

be held responsible for the Islamists under its rule and that would have every incentive to exercise this responsibility.

The essential U.S. strategic objective in the Islamic world should be the establishment of strong, responsible states that we can hold responsible for their own actions and for the actions of the Islamists who live within them.

The logic of this analysis leads to what many people—at least neoconservatives—will consider a perverse conclusion. We consider it to be more a discerning, if paradoxical, one.

A good example of such a state is Iran. When the United States is dealing with this troublesome country, the worst thing it could do would be to destroy the Iranian state totally so that Hezbollah and other Shi'ite terrorist networks would have no state to control them. They would become unguided missiles or loose cannons, careening around the Middle East and even the globe.

In regard to transnational Sunni terrorist networks, however, we do not now have any obvious candidates for strong, responsible states that can control them. Unless or until these are established, deterrence will have to point in a different direction.

For deterrence to survive in the new nuclear age—the age defined by Sunni Islamist terrorism—it must become focused upon ethnic communities. American strategists will have to learn about the features of specific communities and even tribes, just as they learned about specific states and nations in the old nuclear age. And if deterrence does not survive in this new age, neither will we. ■

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In Search of Dear Leader

The problem with partisanship: not enough of it

By Dennis Dale

IT IS A CLICHÉ that the masses crave a strong leader. It is also demonstrably true. It is also true that the political class covets the uncomplicated efficacy of dictatorial rule. This impatience with republican limits can only resolve itself in disdain for the wisdom, and defiance of the will of the people. For the ambitious political leader, the population is the problem for which a unifying monarch or council of oligarchs is the answer.

This impulse recognizes no ideology, drawing many to the same remedy for the frustration of disparate designs. The priesthood of today's prevailing order, mainstream media pundits, share this sentiment, often demonstrating it with unintentional comedy. Witness Chris Matthews' serial exaltation of the masculine virtues of John McCain.

There is even a distinctly modern American, pop-celebrity version that imagines a benign leader who will unite us in defiance of our most elemental divisions by power of personality, liberal severity, or mere demographic circumstance. Acolytes sometimes use the familiar totalitarian method of simultaneously deifying and sentimentalizing the chosen by denoting them with the familiar forename; witness Hillary and Rudy (or for that matter, Oprah). This device is not available to all; the inelegant Barack doesn't carry the same

musical, open-ended vowel structure (or the soft consonant ending of, say, Saddam).

Andrew Sullivan's boundless faith in the power of Senator Obama's comforting non-Caucasian visage to absolve our sins in the eyes of the world and deliver it finally to the faith that is Americanism is one genre of the art of the benign despot. Matthews's affected regular-guy, war-hero fascination is another.

This natural enemy of republican government didn't escape the attention of the founding fathers, and many of those arguing for the necessity of a vigorous chief executive reassured us that the office envisioned by the Constitution would not become the imperial presidency we have made of it. Among their calculations was that legislators' jealousy of their own power would naturally create resistance to executive overreach, rescuing us from a precarious dependence on ethical discipline. Alas.

Needless to say, this has not happened, and the creeping expansion of power concentrated in the executive branch has become a rout in the frenzied, post-9/11 atmosphere. Congress has abnegated all authority over war, first by passing an open authorization for the president to invade a nation halfway around the world and powerless to threaten us, then by surrendering the power of the purse and funding the ensuing occupation at each turn—long

after its pretext was revealed. While consequences for the nation and the world still unfold catastrophically, any consequences for those responsible have been thwarted, through the same perverse state of comity between executive and legislature that allowed it.

The power of the presidency now compounds itself; one party wields this power while the other covets it. The spectacle of Democratic legislative impotence is a direct result of presidential aspirations. Through it all, a distinct faction and particular worldview at odds with the valid interests of the nation have carried the day with remarkable efficiency. Corrupt though it may be, our government cannot be said to be divided or lacking in vigor. Yet divisions there are—between popular and elite will, between the law and government action, between legitimate national interest and current foreign policy.

Of the two defining initiatives of the Bush administration, the war and immigration reform, the government has showed a unity that authoritarian regimes acting in camera sometimes struggle to achieve.

In the case of the war, a bizarre pattern of official subterfuge giving way to exposure and failure giving way to further subterfuge has unfolded. Pretext gains public support for the war until pretext is exposed and the war goes badly, turning public opinion. Consequences of failure then become the pretext for remaining in the war, with the “surge” and attendant ethnic cleansing creating the plausibility of a narrative of success, which relieves public opposition. It no longer matters that this “success” bears no relation to the original purposes given for the war. This absurdity renders us as a people complicit through a lack of diligence in the criminal behavior of our government. Nonetheless, in each phase the people have either been misled or defied.

The common feature through all of this has been a remarkable level of unity between the political parties, notwithstanding the belated and stillborn Democratic opposition to the war that was the public’s paltry payout for returning them to power. “Bipartisanship” has never been more in evidence.

Now into the breach of public and international confidence comes a group of 16 retired politicians and one lame-duck senator identifying partisanship as the culprit and dictating that their erstwhile colleagues present them with their plan to forge a “government of national unity.” If denied, they promise to challenge them for power with their very own Augustus, who wears upon his brow the noblest wreath of our time, massive wealth: New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg. After two days meeting in private, the congregants of the Bipartisan Forum emerged with a short statement, demanding that all presidential candidates commit to apportioning a certain amount of cabinet positions to the opposition party. No constitutional or customary basis, much less authority, for delivering such an ultimatum was offered.

The assembly was dampened by Obama’s victory in Iowa. Mayor Bloomberg’s alarm at partisan gridlock seems to inversely track his viability as a presidential candidate, which consultants have decided is more degraded by Obama’s vague promises of transformation than it is by Hillary Clinton’s claim of perpetual change; likewise John McCain’s crossover appeal to Democrats soothes the mayor’s outrage.

One might conclude from Bloomberg’s putsch that he opposes the policies of President Bush. Finding particular points of departure is difficult, however. The mayor supports the Patriot Act and the war on terror as envisioned by the Bush administration, and enthusiastically supported the war in

Iraq. This isn’t political opportunism or post-9/11 hysteria that might presage a conversion to realism. The mayor has staunchly supported foreign policy that views Israel’s security as inseparable from America’s.

On the other signature issue of the Bush administration, immigration, Bloomberg just as neatly tracks the president. It is a failure in execution and competence that the mayor bemoans. That this failure is in no way attributable to partisanship but to public opposition, which Bloomberg denounces as xenophobia, contradicts his vague but energetic protestations of a lack of “unity” and “civility” between political parties. Still his enthusiasm for illegal immigration does not hamper his support for the institution of a DNA or fingerprint database, ostensibly to track and verify all U.S. workers. Any possible erosions of citizens’ liberty do not trouble the mayor, while any actual regulation of immigration does.

The intellectual and moral inadequacy of President Bush, uniquely empowered, has been disastrous. Still, the Bloomberg effort suggests that our elites do not see the outsized power of the presidency and the direction of its policies as problems requiring any remedy other than the installation of a more capable sovereign.

Perhaps they truly believe that our problems are the direct result of “partisanship.” Certainly they’re confident of their ability to do better. But whether they understand or not, what the elite laments is not divided government but a government limited in its powers. They lament democracy. It’s remarkable, but apparently the longer one serves in a Republic, the more one comes to resent it. ■

Dennis Dale’s blog, Untethered, can be found at www.dennisdale.blogspot.com.

Grand Old Party

High spirits and low expectations at CPAC

By Michael Brendan Dougherty

AT LAST YEAR'S Conservative Political Action Conference, a man in a dolphin suit stood outside the Omni Shoreham Hotel mocking Mitt Romney's flip-flopping on abortion, the Reagan presidency, and other issues dear to conservative hearts. Attendees loved him. This year, Flipper stood by himself in a hallway, his dorsal fin drooping, his plush head hanging—a year's worth of wear and tear. With John McCain on the verge of winning the Republican nomination, few of the conservatives at CPAC wanted to joke about Romney, in whom they had of late placed their hopes. And within a few hours of the start of the conference, both Romney and Flipper would need to find new lines of work.

The former Massachusetts governor was introduced by Laura Ingraham, who, clueless of the drama to come, waxed on about Romney as the “conservative's conservative” while enthusiastic supporters waved foam “Mitts.” With trademark efficiency, he delivered a speech that served red meat with the regularity and forced sincerity of a Denny's waitress. On welfare and regulation, Romney said, “Dependency is culture killing.” On family, he declared that the development of a child is “enhanced” by having a mother and father. “I wonder how it is that unelected judges, like some in my state of Massachusetts, are so unaware of this reality,” he mused.

He compared his run against McCain to Reagan's campaign against the moderate Ford, but then declared that one issue trumped everything, even his own presidential ambitions: “There is an important

difference from 1976. Today we are a nation at war.” He explained that by fighting on to the convention, he would “forestall the launch of a national campaign and, frankly, I'd make it easier for Senator Clinton or Obama to win. ... I simply cannot let my campaign be a part of aiding a surrender to terror.” As disappointed fans filed out, organizers hauled out the campaign debris. Exit Romney faithful, enter McCainiacs. The transition took mere minutes.

Well aware that CPAC wasn't a natural constituency, McCain's campaign had loaded a double-barreled introduction: former Virginia senator George Allen, who but for three unfortunate syllables might have been in McCain's place, and Tom Coburn, arguably the Senate's most conservative member.

His credentials polished, McCain entered to orchestrated applause—the string of speakers preceding him had urged the crowd to mind its manners—and struck as conciliatory a tone as an old maverick can muster. “Many of you have disagreed strongly with some positions I have taken in recent years,” he said. “I understand that. ... And it is my sincere hope that even if you believe I have occasionally erred in my reasoning as a fellow conservative, you will still allow that I have, in many ways important to all of us, maintained the record of a conservative.”

The reaction was mixed. The author of last year's wildly unpopular “comprehensive immigration reform” was roundly booed when he broached the subject of America's borders. But he knew how to win the audience back: “Whomever the Democrats nominate,

they would govern this country in a way that will, in my opinion, take this country backward to the days when government felt empowered to take from us our freedom to decide for ourselves the course and quality of our lives.” (Within the same paragraph, McCain inadvertently demonstrated the contradictions between the old Republican palaver about freedom and the demands of the war on terror saying, “It is shameful and dangerous that Senate Democrats are blocking an extension of surveillance powers.” No line got louder applause.)

McCain may not have sealed the deal, but he got his foot in the door. Blogging for *National Review*, Stanley Kurtz wrote, “I thought McCain did an excellent job ... he won over most of the crowd.”

While the establishment was upstairs coalescing around its unlikely champion, the full spectrum of the conservative grassroots was on display in the downstairs exhibition hall. Where else to buy an “I'd rather be water-boarded than vote for McCain” t-shirt? Other conservative couture featured a picture of a bricklayer constructing a wall: “If you build it, they won't come.” (One wonders what the Hondurans who make these shirts think of the Americans who buy them.) A generation after the Berlin Wall fell, red-baiting is still in vogue: one activist sold t-shirts with the figure of Vladimir Lenin bestriding an American university; another offered bottles of Lenin-ade and ushankas with hammer and sickle insignia and Clinton or Obama's name.

Wandering among the dealers, Max Blumenthal greeted me. Son of former Clinton aide Sidney Blumenthal, Max