administration, apparently anticipating the cogency of this argument, despite Paul’s status as a non-starter in the GOP race, is already trying to counter the “disband NATO” chatter and to make the case for maintaining this dated defense against Soviet aggression. Obama should be careful here, we think. The more people are aware that NATO still exists, the more they are likely to want it disbanded. Why, after all, should Americans continue to provide for the national security of the lay-about Athenians, even as their own credit rating is being downgraded?

And when Americans figure out what they can save by making the Europeans defend themselves, then guys like Gideon Rachman may begin to understand what the American “decline” means to them. It is worth remembering in this context, we think, that the last two military expeditions undertaken by the United States for “humanitarian” reasons, were actually undertaken at the behest of our British allies. And “behest” is undoubtedly an inadequate description. Tony Blair begged for American involvement in the Balkans in the ‘90s, just as David Cameron begged for American involvement in Libya several months back. In both cases, American national interest was dubious, while the British and continental interests were obvious. So the Americans helped– or rather, so the Americans did what the Brits and Europeans could not do themselves.

The end of this kind of American “help” is what the American decline presages. We wonder if people like Rachman realize that. We have written countless times about the vicious “state of nature” that will return to the developing world when American “interventionism” ebbs. And the recent events in Libya underscore this fact. But we have not noted, and we suspect that too many in Europe, in Great Britain and elsewhere – those who ache for the American

decline – have not much contemplated that it is hardly the developing world alone that will suffer.

Gideon Rachman concedes that Britain's fall from global hyperpower status was "helped by the fact that the new global hegemon was the US – a country tied to Britain by language, blood and shared political ideas." No kidding. He goes on to note that, given this, "It will be tougher for America to cede power to China." Well, maybe. But it won't be nearly as hard on America as it will be on Britain. And France. And so on. Even to think otherwise is to completely ignore the role that America has played in the global order since 1945, a role that has been that of unarguably the most benevolent, just, and earnest global hegemon in the history of the planet, the likes of which the world is unlikely to see again.

That's too bad, of course. But mostly for people who live in places other than America. Here it will probably be fine, at least for a while. Out there, in the rest of the world, America's "decline" will be felt more acutely. There is a reason that Mark Steyn's book is subtitled "Get Ready for Armageddon." That's what the rest of the world will see. The Brits, the Europeans, the Japanese, the Koreans, and the rest of the American-reliant people of the world may think that this Armageddon applies only to someone else, but they're wrong. It applies to everyone.

Oh. And congratulations on that Qaddafi thing, Europeans. Glad you got to keep your oil flowing and the refugees out of Italy. Happy to help. Best of luck next time.

POPULATION AND THE "EXPERTS."

Welcome! And Happy Birthday! We're so glad to have you here!

To whom are we talking, you ask? Whose birthday are we so excitedly celebrating?

Why, the seven billionth person on earth, that's who. He or she was, according to demographers, supposed to have been born somewhere on this great blue

marble yesterday. And that is cause for celebration. Right? Three cheers. Hooray! Hooray! Hooray!

But why the celebration? Well, for starters, because we're goofy for babies. We love 'em. But more to the point, this is an important birth. It interjects a needed dose of skepticism into the debate over the nature of man's relationship to the planet, particularly with regard to the position held by the so-called experts. It also makes it possible to examine the validity of the current case that "science" is exclusively defined by those experts who purport to seek to facilitate the promotion of a more "sustainable" planet. And it also gives some insight into those challenges facing the planet over the course of the next century that might have been considered absurd even just a few years ago.

For starters, it is worth considering in this context, we think, what some of the great minds of the scientific community recently told us about population. The most famous, modern population doomsayer, of course, was the not-so-great biologist Paul Ehrlich, the author of *The Population Bomb*. He has been a source of unending embarrassment to one half of The Political Forum editorial board and kitchen help, due to the fact that he is considered one of the "greatest" minds ever to have studied and received his MA and Ph.D from the University of Kansas. Four decades ago, Ehrlich was warning desperately about the tragedies to come:

Population will inevitably and completely outstrip whatever small increases in food supplies we make. The death rate will increase until at least 100-200 million people per year will be starving to death during the next ten years.

And:

By . . . [1975] some experts feel that food shortages will have escalated the present level of world hunger and starvation into famines of unbelievable proportions. Other experts, more optimistic, think the ultimate food-population collision will not occur until the decade of the 1980s.

Oh dear.

Unfortunately, Ehrlich was not alone. He may have been the most vocal and most dramatic doomsayer. But he was more within the mainstream than outside it. Peter Gunter, for example, a professor at North Texas State University, declared back in 1970 that a scientific *consensus* had been reached:

Demographers agree almost unanimously on the following grim timetable: by 1975 widespread famines will begin in India; these will spread by 1990 to include all of India, Pakistan, China and the Near East, Africa. By the year 2000, or conceivably sooner, South and Central America will exist under famine conditions . . . By the year 2000, thirty years from now, the entire world, with the exception of Western Europe, North America, and Australia, will be in famine.

None of this, of course, was even close to remotely accurate, much less “scientific.” But that didn’t stop the governments, the inter-governmental agencies, the international non-governmental organizations, and general do-gooders from doing something – *anything!* – that they could to stop this plague on mankind known as . . . well . . . mankind. People were the enemy. They were destroying the planet. And they had to be stopped! So they were.

Now, we all know about the disaster that was and is Communist China’s “One Child Policy.” And back in June, in a piece about the corruption of American feminism, we noted that China was hardly alone in the practice of compelling abortion – particularly of girl babies – in pursuit of a more “manageable” population. Its neighbor India, for example, as well as many, if not most of the rest of the nations of Southern Asia, have also seen an abundance of selective abortions in the name of population “control.” And this, sadly, is only but the half of it. As the guys at the Powerline blog noted over the weekend, a remarkable and remarkably unheralded 2009 book by the Columbia University historian

Matthew Connelly – *Fatal Misconception: The Struggle to Control World Population* – describes in rather vivid and gory detail the efforts undertaken in pursuit of “controlling” the population. As the author/blogger Steven Hayward put it:

Connelly recounts one of the first major international conferences on world population, held in Geneva in 1927, where Albert Thomas, a French trade unionist, asked, “Has the moment yet arrived for considering the possibility of establishing some sort of supreme supranational authority which would regulate the distribution of population on rational and impartial lines, by controlling and directing migration movements and deciding on the opening-up or closing of countries to particular streams of immigration?” Connelly also describes the 1974 World Population Conference, which “witnessed an epic battle between starkly different versions of history and the future: one premised on the preservation of order, *if necessary by radical new forms of global governance . . .*” . . .

As Connelly lays out in painstaking detail, population control programs, aimed chiefly at developing nations, proliferated despite clear human rights abuses and, more importantly, new data and information that called into question many of the fundamental assumptions of the crisis mongers. Connelly recalls computer projections and economic models that offered precise and “scientifically grounded” projections of future global ruin from population growth, all of which were quickly falsified. The mass famines and food riots that were predicted never occurred; fertility rates began to fall everywhere, even in nations that lacked “family planning” programs.

The coercive nature of the population control programs in the field was appalling. India, in particular, became “a vast laboratory for the ultimate population control campaign,” the chilling practices of which Connelly recounts:

Sterilizations were performed on 80-year-old men, uncomprehending subjects with mental problems, and others who died from untreated complications. There was no incentive to follow up patients. The Planning Commission found that the quality of postoperative care was “the weakest link.” In Maharashtra, 52 percent of men complained of pain, and 16 percent had sepsis or unhealed wounds. Over 40 percent were unable to see a doctor. Almost 58 percent of women surveyed experienced pain after IUD insertion, 24 percent severe pain, and 43 percent had severe and excessive bleeding. Considering that iron deficiency was endemic in India, one can only imagine the toll the IUD program took on the health of Indian women.

These events Connelly describes took place in 1967, but instead of backing off, the Indian government—under constant pressure and lavish financial backing from the international population control organizations—intensified these coercive programs in the 1970s. Among other measures India required that families with three or more children had to be sterilized to be eligible for new housing (which the government, not the private market, controlled). “This war against the poor also swept across the countryside,” Connelly notes . . .

In all, over 8 million sterilizations, many of them forced, were conducted in India in 1976—”draconian population control,” Connelly writes, “practiced on an unprecedented scale . . . There is no way to count the number who were

being hauled away to sterilization camps against their will.” Nearly 2,000 died from botched surgical procedures.

All of this, of course, was done in the name of “settled science.” And all of it was done for our own good. And how has that turned out? Not so well, according to most people who actually care about this stuff. The bigger worry right now is population collapse, not over-population. Seven billion people is, of course, the largest that the world’s population has ever been. But peak population can be seen just over the temporal horizon. And from there the drop is steep and the consequences potentially grave. Even Reuters, the official newswire of the global left, is beginning to wonder what happens when the babies stop coming.

Many demographers and long-term planners say the challenge for the next century will be less dealing with growing numbers of people and more managing the much larger population of aged and perhaps dependent people while finding new strategies to deliver prosperity, jobs and essential services.

The trend has already contributed to the current global financial crisis by driving up health and social care bills and perhaps also undermining productivity. But while politicians tie themselves in knots over short-term worries, experts say there is not enough discussion of longer-term demographic challenges.

“It’s not a world that’s going to look anything like any world or population that has existed before,” says Jack Goldstone, professor of public policy and a leading demographics expert at Washington’s George Mason University.

“We thought that overpopulation was going to force humanity to expand outward to the stars. That doesn’t look

like the problem at all. And the policy framework isn't set up at all to handle these longer-term issues."

With many of the world's poorer countries still seeing strong growth, the global fertility rate -- the number of children born per couple -- remains around 2.5, more than enough to replace every person currently alive.

But in richer countries, the rate has already nosedived. Russia, Singapore and several other developed countries have introduced policies to boost fertility but with mixed success.

Exact predictions vary, but most projections suggest the global population will peak at around 9 billion around 2070 and then start to fall, perhaps very fast . . .

"The decline in fertility has gone the furthest certainly in the developed world but it is falling very rapidly in most middle-income countries and even some of the more successful lower-income countries," said Daniel Cotlear, a population expert at the World Bank specializing in Latin America. "With an aging population, that brings challenges." . . .

Many developing states, most notably China with its one-child policy but also a growing number of other nations, will follow suit -- often without the financial resources to help pay for the cost of medical and nursing care.

"It's the seminal issue of our time," says Michael Hodin, executive director of the New York-based Global Coalition on Aging and a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations.

"The numbers are stunning. The exact projections vary but it doesn't really matter because they are all going in the same direction."

This tells us a couple of different things.

First, no matter what the so-called experts tell us about how the world is dying and collapsing and "everyone" knows it, unless these claims are backed up by FALSIFIABLE scientific experiments, they are mere speculation. And the notion that we have to change the way we live, act, and govern ourselves to prevent this imminent disaster is foolishness based on speculation, which amounts little more than hysteria.

None of this is to say that some of the speculation made by the experts might not prove to be right. It does not, in other words, mean that the "experts" are making things up or that the problem may not be real.

It does, however, mean that experts are human too. And they too are driven by the same forces that drive the rest of us and are often victims of and participants in information cascades that lead to ridiculous conclusions being drawn based on the scantest of evidence.

It also means, contrary to the claims of the original Progressives and their modern-day heirs, that even "experts" have agendas, and these agendas tend, as Lord Acton might have noted, to run parallel with the accumulation of power and the subsequent corruption of the erstwhile "objective" expertise.

The global political Left, as a rule, tends to see great value in the power of expertise and to believe that the conclusions of the experts necessitate radical behavioral changes. Not surprisingly, these changes always include the sacrifice of sovereignty, the sacrifice of individual and national liberty, and the accumulation of power by a global bureaucracy. And equally unsurprising, this drive for the accumulation of power leads inevitably to the abuse of power -- as seen above in India. Or China. Or...well, countless other places where the Left has had its way.

Expertise, of course, is invaluable. But it is no longer ever impartial. And those who believe or pretend that it is are all but certain to set the proverbial stage for greater human ugliness.

A second take-away from all of this is the fact that the economies of the future – both in the developed world and the developing world – are going to be radically different from the economies of today. And he (or she) who figures out how they are going to be different, how they are going to be managed in terms of policy and technology innovations, and which economies will survive and thrive, will be the big winner in the markets and beyond.

We know that, in general, today's economies require that the more-productive, working-age population be larger than the less-productive retirement-age population. And the larger the better. At the same time, we know that tomorrow's populations – in Western Europe, Japan, the United States, and even much of the developing world – are not going to reflect that ideal. Between the "birth dearth" and radical advances in longevity, aging populations are growing rapidly as a percentage of the total population. And that means not only that there will soon be too few young to take care of the old, but there will be too few young to support the old – and this problem is not going away and it is not exclusive to the West or the developed world.

Whoever figures out what this means and how economies will be forced to adapt will be the big winner and tomorrow's "1%."

Finally, what all of this tells us is that there is even more reason not to believe that the 21st century will be the "Chinese Century" or the "Asian Century" as most of the "experts" currently predict. The experts are, once again, likely to be wrong.

As Joel Kotkin, a distinguished presidential fellow in urban futures at Chapman University and an adjunct fellow of the Legatum Institute in London, notes, "By

2030 the median age will also be higher in China and Korea than in the U.S. This age difference will grow substantially by 2050...." He continues:

The biggest impact of aging, however, will not occur in northern Europe and Japan, where there may be enough chestnuts hidden away to keep the aged fed, but in Asia. In the next few decades, South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, Thailand, and even Indonesia will start following Japan into the wheelchair stage of their demographic histories. These are not quite rich places like China and Brazil, which still lack the wealth and a developed welfare state to take care of the elderly. Although not headed directly to European or Japanese rates of aging, these countries will experience a doubling of their Old Age Dependency Ratios; both will rise slightly above current U.S. levels by 2030.

In any scenario where you're comparing countries to China and referring to China as the "rich" country, you've got some poor folks running around. The troubles that await the Chinese with respect to this (and other) demographic time bombs are massive and wildly underappreciated. And if China is the "rich" and well prepared character in the story, you can bet there's some serious trouble brewing.

Obviously, we have no idea exactly how all of this will play out. And if we did, we'd keep it to ourselves and become the mega-billionaires we've always believed we deserve to be. In any case, we suspect that someday – and possibly not too long from now – we will look back on these days as a Golden Age of sorts. Hard to imagine? We suppose it is. The experts would tell you that that's nuts. Of course, back in 1970, whouda think we'd be welcoming the 7 billionth person to earth? Certainly not those "experts."

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