AMERICA LAST

When one has reached the advanced age of the Holy Man Ruhollah Khomeini, the professional services of the weatherman become very important indeed. Allah and all his esoteric blah doublets remain diverting, but a sepulchral grouch-er’s preeminent concern is with the dance of the barometer. And what of the humidity? How blow the winds? Will the temperature remain benign?

Let the barometric pressure dive, and a geezer is ambushed by sudden inflammation of the nasal mucosa, painful swellings in the joints, and, as every subscriber to the New England Journal of Medicine knows, constriction of the blood vessels. A vagrant chill in the wind is but a prelude to paresthesias of the most exotic and unenviable variety. Things tingle. Things go numb. Suddenly there is a surge of gas in the upper gastrointestinal tract, a burning in the hind of the eyes, perhaps dizzy spells. Does the Holy Man go about his daily ministrations amid a gaggle of prostrate followers? Well, why should he not pause occasionally to boote one in the arse? They get in the way, and wait until they get up in years. The Holy Man Khomeini can tell you that, as the shadow of one’s years lengthens, a bout on the prayer rug is no picnic, and, should the barometer heave suddenly, there can be flatus, perhaps worse.

Precisely what the weather was in historic Qom during the first weekend in November, I do not know. Our American newspapers no longer carry all the important foreign news, and our newly reformed CIA would have difficulty spotting a major earthquake in the area, so humane and progressive has it become.

Whatever the weather, it is apparent that it took a drastic change on November 4. Before that date the days must have been halcyon, for the venerated Mullah was relatively quiet: sweetly lapping up his luncheons of bread and gravy, perhaps mulling over plans for a few new prisons, but nothing more. In far-off Mexico the Shah, attired in his ever-present glamour shirt, discoed lewdly, but the cerebral chambers of the Holy Man remained free of fever. Then on November 4 he filled with an inexplicable fury. Why?

He should have been purring with holy contentment. Doubled up with gallstones, the Shah had been flown to New York Hospital. There he had his gall bladder removed in a two-and-one-half-hour operation, and—Allah be praised—cancer was reported. Painful therapies were a certainty. The Holy Man should have been kicking up his ancient heels and dispensing cigars to his entourage of yokels. But no. Fury descended on him.

Soon he was bashing his old head into the holy rug, foaming with imprecations against our Great Republic, and defenestrating wastepaper baskets. Under his homiletics, the crème de la crème of Iranian studenthood—all middle-aged, inflamed, and some speaking Russian—went marching, and the entire U.S. Embassy was kidnapped. Iranian radio roared with the sacred vituperative of this gifted “Islamic philosopher.” The land of the free and the home of the brave became “The Great Satan,” the “Enemy No. 1 of Humanity,” and, well, indecencies so shocking that even members of the League of Women Voters would not utter them. Why such furious allegations against us and not our neighbors, the hospitable Mexicans? Our CIA analysts, busily pondering their meager evidence and pestering the Library of Congress for more facts, remain in the dark. They should not rule out the weather. Perhaps a sudden fall in the barometric constriicted the flow of blood to the Holy Man’s ancient ruin of a brain. Inflammation of the mucosa cannot be ruled out. Still, despite the great saintliness Brother Young spied in him, I wish he were dead.

It is significant that our President chose Mr. Ramsey Clark, of all the political corpses in America, as our envoy to Iran. And it is more significant still that the dyspeptic Holy Man left him blubbering and scratching his noodle in Istanbul. Last January Clark, a tireless and unctuous sympathizer for some of the most barbaric so-called liberation movements, returned from a personal conversation with the Rev. Khomeini, carrying away no hint of the man’s lunatic viciousness. Instead, he and his traveling companions, Professor Richard Falk and Mr. Don Luce, returned with praise for Khomeini, admonitions against impending American deviltry, and scorn for the Iranian Prime Minister Shahpour Bakhtiar, by all accounts a decent liberal intellectual who was then a staunch opponent of the autocratic Shah and has ever since shown himself to be a brave friend of liberty.

These three meatheads are significant because they so wondrously represent the foreign policy mentality that has reigned in the Wonderboy’s White House. It is a mentality whose ancestry dates back to the days of Henry Wallace. Founded on the most absurd farcii, it always assumes the innocence and higher morality of our enemies: They are in the right, we are in the wrong; accommodation
is our only proper response. Today this mentality stands exposed in all its decrepitude. In the Southeast Asian holocaust and in the Iranian hysteria, we see the utter discrediting of the sometimes guilt-ridden, sometimes self-righteous appeasers who have reigned atop our foreign policy establishment since Vietnam. Their nostrums have lead to literally millions of deaths and could lead to millions more. Now these nostrums and the beliefs underpinning them have been exposed in all their lurid vacuity. To persist in advocating them is to declare oneself a fanatic in behalf of idiocy.

One has to be an idiot to believe, as some piously do, that America’s war in Southeast Asia persuaded Pol Pot to destroy his own nation. One has to be an idiot and a drunk to believe, as Mr. Luce does, that there would be no boat people had the United States and the refugees been more cooperative with Hanoi. And to think that the Shah was our “puppet” and that we were responsible for his policies—well, here one has to be less than an idiot: One has to be Garry Wills writing his syndicated column. There

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**CAPITOL IDEAS**

**KENNEDY’S HEARING AIDES**

Wherever Senator Edward M. Kennedy goes, he is surrounded by a tight cluster of petitioners and protectors who maneuver for positions around his bustling person. Some call out, “Senator... Senator...” as they trot along in his wake—the whole convoy proceeding at well above normal walking speed. Others carry briefcases and wave memoranda, while still others have little insignia under their armpits—tokens who maneuver for positions among themselves various proposals to amend pending legislation. S.1722 is an elaborate attempt to rewrite a portion of their daily routine is necessary to rewrite the criminal code. Judging by their reactions at today’s markup, quite a few senators don’t know either.

The hearing room is plainly too small for the number of people in it. A long table with microphones in front of each chair awaits the senatorial arrivals. In front of Kennedy’s chair, at the end of the table, there is a little wooden gavel. The room is already packed with senators’ aides and reporters. The latter carry note-pads, but are probably more interested in Kennedy than in the bill under consideration. The numerous legislative assistants, who outnum-ber the senators two or three to one, are more interested in trying to influence the bill this way or that. It is true to say of most of them, if not all, that a portion of their daily routine is devoted to imagining that they actually are senators, in which capacity they find that they easily outperform their employers.

Kennedy enters the room and pops a cigar into his mouth. Heads turn and there is a subtle change in the noise level. When a celebrity shows up at a crowded party, the decibel level rises. But this is more complex. The murmur level rises. A Secret Service man takes up station by the door, and Kennedy moves over toward his chair, taking his jacket off. The jutting line of his back-corset is plainly visible beneath his shirt.

His face is salmon-pink, his hair somewhat tousled. Kennedy has about him an air of slightly disreputable, roguish charm. You get the feeling that were it not for the accident of heredity he would today be far, far away from the tedium of a Judiciary Committee meeting—perhaps tending bar somewhere in South Boston or rollicking about with half a dozen pals at the racetrack. It is possible even to feel sorry for him—driven by circumstances more or less beyond his control into a public life for which he is probably unsuited by temperament, and which he probably does not enjoy.

Sitting next to him is the aged Senator Strom Thurmond, an extinct volcano most unlikely to erupt. Very

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Drawing by Elliott Banfield, from *Public Nuisance*, Basic Books.

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to be absent without penalty. The faculty approved, as an olive branch, in Southeast Asia. 

opposed United States military action to be absent without penalty. The were so outraged by the soon desig-

nated "pusillanimous decision" of the faculty that they vowed to shut class was to be given. Anyone who class to be absent without penalty. The were so outraged by the soon desig-

tion of the issues, university students were willing to jeopardize two hundred years of tradition in the name of 

the revolution." For a perceived moral principle, they were willing to disregard the rights and welfare of others. It is patently extreme to compare this era with the rise of Nazism. Yet on one issue, noted by Peter Gay in The Weimar Culture, there does appear to be a similarity: As the need for absolute morality increases, the concern for human decency de-

creases.

Several springs passed, and I managed to stay out of the path of the hurricane. Perhaps I was so enervated by the events in May 1970 that I could no longer marshal the strength to oppose the latest activist cause. On the other hand, there were far fewer causes.

This condition, however, did not prevent anti-war protestors from using their "idealism" to try to solve other problems. In 1975 I met such an idealist. She was 17, had been raised in upstate New York, and was pumped up with social justice slogans and eager to assist the downtrodden. She used her university experience as a way to get involved with the "real people" in the inner city. After several months of working on a project on the Lower East Side of New York, she was brutally beaten to death.

I decided to tell her story. What I wrote was a fable that intentionally altered the facts of this one case, but, I hoped, contained the spirit of a generational tale. The result of my efforts was another confrontation with radicals.

These people maintained that I had maligned the girl's character in order to prevent episodes of this kind from being repeated. At the very least, I maintained, idealism should be tempered by a healthy respect for risks. It wasn't good deeds that I criticized, but an inability to recognize our own limitations.

That explanation fell on deaf ears. A campaign was launched in the student newspaper and in mimeographed hand-outs for my resigna-
tion. At this point I was dean of a college, proud of the progress my division had achieved, and generally well regarded by colleagues and students as a sound administrator. I would not, and could not, permit this rabble to drive me from my position, particularly since most of my oppo-
nents were neither students in my college nor students in the univer-
sity.

One week prior to their demonstra-
tions against me, I had surgery on my knee and was forced to use crutches. Even so, the demonstrators pelted me with eggs and tomatoes, and forcibly prevented me from entering my office. They also alleged that I was a racist and elitist because the white victim in my story was mur-
dered in an ostensibly nonwhite neighborhood. However, I had never mentioned the race of her assailant.

It was amusing to see signs in front of my office which read, "London is racist"—I immediately thought of Anglophobes who were protesting British immigration policy. My amusement came to an abrupt end when the demonstrators had a CBS affiliate cover their pseudo-events for the six o'clock local news. Since only the demonstrators were interviewed on camera, I called the station to offer my side of the story. A reporter listened politely to my account for about ten minutes and then said, "If I accept your explanation then we have no news story." Then he hung up.

I managed to weather this storm, too; I kept my position, and ultimately had a chance to refute some of the charges made against me. But it wasn't easy. One now hears glib de-
nunciations of the McCarthy era on campuses all over the country. Yet very few of those doing the denounc-

ing trouble to examine their own actions during the sixties and early seventies. They are self-righteous and intolerant, and choose facile slogans for hard thought. A genera-
tion has been paralyzed by its moral outrage.

EDITORIAL

(continued from page 5)

are dozens more yawns like this and there are thousands more solemn idiots propounding them. Professor Falk, for instance, returned from his visit with the Rev. Khomeini singing of his superb character and commitment to "social justice." Mr. Falk found the old scowler progressive, and the dreaded Yankee in error. In the New York Times he wrote that our media "defamed [Khomeini] in many ways, associating him with efforts to turn the clock back 1,300 years, with virulent anti-Semitism, and with a new political disorder, "theocracy, fascism."" In the 1930s there was the America First move-

ment. Since Vietnam's fall our for-

eign policy has been in the paws of an American Lasters were pithily set out by Mr. Rida spoke for millions when he said, "The West, whose civilization is 

pen and pad in hand—to record Mr. Clark's reaction as he was repeatedly denounced by the Holy Man and his 

swearing disciples as a "dirty charac-
ter.""

Our present peril issues from the fact that we have allowed our foreign policy to be dominated by popinjays. The fundamental tenets of the Ameri-
can Lesters were pithily set out by Mr. Richard Holbrooke, our President's Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, in a 1976 issue of Foreign Policy. There he urged that we "use our natural strengths...to replace (in Marina V.N. Whitman's words) 'leadership based on hegemony with leadership based on persuasion and compro-
mise.'" Moreover, Mr. Holbrooke reminded us that "we still possess...the basic moral force that exists in the principles of our system of gov-

ernment. Mr. Holbrooke hoped that we will recognize that we do not need to dominate the world in order to live safely in it...And above all, we must retain our belief in the exceptional nature of our system of democracy."

This sanctimonious vaporizing has inspired three years of foreign policy blundering for which the civilized nations of the world will be paying dearly for years to come. "Persuasion and compromise" are as laugh-
some to the Rev. Khomeini as under-

wear ads and toothpaste. "The basic moral force that exists in our system" is repugnant to him, and to the com-

rades and colonels of this orb "moral force" is the stuff of comedy. Most of our enemies want nothing to do with liberal democracy, and some even bray at material riches. In a letter in the November 10 issue of the Econo-
mist, a Mr. Abu Abdul Rasoul Al-

Rida spoke for millions when he said, "The West, whose civilization is visibly crumbling in a morass of hedonism, unbridled materialism, social discipline and the rule of special interest groups, naturally fears the rise of a rejuvenated Islam, and the alternative moral values it posits to the West's discredited myths of democracy and liberal-

ism."
Behind the enormities of the Iranians, behind their obstinacy and the hysterical obscenities they spit out, there is a huge element of unreason. This is so obvious that even the Wonderboy has perceived it. Yet what has not been widely noted is our own devotion to unreason. As we earnestly pad about the world, first taking our legalistic briefs to the United Nations, then to the International Court of Justice, then in desperation, to any foreign government that will listen, it is increasingly apparent that our government is not acting rationally. The Iranians have made themselves perfectly clear. They are not susceptible to international law or to American diplomacy. They answer only to the buzz between the Rev. Khomeini’s ears. They began their farce with an act of war. They have acted as bellicosely as it is in their power to act—a point that might even penetrate the Wonderboy’s thick skull had the Holy Man a few nuclear devices to send Satanward. Whatever course the Iranians follow, you can be sure it will have been taken not because of our protests at the International Court of Justice but because of their whim.

Firmly and publicly eschewing force in Iran was not only irrational, it was dangerous and provocative. While we posture and render ourselves contemptible to the world, terrible things are happening. As we have drawn out this crisis, we have allowed the passions of primitive peoples all over the world to be inflamed. We have allowed the preeminent power of the West to be placed outside the international community and to be treated as a pariah nation. Despite all our government’s lovey-dovey policies, there are more people railing against us today than ever before. Not even during the Vietnam war did we have so many people demonstrating such hate toward us—and of course that idiotic war was another example of our dragging a crisis out to the benefit of our enemies.

The irrationality of the Iranians can be laid to anti-Americanism, and the way to deal with anti-Americanism is to pull a page from the Israelis’ manual on defense against bigotry. That is to say, our government must cease rendering itself contemptible to the world and must respond decisively and punitively to those who violate our rights. The irrationality of the Carter administration is more complicated. What makes his advisors, at least the bulk of them, adhere to their idiotic notions? What makes them follow a policy of America Last? It is a vast question, duly requiring the services of Aristotelians, Freudians, Ann Landers, and all kinds of experts. Yet I suggest that the thing be pondered immediately, for even though the idiocy of these policies is now clear for all to see, the reasoning that supports them seems to have spread across the country.

Turn to Louisville, Kentucky, where a pet dachshund recently killed a family’s two-week-old baby. The dog has been placed in a local animal shelter, and the question now is what to do with the dog. Should it be destroyed? Speaking in elevated terms wonderfully suggestive of Mr. Clark and the Carter foreign policy, a Mr. Eric Blow, director of the Jefferson County Animal Shelter, steps to the microphones and says, “It’s a problem we have to figure out...Is he a lavished pet of the family or a normal household pet? There’s a lot of different angles to look at...It will be a very hard decision for them. It [the dog] is bound to hold a very high-ranking position in their family.” Here is leadership. Ladies and gentlemen, I give you Mr. Eric Blow, a lively prospect for Secretary of State in the next Carter administration or in a Kennedy administration. It really would not matter.

Do you know anybody who is somebody in business who does not read Forbes Magazine?

FORBES: CAPITALIST TOOL