

“HAPPY CHRISTMAS?”

December 2005

Dear Colleagues

Once again this Christmas we are being environmentally correct by replacing a printed Christmas card with electronic best wishes. Our now traditional donation goes to the Global Commons Institute in recognition of their extraordinary and continuing work in pointing the way ahead to an intellectually satisfying and diplomatically achievable solution to the planet's climate problems. For an up to date brief their website is (www.gci.org.uk).

Usually we have kept this greeting separate from the business of an ECPA briefing. However this year the very act of wishing colleagues a Happy Christmas has been subject more than ever before to political correctness. The British post office is criticised for featuring a seventeenth century Indian painting featuring the Madonna and Child on the postal rate required for letters to India. It is being accused of overt missionary work on behalf of Christianity “liable to cause offence to devout Hindus”. President Bush's greeting card only offers best wishes for the holiday season. I do not often find myself allied with the American Religious Right, but on this occasion I think they have a point. Political correctness sprang from tender liberal feelings on US campuses. For most people it was merely an occasion for a tolerant smile. Nowadays however it has grown into a monster which gets in the way of both truth and good government. It is essential in a century which is less secular than its predecessor that we preserve the ability of different ethnic and religious traditions to speak to each other unambiguously.

A good example of this is the recent unrest in Paris and other French cities. Listening to the initial reporting on the BBC World Service one would have no idea that the rioters were not a perfect cross section of French society. The racial and religious aspects were hurried over in favour of generalisations such as “unemployed youths”. In the process intelligent analysis was lost or abused. My Vice Chairman on the European Parliament Foreign Affairs Committee in the late '90s was a delightful and impressive Gaullist MEP by the name of H  l  ne Carri  re d'Encausse. H  l  ne is a very distinguished historian and a member of the Acad  mie Fran  aise possessed of both wit and wisdom. During a dinner at the Carlton Club in London she once observed that “the problem with some of my compatriots is that they feel that summer pudding is the only contribution made to world culture by the English”. Commenting on the riots she pointed out to a Russian TV station that the African habit of polygamy was one of the contributory causes of the riots. She found herself abused with unacceptable violence. As someone who has written extensively on Stalin's Russia, she may have recognised this phenomenon of thought control.

I have argued elsewhere that the correct response from Europe's political classes to the rejection of the Constitutional Treaty, fuelled at least in part by fears of Turkish entry, was to accept that these popular votes had effectively defined the eastern border of Europe. For which thought I found myself roundly abused as anti-Turkish and anti-Islam. I reject such nonsense as an example of political correctness being used to shield a weak and ill thought out position. I am in favour of continued enlargement within the historical boundaries of a shared concept of what is Europe. I welcome the decision to give Croatia and Macedonia candidate status. FYROM (Former Yugoslav Republic Of Macedonia) is a meaningless example of diplomatic correctness which the Greeks should stop trying to impose on the rest of us, given that Macedonia is one of the few properly functioning multi- ethnic states in the Western Balkans. I also welcome the recent paper from DG ENLARGEMENT on the European vocation of the other states in the Western Balkans. The time has definitely come to make progress on Kosovo and to end the polite, inoperative fiction of "Serbia and Montenegro". Enlargement in the Western Balkans will eventually contain at least two states with clear Islamic majorities. Political correctness is no longer a minor irritant, if it blinds Europe's leadership to the challenges as well as the benefits of the recent, large Islamic migration into Europe. To understand why we have to go back and examine the reactions of Messrs Blair and Bush to the events of September 11th 2001.

I have written on previous occasions about Daniel Benjamin and Steven Simon and their book *The Age of Sacred Terror*. Benjamin and Simon were respectively the Director and Deputy Director of Counter-terrorism in the Clinton Administration. They both resigned in August 2000, frustrated by their inability to make anyone take al Qaeda seriously. They have now published an even more powerful book entitled "The Next Attack: The Failure of the War on Terror and a Strategy for getting it Right" This volume should be required reading for all members of Europe's political classes. They make a compelling case that Europe is likely to be the main target for the second generation of Islamic fundamentalist attacks.

Their analysis begins by pointing to the culpable lack of planning for the occupation of Iraq. They underline the venom with which Messrs Cheney and Rumsfeldt pursued anyone who sought to question the rosy assumptions on which the invasion was posited. They trace in convincing detail how the pursuit of al Qaeda was presented as an attack on an organisation, when it should have been prosecuted as a political response to a movement. They list the numerous attacks on civil liberties, on both sides of the Atlantic, that were justified in the name of responding to September 11th, even where their operational impact was close to zero. Whatever happens to all those nail clippers confiscated at airports? It is no consolation that President Bush is now running into Congressional opposition over his phone tapping habits and is having to fight for the renewal of the Patriot Act.

In Britain the Prime Minister, showing signs of 'Number 10 dementia' having passed the magic eight years of tenure, braves even the opposition of his wife to insist on further restrictions to civil liberties. He denies the country an independent enquiry on the London bombings, for fear that it re-ignites the debate about his backing of the Bush Administration and his subsequent deceit.

Benjamin and Simon draw our attention to the consequences for Western security after the eventual withdrawal from Iraq, whatever the outcome of the occupation. A

new generation of terrorists will have been recruited, trained and motivated by the insurgency in Iraq. Those who have fought in Iraq will eventually return to their home countries hardened to continue the struggle against the “crusaders”. In some ways worse than this are the “self-starters”, typified by the Madrid bombers. They were not part of al Qaeda. They did not need a sinister mastermind. Their motivation was stoked by the internet, which taught them the basic skills necessary to kill hundreds with low technology. Britain now has its own generation of similar homegrown self-starters. The authors point to the dramatic differences between Islamic populations in the USA and in the European Union. American Muslims earn more than the national average wage, are regionally dispersed and educationally highly qualified. European Muslims are geographically concentrated, have high levels of unemployment, low levels of education and an increasing anger against the West in general and their host countries in particular. So much for those Europeans whose body language in September 2001 implied that fundamentalism was an American problem, which they at least in part deserved.

Of course European politicians are right to stress that the overwhelming majority of Muslims are law abiding, but it only takes a small percentage to become radicalised for every railway station and underground in Europe to become an easy target. Modern technology is helping the fundamentalists well before any Reformation in Islam can come to our rescue. The new “umma” is daily boosted on the internet. The doctrine goes that Muslims owe a duty of support to any co-religionist. A Russian attack in Chechnya justifies a response from Yorkshire. The distinction between civilians and soldiers as targets is undermined by the assertion of implied democratic consent. The Islamic communities in Europe are short of educated and accredited imams who could contest amateur doctrines by self-taught radicals. A good example are the assertions that justify the abolition of all barriers to mass violence and talk happily of millions of westerners whose death would be justified in revenge for the humiliation of Muslims in the twentieth century. It is essential that even the current generation of second rate political leaders in Europe recognise that they are dealing not with a single terrorist organisation, but with a complex and long-lasting political challenge. Suppressing Christmas greetings and owning a copy of the Koran is woefully inadequate tokenism.

Everyone at the European Centre for Public Affairs joins me in wishing you a Happy Christmas and Peaceful New Year

Yours

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