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It's Never *Just* the Economy, Stupid

Brian T. Kennedy

President, The Claremont Institute



BRIAN T. KENNEDY is president of the Claremont Institute and publisher of the *Claremont Review of Books*. He has written on national security affairs and California public policy issues in *National Review*, the *Wall Street Journal*, *Investor's Business Daily*, and other national newspapers. He sits on the Independent Working Group on Missile Defense and is a co-author of the recent book *Shariah: The Threat to America*.

The following is adapted from a speech delivered on January 7, 2011, in the "First Principles on First Fridays" lecture series sponsored by Hillsdale's Kirby Center for Constitutional Studies and Citizenship in Washington, D.C.

We are often told that we possess the most powerful military in the world and that we will face no serious threat for some time to come. We are comforted with three reassurances aimed at deflecting any serious discussion of national security: (1) that Islam is a religion of peace; (2) that we will never go to war with China because our economic interests are intertwined; and (3) that America won the Cold War and Russia is no longer our enemy. But these reassurances are myths, propagated on the right and left alike. We believe them at our peril, because serious threats are already upon us.

Let me begin with Islam. We were assured that it was a religion of peace immediately following September 11. President Bush, a good man, believed or was persuaded that true Islam was not that different from Judaism or Christianity. He said in a speech in October 2001, just a month after the attacks on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon: "Islam is a vibrant faith. . . . We honor its traditions. Our enemy does not. Our enemy doesn't follow the great traditions of Islam. They've hijacked a great religion." But unfortunately, Mr. Bush was trying to understand Islam as we would like it to be rather than how countless devout Muslims understand it.

Organizationally, Islam is built around a belief in God or Allah, but it is equally a political ideology organized around the Koran and the teachings of its founder Muhammad. Whereas Christianity teaches that we should render unto Caesar what is Caesar’s and unto God what is God’s—allowing for a non-theocratic political tradition to develop in the West, culminating in the principles of civil and religious liberty in the American founding—Islam teaches that to disagree with or even reinterpret the Koran’s 6000 odd verses, organized into 114 chapters or Suras and dealing as fully with law and politics as with matters of faith, is punishable by death.

Islamic authorities of all the major branches of Islam hold that the Koran must be read so that the parts written last override the others. This so-called theory of abrogation means that the ruling parts of the Koran are those written after Muhammad went to Medina in 622 A.D. Specifically, they are Suras 9 and 5, which are not the Suras containing the verses often cited as proof of Islam’s peacefulness.

Sura 9, verse 5, reads: “Fight and slay the unbelievers wherever ye find them, and lie in wait for them in every stratagem of war. But if they repent, and establish regular prayers and practice regular charity, then open the way for them”

Sura 9, verse 29, reads: “Fight those who believe not in Allah nor the Last Day, nor hold that forbidden which hath been forbidden by Allah and His Apostle, nor acknowledge the religion of truth, even if they are of the 40 people of the Book,

until they pay the jizya with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued.”

Sura 5, verse 51, reads: “Oh ye who believe! Take not the Jews and the Christians for your friends and protectors; they are but friends and protectors to each other. And he amongst you that turns to them for friendship is of them. Verily Allah guideth not the unjust.”

And Sura 3, verse 28, introduces the doctrine of *taqiyya*, which holds that Muslims should not be friends with the infidel *except as deception*, always with the end goal of converting, subduing, or destroying him.

It is often said that to point out these verses is to cherry pick unfairly the most violent parts of the Koran. In response, I assert that we must try to understand Muslims as they understand themselves. And I hasten to add that the average American Muslim does not understand the Koran with any level of detail. So I am not painting a picture here of the average

Muslim. I am trying to understand those Muslims, both here in the U.S. and abroad, who actively seek the destruction of America.

Here at home, the threat is posed by the Muslim Brotherhood and its organizational arms, such as the Council on American Islamic Relations, the Islamic Society of North America, and the various Muslim student associations. These groups seek to persuade Americans that Islam is a religion of peace. But let me quote to you from a document obtained during the 2007 Holy Land Trial investigating terrorist funding. It is a Muslim Brotherhood Strategic Memorandum on North American Affairs

Imprimis (im-pri-mis),
[Latin]: in the first place

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that was approved by the Shura Council and the Organizational Conference in 1987. It speaks of “Enablement of Islam in North America, meaning: establishing an effective and a stable Islamic Movement led by the Muslim Brotherhood which adopts Muslims’ causes domestically and globally, and which works to expand the observant Muslim base, aims at unifying and directing Muslims’ efforts, presents Islam as a civilization alternative, and supports the global Islamic State wherever it is.”

Elsewhere this document says:

The process of settlement is a “Civilization-*Jihadist* Process” with all the means. The *Ikhwan* [the Muslim Brotherhood] must understand that their work in America is a kind of grand *Jihad* in eliminating and destroying the Western civilization from within and “sabotaging” its miserable house by their hands and the hands of the believers so that it is eliminated and Allah’s religion is made victorious over all other religions. Without this level of understanding, we are not up to this challenge and have not prepared ourselves for *Jihad* yet. It is a Muslim’s destiny to perform *Jihad* and work wherever he is and wherever he lands until the final hour comes . . .

Now during the Bush Administration, the number of Muslims in the U.S. was typically estimated to be around three million. The Pew Research Center in 2007 estimated it to be 2.35 million. In 2000, the Council on American Islamic Relations put the number at five million. And President Obama in his Cairo speech two years ago put it at seven million.

In that light, consider a 2007 survey of American Muslim opinion conducted by the Pew Research Center. Eight percent of American Muslims who took part in this survey said they believed that suicide bombing can sometimes be justified in defense of Islam. Even accepting a low estimate of three million Muslims in the U.S., this would mean that 240,000 among us hold that suicide bombing in the name of

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Islam can be justified. Among American Muslims 18–29 years old, 15 percent agreed with that and 60 percent said they thought of themselves as Muslim first and Americans second. Among all participants in the survey, five percent—and five percent of the low estimate of three million Muslims in America is 150,000—said they had a favorable view of al Qaeda.

Given these numbers, it is not unreasonable to suggest that the political aims and ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood represent a domestic threat to national security. It is one thing to have hundreds of terrorist sympathizers within our borders, but quite another if that number is in the hundreds of thousands. Consider the massacre at Fort Hood: Major Nidal Malik Hasan believed that he was acting as a devout Muslim—indeed, he believed he was obeying a religious mandate to wage war against his fellow soldiers. Yet even to raise the question of whether Islam presents a domestic threat today is to invite charges of bigotry or worse.

And as dangerous as it potentially is, this domestic threat pales in comparison to the foreign threat from the Islamic Republic of Iran and its allies—a threat that is existential in nature. The government in Tehran, of course, is enriching uranium to convert to plutonium and place in a nuclear warhead. Iran has advanced ballistic missiles such as the Shahab-3, which can be launched from land or sea and is capable of destroying an American city. Even worse, if the Iranians were able to deliver the warhead as an electromagnetic pulse weapon from a ship off shore—a method they have been practicing, by the way—they could destroy the electronic infrastructure of the U.S. and cause the deaths of tens of millions or more. And let me be perfectly clear: We do not today have a missile defense system in place that is capable of defending against either a ship-launched missile attack by Iran or a ballistic missile attack from China or Russia. We do not

yet today have such a system in place, even though we are capable of building one.

Since I have mentioned China and Russia, let me turn to them briefly in that order. The U.S. trades with China and the Chinese buy our debt. Currently they have \$2 trillion in U.S. reserves, about half of which is in U.S. treasuries. Their economy and ours are intimately intertwined. For this reason it is thought that the Chinese will not go to war with us. Why, after all, would they want to destroy their main export market?

On the other hand, China is building an advanced army, navy, air force, and space-based capability that is clearly designed to limit the U.S. and its ability to project power in Asia. It has over two million men under arms and possesses an untold number of ICBMs—most of them aimed at the U.S.—and hundreds of short- and medium-range nuclear missiles. China’s military thinking is openly centered on opposing American supremacy, and its military journals openly discuss unrestricted warfare, combining traditional military means with cyber warfare, economic warfare, atomic warfare, and terrorism. China is also working to develop a space-based military capability and investing in various launch vehicles, including manned spaceflight, a space station, and extensive anti-satellite weaponry aimed at negating U.S. global satellite coverage.

Absent a missile defense capable of intercepting China’s ballistic missiles, the U.S. would be hard pressed to maintain even its current security commitments in Asia. The U.S. Seventh Fleet, however capable, cannot withstand the kinds of nuclear missiles and nuclear-tipped cruise missiles that China could employ against it. The Chinese have studied American capabilities, and have built weapons meant to negate our advantages. The destructive capability of the recently unveiled Chinese DF-21D missile against our aircraft carriers significantly raises the stakes of a conflict in the South China Sea. And the SS-N-22 cruise missile—designed by the Russians and deployed by the Chinese and Iranians—presents a daunting challenge due to its enormous

size and Mach 3 speed.

China has for some time carried out a policy that has been termed “peaceful rise.” But in recent years we have seen the coming to power of what scholars like Tang Ben call the “Red Guard generation”—generals who grew up during the Cultural Revolution, who are no longer interested in China remaining a secondary power, and who appear eager to take back Taiwan, avenge past wrongs by Japan and replace the U.S. as the preeminent military power in the region and ultimately in the world.

However far-fetched this idea may seem to American policymakers, it is widely held in China that America is on the decline, with economic problems that will limit its ability to modernize its military and maintain its alliances. And indeed, as things stand, the U.S. would have to resort to full-scale nuclear war to defend its Asian allies from an attack by China. This is the prospect that caused Mao Tse Tung to call the U.S. a “Paper Tiger.” Retired Chinese General Xiong Guong Kai expressed much the same idea in 1995, when he said that the U.S. would not trade Los Angeles for Taipei—that is, that we would have to stand by if China attacks Taiwan, since China has the ability to annihilate Los Angeles with a nuclear missile. In any case, current Chinese aggression against Japan in the Senkaku Islands and their open assistance of the Iranian nuclear program, not to mention their sale of arms to the Taliban in Afghanistan, would suggest that China is openly playing the role that the Soviet Union once played as chief sponsor of global conflict with the West.

Which brings us to Russia and to the degradation of American strategic thinking during and after the Cold War. This thinking used to be guided by the idea that we must above all prevent a direct attack upon the U.S. homeland. But over the past 50 years we have been taught something different: that we must accept a balance of power between nations, especially those possessing nuclear ballistic missiles; and that we cannot seek military superiority—including defensive superiority, as with missile defense—lest we create strategic

instability. This is now the common liberal view taught at universities, think tanks and schools of foreign service. Meanwhile, for their part, conservatives have been basking in the glow of “winning the Cold War.” But in what sense was it won, it might be asked, given that we neither disarmed Russia of its nuclear arsenal nor put a stop to its active measures to undermine us. The transformation of some of the former captive nations into liberal democracies is certainly worth celebrating, but given the Russian government’s brutally repressive domestic policies and strengthened alliances with America’s enemies abroad over the past 20 years, conservatives have overdone it.

Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that our policy toward Russia has been exceedingly foolish. For the past two decades we have paid the Russians to dismantle nuclear warheads they would have dismantled anyway, while they have used those resources to modernize their ballistic missiles. On our part, we have not even tested a nuclear warhead since 1992—which is to say that we aren’t certain they work anymore. Nor have we maintained any tactical nuclear weapons. Nor, to repeat, have we built the missile defense system first proposed by President Reagan.

Just last month, with bipartisan backing from members of the foreign policy establishment, the Senate ratified the New Start Treaty, which will further reduce our nuclear arsenal and will almost certainly cause further delays in building missile defenses—and this with a nation that engages in massive deception against us, supports our enemies, and builds ever more advanced nuclear weapons.

At the heart of America’s strategic defense policy today is the idea of launching a retaliatory nuclear strike against whatever nuclear power attacks us. But absent reliable confidence in the lethality of forces, such a deterrent is meaningless. In this light, deliberating about the need for a robust modernization program, rather than arms reductions

through New Start, would have been a better way for Congress to spend the days leading up to Christmas—which is to say, it would have been supportive of our strategic defense policy, rather than undercutting it.

But what about that strategic policy? Some of New Start’s supporters argued that reducing rather than modernizing our nuclear arsenal places us on the moral high ground in our dealings with other nations. But can any government claim to occupy the moral high ground when it willingly, knowingly, and purposely keeps its people nakedly vulnerable to nuclear missiles? The Russians understand well the intellectual and moral bankruptcy of the American defense establishment, and have carefully orchestrated things for two decades so that we remain preoccupied with threats of North Korean and now Iranian ballistic missiles. We spend our resources developing modest defense systems to deal, albeit inadequately, with these so-called rogue states, and meanwhile forego addressing the more serious threat from Russia and China, both of which are modernizing their forces. Who is to say that there will never come a time when the destruction or nuclear blackmail of the U.S. will be in the interest of the Russians or the Chinese? Do we imagine that respect for human life or human rights will stop these brutal tyrannies from acting on such a determination?

If I sound pessimistic, I don’t mean to. Whatever kind of self-deception has gripped the architects of our current defense policies, the American people have proved capable of forcing a change in direction when they learn the facts. Americans do not wish to be subjected to Sharia law, owe large sums of money to the Chinese, or be kept vulnerable to nuclear missiles. Having responded resoundingly to the economic and constitutional crisis represented by Obamacare, it is now

time for us to remind our representatives of the constitutional requirement to provide for a common *defense*—in the *true* sense of the word. ■



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DID YOU KNOW?

John J. Miller, national correspondent for *National Review*, will join the Hillsdale College faculty this fall as director of the College’s Dow Journalism Program.