

The Political Forum

*A review of social and political trends and events
impacting the world's financial markets*

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STRENGTH FROM ADVERSITY

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It was, if I remember correctly, Sir Isaac Newton who first observed that for every action force which one body exerts upon another, there is an equal and opposite reaction force exerted by the second body on the first. This, the "Third Law of Motion," first appeared in a work entitled *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica* and was solely concerned with what is called the physical sciences.

During the 314 years since its publication in 1687, many individuals, whose interests center on human behavior rather than on hard science, have observed that Sir Isaac's law is applicable to interpersonal relations as well, albeit on a somewhat less precise scale. Recently, for example, the U.S. military has been conducting a demonstration of this phenomenon in the mountains of Afghanistan for the benefit of none other than Osama bin Laden.

Another related display of Newton's third law, as applied to the social sciences, has been going on in Congress, the first "action force" being the events of September 11, and the opposite "reaction force" being approval of legislation to extend the already enormous police power of the executive branch by expanding its legal authority to investigate and detain terrorist suspects.

Besides being a demonstration of a social application of Newton's third law, this is also, I believe, a verification of an ancient truth first revealed in a papyrus scroll, written in Aramaic, and found in a cave near Minneapolis. It reads as follows: *Wars and other national crises are to executive power what Miracle-Grow is to houseplants.*

But the most important social reaction force to Osama's action force has, in my opinion, been a great leap forward in the already on-going rapid expansion in U.S. global authority. Had Osama spent more of his time studying the modern history of the "decadent" West, rather than brooding over the Crusades, he might have anticipated this reaction, for it is a matter of record that each time America has engaged in a serious conflict, from the Revolutionary War, to the Cold War, to the Gulf war, it has emerged from the melee onto the world stage with significantly greater military, economic and cultural influence than it had before the battle began.

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This is true, I think it is safe to say, even of the Vietnam War, the one America “lost.” Among other things, that conflict demonstrated to the world not just the remarkable destructive power the United States can bring to a battle, but the willingness of Americans to use that power on a massive scale, even in a cause that is unpopular among a significant segment of the public. It also, not incidentally, helped spur the development of an industrial infrastructure for the production of modern weapons systems that is unrivaled in the world today.

Thus, I believe that Osama will find, in the unlikely event that he lives long enough to see it, that one of the most significant reactions to his *jihad* action against America will be to have greatly facilitated the expansion of the military power, as well the economic and cultural influence, of the “great Satan” into geographical regions and political circles that were previously considered out of bounds by all but the most ambitious augur.

Two short months ago, for example, no foreign policy guru would have predicted that the United States would soon have a military presence in the Muslim republics of the old Soviet empire, with Russian acquiescence, as well as significant support from Pakistan’s government for an American attack on a neighboring Muslim nation.

Several weeks ago, before the events of September 11, I wrote an article entitled “A Global Paradigm For The 21st Century,” in which I argued that the principal political theme of the new century will be the inevitable achievement by the United States of cultural, economic, and military hegemony, or “predominant influence,” if you will, over the entire world. I further predicted that the animating action of the century will revolve around how other nations react to this circumstance.

Some nations, I noted, will simply join forces with America. My guess, I said, was that these will include many, if not all, of those in Latin America, but most especially Mexico, and most of the “free” Asian countries, including Japan. Some nations, I said, would almost certainly react by “attacking the United States with non-conventional weapons of terror.” Relative to this latter point, I had earlier in that piece noted that “in many Islamic nations the phrase ‘deeply concerned’ does not begin to describe the intensity of their implacable hatred of America’s growing power.”

I now think it is fair to say that Osama’s recent attacks on the United States “with non-conventional weapons of terror,” will not only accelerate the expansion of U.S. authority throughout the world, but will also provide some important, early clues as to how certain key players will react to this reality.

Russian President Putin, for example, is sending remarkably strong signals, in the wake of bin Laden’s actions, that he has decided that Russia’s long-term interests will be best served by friendly, cooperative relations with America. I am not predicting here that all will be sweetness and light between the U.S. and Russia in the years ahead. Indeed, I would anticipate considerable tension between the two countries at times, if for no other reason than the fact that Russia continues to be a sponsor, friend, and supplier of conventional and, some say, non-conventional weapons to virtually every nation that has been identified by the U.S. State Department as sponsoring terrorism, including Iran, Iraq, Syria, Libya, North Korea and Cuba.

I am simply saying that Putin's friendly, and by all appearances, sincere, response to President Bush's request for help in the fight against bin Laden is a sign that Russia may, just may, recognize that a genuine friendship with America makes considerable practical sense right now and is likely to make even more sense in the future.

Among other things, Russia will need vast amounts of American capital and technical expertise if it is to overcome its severe economic and social problems. In addition, Putin certainly understands that Russia's goal of reestablishing a dominant, meaningful position on the world stage, as well as in its own neighborhood, could be accomplished more quickly and more easily if it could be done within the context of U.S. cooperation and support.

And finally, while Putin continues to pursue friendly relations with China, largely in response to America's growing worldwide power and influence, he certainly knows that Russia's hand in this Sino-Russian alliance would be strengthened, not weakened, by friendly ties with America, especially if Russia's "friendship" with China should ever become strained.

And speaking of China, the early signals from President Jiang Zemin indicate that he is somewhat less enthusiastic than Putin about using the events of September 11 as a catalyst for friendlier relations with the United States.

Jiang is, of course, publicly pledging cooperation with America in its "fight against terrorism." But I believe that a front-page headline in the October 20 *Washington Post* concerning the meeting between President Bush and Jiang on the day before pretty much said it all: "U.S., China Agree on Little But Need to Fight Terrorism." I am not predicting here that China will be aggressively antagonistic to U.S. interests in the months ahead. Like Russia, China needs U.S. capital and technology in order to keep its economy afloat in the face of myriad problems, so outwardly "friendly" relations are certain to be in evidence.

But I do think that China will continue, and most probably accelerate, in the wake of the September 11 events, the kind of actions outlined in a October 18 front-page *Washington Post* story entitled "In Its own Neighborhood China Emerges as Leader," and subtitled, "Bold Approach Challenges U.S. Power." A few excerpts from that article will provide some clues as to one aspect of the nature of future U.S.-Chinese relations, as well as an insight into some of the things that lurk in the background as the Bush administration fights the hot war against terrorism.

China is believed to be establishing an eavesdropping station on Burma's Coco islands, 30 nautical miles from India's Andaman Island, to monitor Indian missile tests off the Orissa coast. It is the first time since the Ming dynasty that China has pursued security interests so far from home.

Chinese vessels have sailed into waters claimed by Japan, at a rate of about 20 incursions a year. There they are believed to be mapping the seafloor for Beijing's growing fleet of submarines.

China has also made extravagant claims on the seas to its south. In 1992 [it] claimed 80 percent of the South China Seas in a horseshoe-shaped arc along the length of

Vietnam's coastline, swinging southwest to waters off Malaysia, Brunei and the Philippines . . . Although no other nation recognized the [claim], the stakes . . . are enormous: 70 percent of Japan's crude oil moves through that sea, which contains large fishing resources and possibly gas and oil deposits.

In 1995, China seized Mischief Reef, an atoll claimed by the Philippines. Now, . . . China has established installations on four other disputed reefs . . . Finally, China's recent military acquisitions--cruise missile technology, advanced Russian-built destroyers, anti-ship missiles, jet fighters, ground attack aircraft, inflight refueling technology, radar systems, attack submarines and anti-aircraft systems--all point to a military buildup designed to increased China's regional sway.

The bottom line on all of this is, I believe, that Jiang has become increasingly comfortable with President Bush's characterization of the relationship between China and America as "strategic competitors," as compared with Bill Clinton's "strategic partners" designation.

Thus, in the years ahead, Jiang is likely, as I put it in a recent article entitled "The World Will Never Be The Same," "to take every opportunistic advantage possible of America's preoccupation with Arab terrorists to expand its influence not only in East Asia but in the Middle East and in the subcontinent as well." As I further said in that piece, "Adam Smith himself would expect China to do no less."

Before closing, I would like to turn briefly to the domestic front and mention one final example of Sir Isaac's third law at work in the area of interpersonal relationships. I am referring here to the many, many wonderful displays of generosity, patriotism, personal sacrifice, and communal spirit that have been so evident in the American public square since September 11.

Emerson once noted that "Adversity introduces a man to himself." He could have said the same about nations, that through adversity nations learn whether they are real nations, or whether they are simply conglomerations of people who happen to live in the same geographical area with little empathy or love for each other or respect for the communal ties that bind them together.

Adversity recently introduced America to itself and lo, the result was that the nation found that it likes itself, that it is indeed a nation of people united by a respect for freedom and the rule of law. Cynics may disdain the flag waving and repeated public exclamations of "God Bless America" that have become so common since that fateful day. But Osama bin Laden cannot be a happy to see that one response to his attack against America was not fear and defeatism, but a strong resurgence among the American public of both faith and patriotism, the rocks upon which the nation was founded and has been sustained for over 200 years. God bless America.

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