

First Published On

→The Human Conspiracy Blog: <http://www.jaygaskill.com/blog3>

→The Policy Think Site: <http://www.jaygaskill.com>

All contents, unless otherwise indicated are

Copyright © 2005, 2006 and 2007 by Jay B. Gaskill

Permission to copy; publish; distribute or print all or part of this article is needed.

Please contact: **Jay B. Gaskill**, attorney at law, via e mail:

law@jaygaskill.com Profile: <http://www.jaygaskill.com/Profile.htm>

Note: The full archive from June 2006 through June 7, 2007 is now available.

Go to <http://www.jaygaskill.com/BLOGARCHIVE.htm>

Readers' Note: This piece, still acutely relevant, first ran last year.

FROM

THE HUMAN CONSPIRACY BLOG

AUGUST 29, 2006

COLD TURKEY: A MODEST PROPOSAL

@ 9:48 pm

Copyright © 2006 by Jay B. Gaskill

NOTE: Some very interesting comments are arriving as a result of this “proposal”. Tomorrow, I’ll share some of them, along with my personal take. JBG

COLD TURKEY: A MODEST PROPOSAL

The “Bush Doctrine”, succinctly stated, is that post 911 America must regard the countries that support terrorism against us as having no more immunity from US military retribution than the terrorists themselves.

This is a “no-sanctuary and no-aid-to-the-terrorists” policy. Whenever (if ever) is it actually enforced with sufficient will and resources, the terrorists will be doomed. I suppose you’ve noticed that we’re not there yet. That post 911 “get tough and serious policy” was easier to state than to implement. As I write this, several Middle East countries are still giving direct aid to the current jihad, among them Iran and Syria, and others,

notably Lebanon, are unable to curb the jihadists within their own boundaries. When we add our putative friends who seem unable or unwilling to effectively control the terrorist arms suppliers within their own borders (notably France and Russia) and the passive-aggressive mischief makers like Mainland China (who can be counted on to trip us covertly, then offer sympathies when we fall) and our overt enemies (North Korea foremost among them), it becomes increasingly difficult for terrorists to take the Bush Doctrine seriously. This is happening because of the power of oil. Remember that forcible regime change in Iraq? It actually had the salutary, but sadly temporary effect, of frightening Libya and Korea. To be fair, it also had the semi-permanent effect of inspiring the Saudis to get more serious about curbing their own Bin Laden sympathizers. But the deterrent effect of Iraq's regime change is waning, even as its ongoing cost is irritating American public opinion.

So it is now time to consider a Modest Proposal.

BACKGROUND:

I believe that Thomas Friedman was dead on when he identified oil money as the mother's milk of terrorism. And I agree with President Bush that we are addicted to oil.

Regrettably, we may not have the time for any miraculous technological alternative solution to emerge. To reduce world-wide demand for oil enough to drive down the per-barrel price significantly is a pipe dream in the short and mid term because we can't control China, let alone the rest of the developing world. Today, a rapidly industrializing China consumes about 5 million barrels of oil a day to our 20. Tomorrow, the Chinese consumption alone could easily increase five fold.

No American oil diet and no miraculous technological revolution, give us any reasonable prospect within this dangerous next decade of driving the world's oil price low enough to starve terrorist regimes like Iran. To curb the rogue regimes that are bent on achieving nuclear super power status we need to deny them all or nearly all of their oil money.

This leads me to a sobering bottom line:

WE CAN'T DENY TERRORIST REGIMES ACCESS TO OIL MONEY BY REDUCING OUR OWN CONSUMPTION.

If you believe, as I do, that it would be suicidal insanity to allow Iran's regime (in its current form) to buy its way into the nuclear bomb club (or to allow any other regime of similar irresponsibility to do that), then you would be forced to consider (as I have) the grim prospect of another preemptive war. And, once that dire thought enters your mind, you may well recoil (as I have) from the very idea. Surely, you think, there is another way. Well, there is. But it is audacious and dangerous. Of course, compared to the risks of inaction and denial, it is truly a "modest proposal". We need to deny Iran and any other regime with similar malevolent ambitions access to the oil moneys needed to develop the a-bomb. We need to do this effectively. We need to employ air power. The rationale is already policy – the existing Bush Doctrine is sufficient.

The "Modest Proposal" Scenario:

This administration (or its successor) announces to all the terror states that have access to oil money that they must desist (agreeing to a credible verification protocol) from aiding terrorists and from developing weapons of mass destruction. After a reasonable deadline, the US (with or without allies) will destroy their entire oil extraction capability (using air power) and if necessary render their oil fields themselves unusable for many years. [This is a huge roll of the dice, only partly bluff. It may require that at least one terror state actually suffers sharp interruptions in revenue, in the expectation that such a startling show of seriousness will intimidate the rest. Once it is clear to all the players that we are actually serious, a number of forces will emerge in the region and elsewhere to appease us.]

The loss of life inflicted in such an attack would not be zero, of course, but it would be far less than a massive attack on the offending country's cities or from any boots-on-the-ground invasion. And – I must remind everyone – the number of casualties would be far, far lower than the number of lives lost if any 911 style attack on New York, LA or Washington DC ever succeeds using atomic weapons.

Of course, no "sane" political leader will want to be associated with this "modest proposal", because the consequences of its implementation would

be a drastic increase in the per barrel cost of crude oil, one with withering economic consequences. Or would it?

Newly discovered oil reserves in Canada and Australia are expected to generate production exceeding Saudi Arabia's daily output. Iran currently only sells about 3.8 million barrels a day with reserves of about 90 million barrels.

If our threat was first directed at Iran and taken seriously, it would have a ripple effect on the other producers with terror-support ambitions. If, as in the case of post Saddam Libya, the other terror-supporting oil-funded states folded, the actual impact on world oil supplies would be manageable.

Without a doubt, the shock impact on the oil markets would be severe, but (in this scenario) would be limited in time and scope. Even if Iran were fully taken out of production, the daily oil loss would be less than half of the daily oil production of Saudi Arabia or The US.

The world total daily production of oil is about 76 million barrels, more than 20 times Iraq's contribution. The biggest loser would be China's development boom. But with careful planning, the economic impact of the technologically developed countries, like the US, could be mitigated and eventually overcome. Obviously, this action would necessarily trigger profound adjustments in US energy policy and arrangements; foggy promises and half measures would suddenly become urgent priorities.

Several of us think that this Modest Proposal – or something very like it – may well prove a necessary adjunct to mere diplomacy. The operative word is necessity. Nothing short will trigger the consideration of the “Modest Proposal” option.

Is this just Madness, or “An inconvenient truth”?

Tomorrow, your comments and my response.

JBG

The Human Conspiracy Blog

August 30, 2006

A MODEST PROPOSAL, PART 2

@ 2:22 pm

Note: See the preceding post for context.

A MODEST PROPOSAL PART TWO

[Waiting for a Miracle](#)

Four comments follow, three from professors and one from a politically active GOP attorney.

I know all four to be good people. No two of them agree. And that is our problem in a microcosm.

We are at one of those historical pivot points that will be written about later with the benefit of acute hindsight. Either the A-bomb Genie is decisively confined to the bottle in the Middle East, or the developed civilized world will live in a reign of terror that will make the nuclear standoff of the Cold War seem like the good old days. We are on the verge of changing threat paradigms from mutually Assured Destruction (between rational non-suicidal enemies) to Mutually Assured Martyrdom.

Israel is not the problem. Does any reasonable person really think that the Israelis would launch on us? We are at greater risk from the French. Does anyone really doubt that Israel would happily give up its secret nukes as part of a genuine peace accord in the region? The immediate task is not to attempt to disarm Israel but to prevent the emergence of a nuclear armed Islamic empire.

Here is what some of my friends had to say:

A Professor of Economics and Public Policy at an Eastern University, a person whose judgment I greatly respect, wrote:

Your modest proposal is another thought-provoking piece. ...

Launching air strikes against Iran would impose dire hardship on many persons who are innocent of any complicity in murder or terror, who in truth recoil against any such behavior. The death and hardship inflicted on innocent families by such a policy is an injustice in itself, and would turn many minds, and more hearts, against the United States.

I recommend a policy that directs intelligence and military efforts against the murderers and their supporters. That the U.S., with all its wealth and military might, is apparently incapable of waging such a campaign, is a telling commentary on the foresight and ingenuity of our government. It is now nearly five years since the attack on the World Trade Center. We defeated the axis powers in less time than it has taken us to bring bin Laden to justice.

A retired professor of literature at a West Coast University wrote:

It's madness. Sheer insanity.

A regime in the region that has just proven itself not very strategically intelligent, and absurdly irresponsible, Israel, has the bomb, and is not any more a "democracy," unless you're Orthodox, than is Iran. Israel is edging very close to a theocracy itself, one with some messianic and rather bizarre visions of its own future.

So much for nuclear disarmament, rogue nations and ignoring U.N. mandates. PLUS, no one wants to even talk about Israel's "nuclear ambitions."

So we blow up the Middle East oilfields, before they can shut off our supply of oil, and then make up the difference from the Western Hemisphere? (What about all that coal in Montana, or corn oil, or the methane gas from sparrow farts?) As if Canada wouldn't sell oil to China? As if China couldn't outbid us? As if we're just the top dog, and that's the end of it?

A retired professor of the philosophy of science (Oxford trained, a mid-western university) told me:

“That is the first thing I’ve heard that might actually work. It may well come to that.”

An attorney in a rocky mountain state with strong ties to the GOP told me:
Re the prospect of the current administration taking military action:
“He’s not going to do that. There isn’t enough time left.”

**Re the Modest Proposal:
Polite silence.**

MY TAKE

My friends’ opinions in descending order represent:

American idealism;

International idealism

(Sadly, in this case, an all too common version of idealism in which a certain moral equivalence between Israel and those who want it demolished is painfully evident);

Foreign policy pragmatism;

Political pragmatism.

Meantime, we Americans face the future with calculated ambivalence and a president crippled by adverse public opinion and a frightened GOP.

And we have arrived at an uneasy confrontation with a clique of medieval mullahs who control of billions dollars in oil revenue and who implacably intend to continue to arm their captive country with 21st century weapons. Only a fool would buy into the notion that these weapons are just for self defense. Their purpose is to murder our friends and to humiliate the hated West.

This is one of those bizarre situations in which the plain truth sounds like hyperbole.

We face governing cadre of resentment-saturated authoritarian imams who are seeking the restoration of a lost empire. They are perfectly willing to manipulate the other resentment-saturated militant minds in the region. These are the loosely wrapped foot soldiers for whom jihad is therapy for their medieval irrelevance.

The situation is dangerous beyond calculation.

I have no clue where the Iranians have buried their A-Bomb development facilities. But it is evident from any satellite photo where their oil fields are located, 50 to 65 of which are in production at any time. The secret nuclear development sites are well hardened but the oil field sites are unprotected.

Oil revenue accounts for 80% of this regime's international buying power, the only currency that will buy ex-pat nuclear scientists, centrifuge parts, and the rest of the WMD ingredients.

Oil is the Iranian jugular.

A nuclear armed terrorist regime in Iran cannot be permitted to emerge, no matter how inconvenient the task of aborting its birth.

We have a little time to wait for a miracle, but no time to wallow in denial. I'm reminded of the South African example. Against all odds, a relatively peaceful regime change was followed by unilateral nuclear disarmament. It was an authentic miracle.

Would that Iran had a Bishop Tutu.

A Footnote:

I tend to agree with those who doubt that the "modest proposal" will ever be carried out. The reasons are clear enough: striking at known military targets (like uranium reprocessing facilities and missile launch sites) falls within the norms of ordinary warfare (even when unavoidable civilian casualties result). But hitting key economic targets (with far fewer casualties) is somehow out of bounds. And there is the not trivial concern about the economic and political blowback from taking out one of the world's major oil producers.

Here is my real question: Suppose we had a pre-WWII time machine and could have known with certainty in say 1936 the horrors that would follow Hitler's ascent to power in Germany. Would we be equally paralyzed by all the objections? I suspect that any American leader who managed to take the necessary decisive action at that time would be remembered by history as an adventurous fool, worse still, as a cowboy.....**JBG**