

July 2, 2009

**Neal Boortz** comments on our Honduras policy.

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*Then the people of Honduras try to uphold their constitution and laws of the land from being trampled by a Chavez-wanna be ... and it takes Barack Obama one day to proclaim that this was not a legal coup.*

*Why the sudden decisiveness? ...*

**Peter Wehner** writes in Commentary on the important milestone in Iraq.

*... The ultimate wisdom in initiating the Iraq war is still to be validated by contingent events still to unfold. What is happening today is a transition, not a final triumph. And while Iraq is today a legitimate, representative, and responsible democracy, it remains fragile. Hard-earned progress can still be undone. The Iraqi military will have to prove it can provide security to its citizens. Relations between the Iraqi government and the semi-autonomous Kurdistan Regional Government in the north, particularly over the oil-rich province of Kirkuk, are tense. None of us can foretell the future, and almost all of us have been wrong about some aspect of the war or another.*

*Still, it is worth pointing out that those who wrote off the war as unwinnable and a miserable failure, who made confident, sweeping arguments that have been overturned by events, and who had grown so weary of the conflict that they were willing to consign Iraqis to mass slaughters and America to a historically consequential defeat -- they were thankfully, blessedly wrong. And the Land between the Rivers, which has known too much tyranny and too many tears, may yet bind up its wounds.*

And **Max Boot** reminds us of the continuing challenges in Iraq.

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**Michael Barone** says the firefighter case shows us the more disgusting side of racial politics.

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**Krauthammer's take** on events in Iraq.

*... Nonetheless, it [Iraq] is a democracy, and that's what makes it unique and distinctive, and an amazing achievement in a sea of autocracies and dictatorships—having an effect, by example, on Lebanon, on the Gulf states, and even on Iran, where Iranians look to their west and see a country which is also Shiite, Arab, (which the Persians consider culturally inferior), and yet it has a democracy, it has elections, it has an Ayatollah Sistani who says the clerics ought to stay out of politics, and the Iranians are living under a sixth-century dictatorship run by mullahs.*

*So it's a remarkable achievement, and we ought to emphasize what we have achieved in terms of democracy.*

*And it's a pity that the president ignores that because the democratic nature of Iraq will establish the basis for a strategic alliance between America and Iraq in the future. ...*

**Contentions post** tells us about the EPA report that was suppressed.

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*So why, when the House has just passed a "global warming" bill, is this report only available via a leak from CEI? Because, as Dr. Carlin puts it, "I've been involved in public policy since 1966 or 1967.... There's never been anything exactly like this. I am now under a gag order." The [internal EPA e-mails](#) between Dr. Carlin and his superiors that were leaked along with the report back up this claim. ...*

**Daily Mail, UK** reports the continuing evidence of the value of statins.

*Statins cut the risk of heart attacks by 30 per cent even in healthy people, researchers say. The cholesterol-busting drugs also reduce the chances of death from all causes by 12 per cent. The findings, from a review of studies involving people without heart disease, will renew the heated debate over whether everyone over the age of 50 should be prescribed the powerful drugs.*

*At present they are given only to those at significant risk of a heart attack or stroke. Many experts say wider access to the cheap drug could save hundreds of thousands of lives while also saving the NHS billions every year. But others warn of the dangers of 'mass medicalisation' of the population. ...*

**Slate tells us** how McDonald's conquered France.

*... And the company was very adept at catering to French proclivities, a point brought home to me on a visit to a McDonald's on the Champs-Élysées in June 2007. I was part of a group of journalists being given a guided tour by Jean-Pierre Petit, who had succeeded Hennequin as the chief executive of McDonald's France. We had come to this particular McDonald's because Petit wanted to show us the newest addition to the company's product line in France: McCafé, a stand-alone espresso bar offering lattes, macchiatos, and the like, along with fruit tarts, macarons, and other classic French sweets. The company was planning to open McCafés all over France, and the Champs-Élysées location was home to one of the first. Some of the other journalists eagerly ordered espresso drinks and pastries, but I wouldn't be so easily gulled—this was still McDonald's. Petit began making the rounds with a plate of macarons and insisted I try one. I took a pistachio. Not bad, I thought, but no Ladurée. As if reading my mind, Petit immediately chimed in, "We get the macarons from Holder, the company that owns Ladurée." Touché.*

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Boortz.com

## OBAMA MORE THAN 'CONCERNED'

by Neal Boortz

North Korea launches a missile and it takes Barack Obama and the UN five days to respond. Iran holds fraudulent elections, kills protesters and it takes weeks before Barack Obama can stand up and say that he is "concerned" about the situation.



Then the people of Honduras try to uphold their constitution and laws of the land from being trampled by a Chavez-wanna be ... and it takes Barack Obama one day to proclaim that this was [not a legal coup](#).

Why the sudden decisiveness? Where were these strong opinions on foreign matters when Iranian authorities were trampling protestors and cutting off media access to the outside world? Where was this decisiveness when Kim Jong III decided that he was going to launch missiles toward Hawaii on the Fourth of July? Why ... NOW ... is Obama suddenly speaking out loudly

How about a little background. Are you really sure you know what has been going on in Honduras? Do you think that this was simply a coup? Let me give you a rough outline here, and then you can sit back and wonder just why PrezBO is in the weeds with Chavez and Castro on this one.

Mel Zelaya is, or was, the President of Honduras. He and Hugo Chaves were tight. So tight, it seems, that Zelaya wanted to emulate Hugo by changing the Honduran constitution to allow him to run for office until he durned well gets tired of it.

To change the constitution in Honduras you have to convene a constituent assembly. The president cannot do that. The Honduran congress must approve a national referendum calling for the constituent assembly to consider changes to the constitution. Zelaya didn't like the part about the constitution requiring approval of the congress before a national referendum could be called. So ... he decided to call one on his own.

OK .. so here we have President Zelaya calling for a national referendum when he doesn't have the power to do so. The next problem is obtaining ballots! Since the Honduran congress had not called for the referendum, as required by the constitution, the government certainly wasn't going to print the ballots! After all, how smart would it be to print ballots for an illegal referendum? So ... Zelaya had to get the ballots printed elsewhere. Here's an idea! Get his pall Hugo Chavez to print them! Yes! That will work!

So Chaves prints Zelaya's ballots and they're shipped to Honduras. Enter the Honduran Supreme Court. The court considers Zelaya's election in light of the requirements of the Honduran constitution, and rules the referendum illegal and unconstitutional. The court then issues an order to the Honduran military telling them not to do the logistical work associated with Zelaya's phony referendum. Remember, now ... all of this has one primary goal. To get rid of the term limits limiting Zelaya's rule in Honduras.

After the supreme court's decision, General Romeo Velasquez tells President Zelaya that he is subject to a proper order from the Supreme Court and will not be able to carry out Zelaya's referendum. So ... Zelaya fires him. The Supreme Court orders Zelaya to reinstate Velasquez, and Zelaya refuses to do so.

At this point Zelaya's ego is getting the better of him. If the military won't run his illegal referendum, he'll just do it himself. He gins up a mob and leads them to the military compound where Hugo's ballots are stored and then has his supporters begin distributing the ballots to the masses.

Based on the Supreme Court's ruling the Honduran attorney general said that the proposed referendum was illegal and said that he would arrest anyone attempting to carry out the election. Zelaya was arrested by the military and was escorted out of the country.

Now ... does this sound like a military coup-de-etat to you? The attorney general and the military were operating in accordance with the Honduran rule of law. They acted under a valid court order. Coup? The Honduran congress has convened and designated a successor president, all in accordance with the Honduran Constitution. Military coup? The presidential elections set for November .. the election that Zelaya was trying to get around ... will go on as scheduled. A blow for democracy?

Fidel Castro, Daniel Noriega, Hugo Chavez ... all on the side of Zelaya. But Obama? Obama fighting against the rule of law and for a wannabe dictator? What gives?

## Commentary

### [An Important Milestone in the Iraq War](#)

by Peter Wehner

Today marks the withdrawal of U.S. combat troops from Iraqi urban areas, the result of a deadline contained in the Status of Forces Agreement (SoFA) that the Bush administration negotiated and the Obama administration embraced. It is a milestone on the road to Iraqi sovereignty and a useful moment, I think, to consider three widespread -- and to some extent inter-related -- arguments that were made about Iraq in recent years.

The first is that the difficulties in Iraq proved that the underlying theory behind President Bush's "Freedom Agenda" was wrong. It was said that the effort to promote liberty in the Arab world was a fool's errand; the cultural soil was too hard and forbidding. There is no existing undemocratic culture that will allow liberty to succeed. Some peoples and cultures are destined for despotism and unsuited for self-government. Tribal and sectarian allegiances are much stronger than national identity, especially in an artificial state like Iraq. Elections merely deepened sectarian ties and brought radicals to power. They are worse than useless. The 2005 "Arab Spring" was a mirage. *Et cetera*. But then the wheel of time turned again. As Michael Gerson [has written](#):

Now spring is returning. January's local elections in Iraq favored secular nationalists instead of clerical parties. In Lebanon, Hezbollah was defeated in an open and vigorous vote. Kuwaiti women have been elected to parliament for the first time. And in Iran, brave women and men have demonstrated that democracy, not just nihilism, counts martyrs in the Muslim world... Taken together -- a constitutional Iraqi democracy, a powerful reform movement in Iran, democratic achievements from the Gulf sheikdoms to Lebanon -- this is the greatest period of democratic progress in the history of the region. Given consistent outbreaks, it seems clear that the broader Middle East is not immune to the democratic infection.

The democratic uprising in Iran touched people in a particularly deep way. Protest signs written in English, asking "Where Is My Vote?" started springing up. Supporting democratic aspirations in oppressed lands, which was passé during the last few years, is once again fashionable. [Joan Baez](#) posted a message on her [Web site](#), with a video of her "We Shall Overcome" [dedicated to the people of Iran](#). Jon Bon Jovi also did a duet in Farsi with exiled Iranian singer Andy Madadian; they are singing a new version of "Stand By Me," the purpose of which is to send "a musical message of worldwide solidarity" [to the Iranian people](#). People are rediscovering the virtues of liberty.

The second argument we heard *ad nauseum* was that the real winner from the war in Iraq was Iran. "Iran has emerged as the dominant regional power in the Persian Gulf once the U.S. removed its major rival from the scene and put its Shiite clients into power in Baghdad," [Francis Fukuyama wrote](#) in an August 2008 *Wall*

*Street Journal* op-ed the conclusions of which, even at the time, were dramatically out of sync with reality on the ground.

In fact, Iran was already back on its heels when Fukuyama wrote his piece. Iraq's "Shiite client," Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, gave the orders to go after the Mahdi Army, which was overseen by Iran's real man in Iran, Moqtada al-Sadr. The Mahdi Army was smashed by Iraqi security forces in Basra, Sadr City, and Baghdad so definitely that al-Sadr announced plans to disarm and remake the Mahdi Army into a social-services organization. Major Shiite parties assured the passage of the strategic alliance Iraq signed with the United States, a development Iran fought hard to undermine. And in Iraq's provincial elections earlier this year, secular and moderately religious parties (like the Dawa Party) did well; sectarian parties (like the Iranian-backed Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq) did not.

Things have not only gotten worse for Iran in Iraq; things have gotten worse for Iran in *Iran*. In the aftermath of the democratic Iranian uprising earlier this month, [we find that](#) "Unrest in Iran has opened a theological rift within the Shiite sect of Islam, undermining the Iranian regime's founding dogma that is shared by millions of fellow Shiites across the Middle East."

The third argument we heard repeatedly is that global jihadists in general, and al Qaeda in particular, were massively aided by the Iraq war. It was the greatest recruiting mechanism possible. The appeal of bin Ladenism was stronger than ever. A typical proponent of this view was Peter Bergen, who, in October 2007, wrote a lead article for the *New Republic*, entitled "War of Error: How Osama bin Laden Beat George W. Bush." In it Bergen [wrote](#),

America's most formidable foe -- once practically dead -- is back. This is one of the most historically significant legacies of President Bush. At nearly every turn, he has made the wrong strategic choices in battling Al Qaeda. To understand the terror network's resurgence -- and its continued ability to harm us -- we need to reexamine all the ways in which the administration has failed to crush it. . . . If, as the president explained in a speech [in 2006], the United States is today engaged "in the decisive ideological struggle of the twenty-first century," right now we are on the losing side of the battle of ideas.

Bergen and most of the foreign policy establishment had things exactly wrong. A study released last year by American intelligence agencies, "[Global Trends 2025: A Transformed World](#)," [concluded that](#):

Al-Qa'ida's weaknesses -- unachievable strategic objectives, inability to attract broad-based support, and self-destructive actions -- might cause it to decay sooner than many people think... Despite sympathy for some of its ideas and the rise of affiliated groups in places like the Maghreb, al-Qa'ida has not achieved broad support in the Islamic World. Its harsh pan-Islamist ideology and policies appeal only to a tiny minority of Muslims.

According to one study of public attitudes toward extremist violence, there is little support for al Qaeda in any of the countries surveyed -- Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, or Yemen. The report also found that majorities in all Arab countries oppose jihadi violence, by any group, on their own soil.

We have also seen prominent voices within the jihadist movement turn against bin Ladenism and Islamic extremism, a huge (if largely under-reported) development. Among the events catalyzing such shift of attitude was the "Anbar Awakening," a Sunni uprising against al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), and the devastating military pounding AQI was subjected to at the hands of both the Iraqi and the American militaries. For a movement that believed it had the mandate of Allah and depended on the perception of strength to win recruits and support, the decimation al Qaeda experienced in the Iraq war -- which it declared to be the central battleground in the war for jihad -- has been pivotal.

The ultimate wisdom in initiating the Iraq war is still to be validated by contingent events still to unfold. What is happening today is a transition, not a final triumph. And while Iraq is today a legitimate, representative, and responsible democracy, it remains fragile. Hard-earned progress can still be undone. The Iraqi military

will have to prove it can provide security to its citizens. Relations between the Iraqi government and the semi-autonomous Kurdistan Regional Government in the north, particularly over the oil-rich province of Kirkuk, are tense. None of us can foretell the future, and almost all of us have been wrong about some aspect of the war or another.

Still, it is worth pointing out that those who wrote off the war as unwinnable and a miserable failure, who made confident, sweeping arguments that have been overturned by events, and who had grown so weary of the conflict that they were willing to consign Iraqis to mass slaughters and America to a historically consequential defeat -- they were thankfully, blessedly wrong. And the Land between the Rivers, which has known too much tyranny and too many tears, may yet bind up its wounds.

## Contentions

### Iraq's Future Challenges

by Max Boot

Amid the hullabaloo regarding the handover of Iraqi cities to Iraqi security forces yesterday, it is easy to lose sight of the war still going on. Despite dramatic drops in violence in Iraq since 2006-2007 — and a corresponding increase in violence in Afghanistan — Iraq remains by several statistical measures the more violent of the two.

So far this year [101 U.S. soldiers have been killed in Iraq](#) versus [86 in Afghanistan](#). Figures for civilian casualties are less exact but they also indicate more deaths in Iraq — [893](#) in Iraq compared to [680](#) in Afghanistan.

It is hard to get too worked up over statistics so it helps to put a human face on them — a face like Tim Karcher's. A lieutenant colonel and battalion commander, Karcher had only recently handed over control of his Area of Operations in Sadr City to the Iraqis. On Sunday he was riding through Baghdad in his heavily-armored MRAP vehicle when he was hit by a devastating EFP (explosively formed penetrator). MRAP's are some of the best armored vehicles that we have, but EFP's can punch through anything. As ABC's Martha Raddatz relates [in this moving dispatch](#), Karcher wound up losing both his legs. Sandstorms made it impossible to medivac him by air, so his command sergeant major, Richard Franklin, drove him to the hospital where doctors managed to save his life. On the way back from the hospital, the sergeant-major's convoy was hit by another EFP, this one killing a sergeant.

Those EFP's could have come from only one place — Iran. These tragic and maddening incidents are further confirmation, if any were needed, that Iran has not given up destabilizing Iraq and fighting our troops (and those of Iraq by proxy). The remnants of al Qaeda in Iraq also continue to fight. Their capabilities are thankfully much reduced from what they were several years ago, but they remain a formidable threat.

As long as we have 130,000 troops in Iraq, there is little doubt that we can help the Iraqis maintain the progress that has been made in recent years — although that task becomes a bit harder now that most of our troops have left urban centers. The real test will come in a 18 months' time when under the terms of the Status of Forces agreement, U.S. troops are due to leave Iraq altogether.

Until recently I had expected that this deadline would not be binding, and there is still a chance that it won't be, but the zeal with which the Maliki government has insisted on a real (if far from complete) pullout of U.S. troops from Iraqi cities suggests that there will not be many U.S. troops left in Iraq after 2010. That is a worrisome prospect because, for all the gains made by Iraqi security forces, they still have a long way to go before they can police their country entirely by themselves — especially when they face such a potent threat emanating from across the border with Iran.

Firefighter case shows seamy side of racial politics

By: Michael Barone



*Frank Ricci, left, lead plaintiff in the "New Haven 20" firefighter reverse discrimination case speaks to the media outside of Federal Court in New Haven, Conn.*

The Supreme Court's decision in Ricci v. DeStefano, the case of the New Haven, Conn., firefighters, was a ringing endorsement of the Civil Rights Act of 1964's ban on racial discrimination and a repudiation of Supreme Court nominee Sonia Sotomayor's decision in the Second Circuit Appeals Court. While five justices flatly rejected Sotomayor's ruling, even the four dissenters wouldn't have let stand her ruling allowing the results of a promotion exam to be set aside because no black firefighter had a top score.

Ricci is also something else: a riveting lesson in political sociology, thanks to the concurring opinion by Justice Samuel Alito. It shows how a combination of vote-hungry politicians and local political agitators -- you might call them community organizers -- worked with the approval of elite legal professionals like Judge Sotomayor to employ racial quotas and preferences in defiance of the words of the Civil Rights Act.

One of the chief actors was the Rev. Boise Kimber, a supporter of Mayor John DeStefano; the mayor testified for him as a character witness in a 1996 trial in which he was convicted of stealing prepaid funeral expenses from an elderly woman. DeStefano later appointed Kimber the head of the board of fire commissioners, but Kimber resigned after saying he wouldn't hire certain recruits because "they just have too many vowels in their name." After the results of the promotion test were announced, showing that 19 white and one Hispanic firefighter qualified for promotion, Kimber called the mayor's chief administrative officer opposing certification of the test results.

The record shows that DeStefano and his appointees went to work, holding secret meetings and concealing their motives, to get the Civil Service Board to decertify the test results. Kimber appeared at a board meeting and made "a loud, minutes-long outburst" and had to be ruled out of order three times.

City officials ignored the inconvenient fact that they had hired an independent and experienced firm -- this is a thriving business -- to draw up a bias-free test and paid a competing firm to draw up another test. Its head testified that the first firm's test was biased without seeing it. The board capitulated and decertified the test. DeStefano was prepared to overrule it if it had gone the other way.

Such is governance these days in a liberal university town. It may remind some of us old enough to remember of the machinations and contrivances of Southern white officials and agitators employed to prevent blacks from registering and voting.

This is the sort of thing Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg described in the text as just the workings of politics. Writing in Slate, Yale Law faculty member Emily Bazelon goes further. She laments that the promotion test rewarded memorization and that it favored "fire buffs" -- guys who read fire suppression manuals on their

down time." She is outraged that a fire department might want to promote firefighters who know more about suppressing fires, rescuing victims and protecting their colleagues rather than simply promote a predetermined number of members of specific racial groups whose self-appointed political spokesmen back the politicians in office.

Bazon and Judge Sotomayor, who voted to uphold the city's decertification of the promotion test, are typical of liberal elites who are ready to ratify squalid political deals -- and blatant racial discrimination -- in return for the political support and the votes that can be rallied by the likes of Kimber. You supply the numbers on Election Day, and we'll supply the verbiage to put a pretty label on your shenanigans.

Usually the people who are hurt by this are not as sympathetic as Frank Ricci, the dyslexic firefighter who paid a friend \$1,000 to read the training manuals and studied hard enough to get the highest score on the test.

But I think we ought to reserve some of our sympathy for the purported beneficiaries of this wretched discrimination, the black firefighters. Their champions -- Kimber and DeStefano, Bazon and Judge Sotomayor -- are telling them that their way up in life should not be determined by the content of their character or by mastery of their worthy craft, but by the color of their skin. Not by a fair and unbiased test, but by dishonest wire pulling and threats of political retaliation.

Thanks to Justice Alito for pulling back the curtain and showing the ugly reality of racial discrimination in America today.

## The Corner

### [Krauthammer's Take](#) [NRO Staff]

From last night's "All-Stars."

On Obama's remarks as U.S. troops withdrew from Iraqi cities yesterday:

He referred to what we have achieved as a "sovereign, stable, self-reliant" Iraq. He left out one word, and he left it out because it was a George Bush word—democracy. That was a Bush idea—to implant a democracy in Iraq.

If we had wanted to have merely a sovereign, stable, self-reliant Iraq, we could have chosen a Saddamist general to succeed Saddam after the war and gotten out.

It's true that the democracy established here is a fragile one. It's still struggling, and we will argue for decades over whether it was worth the 4,000 American lives, as we still argue half a century later whether or not it was worth 36,000 lives to salvage a democracy in half of the Korean Peninsula.

Nonetheless, it [Iraq] is a democracy, and that's what makes it unique and distinctive, and an amazing achievement in a sea of autocracies and dictatorships—having an effect, by example, on Lebanon, on the Gulf states, and even on Iran, where Iranians look to their west and see a country which is also Shiite, Arab, (which the Persians consider culturally inferior), and yet it has a democracy, it has elections, it has an Ayatollah Sistani who says the clerics ought to stay out of politics, and the Iranians are living under a sixth-century dictatorship run by mullahs.

So it's a remarkable achievement, and we ought to emphasize what we have achieved in terms of democracy.

And it's a pity that the president ignores that because the democratic nature of Iraq will establish the basis for a strategic alliance between America and Iraq in the future.

On Al Franken's ascension to the Senate:

I think it will be refreshing having at least one senator who admits he is a comedian.

As for the number 60, you know, the really important number is 50. That's a one-time majority. If you have the vice president, you get control of the Senate and control of the committees.

Sixty, as Mort indicated, is a floating number—on different issues, you will have around 60. So it's incrementally a help to Democrats, but it's not in any way a fixed super-majority.

## Contentions

### Faith-Based Science, Indeed

by Ted R. Bromund

My colleague at Heritage, Mike Gonzalez, [points out](#) a fascinating report available through the Competitive Enterprise Institute. It consists of the leaked work of EPA veteran Dr. Alan Carlin, and makes a serious argument that

We have become increasingly concerned that EPA and many other agencies and countries have paid too little attention to the science of global warming.... the EPA is largely relying on scientific findings that are, by early 2009, largely 3 years or more out of date.

Dr. Carlin's paper is substantial and deserves to be read in its entirety. But his takeaway is clear: the best explanations for global temperature fluctuations are changes in the amount of energy emitted by the sun, and, especially, oscillations in the temperatures of the oceans. The explanatory power of CO2 levels is much weaker, and, over the past decade, almost non-existent.

So why, when the House has just passed a "global warming" bill, is this report only available via a leak from CEI? Because, as Dr. Carlin puts it, "I've been involved in public policy since 1966 or 1967.... There's never been anything exactly like this. I am now under a gag order." The [internal EPA e-mails](#) between Dr. Carlin and his superiors that were leaked along with the report back up this claim.

The left has been very free over the past few years — actually, the last several decades — with claims of being pro-science, as opposed to those knuckle-dragging obscurantists on the right. But it's the left that badly wants global warming to be real, so as to justify pet policies — such as a bigger, more intrusive state apparatus — that it champions for unrelated and, frankly, ideological reasons. If upholding such policies entails ignoring scientific opposition, the left's quite willing to stick its fingers in its ears and start whistling.

As a newspaper veteran, my colleague regrets that "the media has happily gone along with this suppression." For my part, it reminds me of a paper I once graded at Yale. The student author was absolutely persuaded that carbon monoxide caused global warming.

When I pointed out that CO was indeed toxic, but that no one called it a greenhouse gas, and that it was not the same as CO2, the student had no idea what I was talking about (and refused to revise the draft). All evidence had become irrelevant: what mattered was asserting his ill-informed belief, and refusing to reconsider on the grounds that doing so would be akin to apostasy. In a student, that is sad; in the making of policy, it's both expensive and foolish.

## The Corner

### [A Health-Care Omen](#) [Jonah Goldberg]

[Charles Murray](#) over at the Enterprise Blog:

As a senior citizen, I am privy to arcana that you youngsters are not. Namely, I recently obtained my very own personal Medicare card. Listen up.

Your wallet is stuffed with sturdy plastic credit cards or laminated identification cards, many with photographs and lots of encoded data. Even the basic cards you might get from your county (library card) or state (driver's license) are probably close to state-of-the-art. You want to know what a Medicare identification card is like? It is a little larger than the standard size for credit cards and driver's licenses. (Of course. Couldn't have the federal government make a card that will fit in a stack with all the other cards you use.) It has no magnetic strip. It is plain vanilla text and fonts—no security features whatsoever. It could be counterfeited by a sixth-grader with a scanner. It is made out of flimsy paper that would barely qualify for a really cheap business card. This, for Medicare benefits, for Pete's sake. It's pathetic.

Actually, it is shoddy and incompetent, as are so many things that the federal government does.

## Daily Mail. UK

### [Should all over-50s take anti-cholesterol drug? Statins even cut heart attack risk in the healthy](#)

By [Jenny Hope](#)



*Heart disease czar Roger Boyle says all OAPS should ideally be taking statins*

Statins cut the risk of heart attacks by 30 per cent even in healthy people, researchers say. The cholesterol-busting drugs also reduce the chances of death from all causes by 12 per cent. The findings, from a review of studies involving people without heart disease, will renew the heated debate over whether everyone over the age of 50 should be prescribed the powerful drugs.

At present they are given only to those at significant risk of a heart attack or stroke. Many experts say wider access to the cheap drug could save hundreds of thousands of lives while also saving the NHS billions every year. But others warn of the dangers of 'mass medicalisation' of the population.

More than six million adults already take statins, saving around 10,000 lives a year. The cheapest versions cost as little as 7p a day. The Government's heart disease czar Roger Boyle says all older people should ideally be taking statins or a polypill, new tablets being developed which contain the drugs. And last month heart expert Professor Malcolm Law wrote in the British Medical Journal that everyone over 55 should be

given statins in the same way that everyone would be offered a vaccine against swine flu if it became serious.

But some say such a move could lull the public into forsaking a healthy lifestyle or boost the ranks of the 'worried well'. Mike Rich, of the Blood Pressure Association, said: 'There are other proven ways to prevent high blood pressure such as healthy eating and regular exercise, which have other benefits too. 'There is a danger that these important lifestyle factors could be overlooked in favour of popping a pill.'

Although low dose statins can be bought over the counter, effective versions of the drugs cannot legally be purchased without a prescription. The latest review analysed the results of ten large trials involving more than 70,000 patients who did not have established cardiovascular disease. The trials compared statin therapy with placebo agents or no treatment and tracked patients for an average of four years. Deaths from all causes were cut by 12 per cent among those taking statins, and the risk of major events such as a heart attack went down by 30 per cent. The risk of a stroke was cut by 19 per cent. No significant treatment differences were found between men and women, young and old, and those with and without diabetes. There was no raised risk of cancer, feared as a possible side effect.

## FACT FILE

- More than six million adults are taking statins in the UK
- They're a class of enzyme-inhibiting drugs which dramatically reduce cholesterol levels
- They work by lowering levels of 'bad' LDL cholesterol, which can lead to furring of the arteries
- The drugs are available on the Health Service to those deemed to have a 20 per cent risk of having a heart attack or stroke in the next ten years
- £450million was spent by NHS on statins last year
- Estimates suggest the drugs save the lives of 10,000 Britons annually
- Effective statins are available only with a prescription; over the counter brands contain much weaker doses
- Some types of statin cost as little as 7p a day
- Although side effects are rare, they can include muscle pain, and damage to the liver and kidneys

Dr Jasper Brugts of Erasmus Medical Centre, Rotterdam, which carried out the study, said the findings justify giving statins to those without established cardiovascular disease, but with risk factors such as high blood pressure and diabetes. Writing on the BMJ website, he said: 'People at increased risk for cardiovascular disease should not be denied the relative benefits of long-term statin use.' He said men over 65 with risk factors, or older women with diabetes and risk factors, would probably benefit most.

At present, those with established risk factors including diabetes are eligible for statins because they are being prescribed for secondary prevention of heart and circulatory problems. The big issue is whether taking statins would benefit 'healthy' people for primary prevention. A drive is planned by GPs over the next five years where adults aged 40 to 74 will be invited for a health check to identify heart and stroke risk, as well as kidney disease. Anyone in this age group who is believed to have a 20 per cent risk of suffering a heart attack or stroke over the next ten years will be eligible for the drugs.

It is thought that 15million people will benefit from checks. The move could prevent a further 15,000 heart 'events' each year, such as heart attacks and strokes, in addition to the 7,000 heart attacks already being prevented. But GP Dr Malcolm Kendrick, author of *The Great Cholesterol Con*, said the jury was still out on whether statins provide any overall health benefit for people without a history of heart disease.

Dr Kendrick, a long-standing sceptic about statins for those at low risk of heart problems, said: 'The suggestion that people at low risk should be taking drugs for the rest of their lives is not supported by the trials. In addition to the lack of benefit and expense, statins carry a substantial burden of side effects.' The Department of Health said it would study the findings.

## Slate's Food

### [How McDonald's Conquered France](#)

*The fast-food chain's most surprising success.*

By Mike Steinberger

*In his new book, [Au Revoir to All That: Food, Wine, and the End of France](#), Slate wine columnist Mike Steinberger examines the startling decline of French cuisine over the past few decades, explaining how a country that turned eating and drinking into an art form has lost its touch for cheese, wine, food, and fine dining. In yesterday's excerpt, Steinberger explained how the Michelin guide, which once celebrated the pinnacles of French culinary achievement, became a "millstone" around the necks of the nation's chefs. Today's excerpt, the second of two, explains how McDonald's conquered France—its second-biggest market in the world.*

On a bright, mild Sunday afternoon in March 2007, at a convention center in Paris, the annual Salon International de l'Agriculture was winding down. The Salon was a week-long trade show that literally brought the farm to the city. Hundreds of farmers and truckloads of farm animals came to Paris to give urbanites a taste of *la France Profonde*. It was an opportunity for city kids to pet horses, chase chickens, and be flabbergasted by the amount of waste matter that poured out of cows. It was also an occasion to showcase the meats, cheeses, and wines that made the French countryside such a cherished source of sustenance. No less than that, the event was a way for Parisians to express their support of French agriculture—in a sense, to reaffirm their own Frenchness. The patriotic overtones were catnip for politicians: President Jacques Chirac had kicked off the Salon the previous Sunday, and the floor traffic throughout the week included a steady flow of ministers and members of parliament.



*McDonald's in Paris with the Arc de Triomphe*

Encouraged by the nice weather, an enormous crowd had turned out for the Salon's closing day. Most of the visitors were families with young children. They formed a striking portrait of the new, multicultural France:

Many of them were white, but many others were of African, Caribbean, and Middle Eastern descent. Hijabs were nearly as ubiquitous as baseball caps and sneakers. By now, a full week into this jamboree, animal droppings and strands of hay were everywhere and the place reeked of the barnyard; judging by your nose and the bottom of your shoes, you really might have thought you were down on the farm—that is, until the big, splashy McDonald's exhibit, located toward the back of the livestock hall, came into view. What the hell was that doing here, and why was it crawling with people?

As I moved closer, I discovered that no food was being sold; instead, McDonald's was feeding its guests corporate propaganda. Large, colorful placards ringed the display, documenting the amount of French beef, poultry, and vegetables that McDonald's used, detailing the nutritional value of the food it served, and describing the company's eco-friendly practices. The words were accompanied by lots of pastoral imagery—cows, potatoes, sheaves of wheat. Children weren't spared the charm offensive. At an activity table, a sign reading *D'où vient ton McDo?* (Where does your McDonald's come from?) was adorned with more pictures of chickens and cows. Judging by the display, you would never have guessed that it belonged to an American fast-food chain. That, apparently, was the idea. Cooked down to its essence, the message from McDonald's was that its food was French, it was good for you, and it was good for the environment. I wasn't buying it, but the intended audience clearly was. Didn't these kids realize that McDonald's was the Trojan horse of *mondialisation* and that they were committing cultural treason? Why weren't their parents stopping them?

In the battle for France, Jose Bové, the protester who vandalized a McDonald's in 1999 and was then running for president, proved to be no match for Le Big Mac. The first round of the presidential election was held on April 22, and Bové finished an embarrassing tenth, garnering barely 1 percent of the total vote. By then, McDonald's had eleven hundred restaurants in France, three hundred more than it had had when Bové gave new meaning to the term "drive-through." The company was pulling in over a million people per day in France, and annual turnover was growing at twice the rate it was in the United States. Arresting as those numbers were, there was an even more astonishing data point: By 2007, France had become the second-most profitable market in the world for McDonald's, surpassed only by the land that gave the world fast food. Against McDonald's, Bové had lost in a landslide.

As reprehensible as Bové's tactics were, it was difficult for a food-loving Francophile not to feel a *little* solidarity with him. If you believed that McDonald's was a blight on the American landscape, seeing it on French soil was like finding a peep show at the Vatican, and in a contest between Roquefort and Chicken McNuggets, I knew which side I was on. But implicit in this attitude was a belief that McDonald's had somehow been foisted on the French; that slick American marketing had lured them away from the bistro and into the arms of Ronald McDonald. However, that just wasn't true. The French came to McDonald's and *la malbouffe* (or fast-food) willingly, and in vast and steadily rising numbers. Indeed, the quarter-pounded conquest of France was not the result of some fiendish American plot to subvert French food culture. It was an inside job, and not merely in the sense that the French public was *lovin' it*—the architects of McDonald's strategy in France were French.

The principal architect (or culprit, depending on your point of view) was Denis Hennequin, a forty-nine-year-old Parisian. He had joined McDonald's in 1984, straight out of law school. At the time, McDonald's was relaunching itself in France; an effort in the 1970s to establish a presence there had failed because of the company's dissatisfaction with its French franchisee. After stints as an assistant store manager, a training and recruiting consultant, and the Paris regional director, Hennequin was named president and managing director of McDonald's France in 1996. In the eight years that followed, he steered the company through the Bové controversy and into a period of robust growth and expansion. It was a job so well done that in 2004, Hennequin was promoted to executive vice president of McDonald's Europe, and just a year later he was put in charge of European operations, overseeing more than six thousand restaurants in forty countries and a quarter-million employees. Having done the seemingly impossible and made McDonald's safe for France, he was now thought to be in line to take over the entire Chicago-based company. A Frenchman running McDonald's—it would be a hard thought to swallow on either side of the Atlantic.

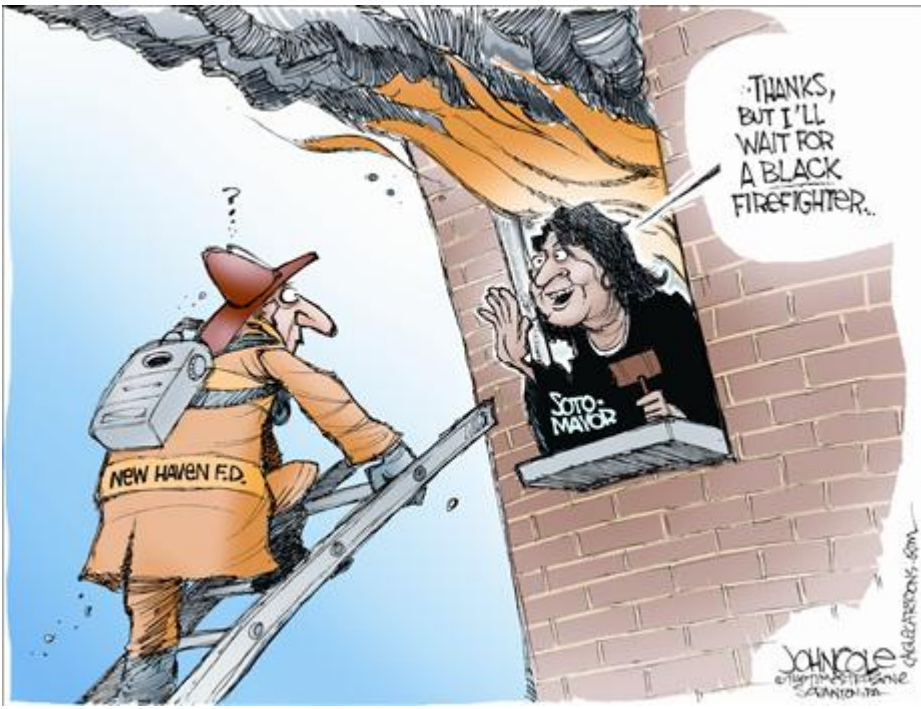
Within the organization, it was widely agreed that Hennequin had exhibited audacious leadership in France, notably in his handling of the Bové crisis. Rather than doing the prudent, corporate-minded thing and seeking some form of conciliation with Bové, Hennequin had decided to meet provocation with provocation. In 2001, McDonald's France had launched a promotional campaign using Astérix, the beloved French cartoon character whose thick handlebar mustache was the inspiration for Bové's facial broom. That same year, Hennequin rolled another, bigger grenade under Bové's tractor by opening the McDonald's booth at the Salon de l'Agriculture. There was deep anxiety among Hennequin's colleagues about the reception that awaited them there. "Everyone said, 'They are going to kill us,'" recalled Eric Gravier, a vice president of McDonald's France and a longtime employee. The fears were so great, he said, that they had all their posters made in triplicate because they expected the booth to be pelted with dung. But Hennequin wouldn't be deterred: McDonald's France was sourcing 75 percent of its ingredients domestically, and he felt it was imperative from a PR standpoint to force French farmers, hypocritically applauding Bové, to publicly acknowledge the large volume of business that they were doing with *McDo*. While the gambit was undeniably bold, Hennequin understood that he was operating from a position of strength, and not only in regard to the farmers. The French public applauded Bové, too, but in the places that mattered most, the stomach and the wallet, it applauded McDonald's more.

The wallet was no minor consideration. McDonald's appealed to budget-conscious students, of course, but with France's high unemployment and sluggish economy, it attracted people of all ages. Pensioners, for instance, were among the chain's most loyal clients. The food at McDonald's was cheap, and it was made cheaper still because its restaurants were officially designated as takeout joints. The value-added tax on meals at such establishments was just 5.5 percent, versus the 19.6 percent levied at "gastronomic" restaurants. This gave McDonald's an even greater competitive advantage over brasseries, bistros, and cafés. It was odd that French politicians, supposedly committed to keeping globalization at bay and defending France's culinary patrimony, would extend such favorable tax treatment to an American hamburger chain, and the different rates were a source of endless consternation to chefs, restaurant owners, and other purveyors of French cuisine. As André Daguin, a retired two-star chef and now the head of the French Hotel and Restaurant Association, put it, "Either our government wants us to be the country with the best restaurants, or it doesn't."

What especially cheesed off Daguin and other chefs was that McDonald's was being taxed as a carryout establishment even though the overwhelming majority of its customers actually chose to dine *chez McDo*. French diners tended to treat McDonald's as if it were no different than the bistro around the corner: They came, they ate, and they lingered. As Gravier artfully put it, "The French population uses McDonald's in a very French way; it is fast food, but not that fast." The data the company collected bore this out. Americans visited McDonald's more often than the French, at all hours of the day, frequently alone, and opted for takeout 70 percent of the time. The French spent more money per visit, came in groups more often than Americans, and did 70 percent of their eating during regular lunch and dinner hours. "We have a food culture in France; eating is not a feeding moment, it is a social moment," Gravier said.

And the company was very adept at catering to French proclivities, a point brought home to me on a visit to a McDonald's on the Champs-Élysées in June 2007. I was part of a group of journalists being given a guided tour by Jean-Pierre Petit, who had succeeded Hennequin as the chief executive of McDonald's France. We had come to this particular McDonald's because Petit wanted to show us the newest addition to the company's product line in France: McCafé, a stand-alone espresso bar offering lattes, macchiatos, and the like, along with fruit tarts, *macarons*, and other classic French sweets. The company was planning to open McCafés all over France, and the Champs-Élysées location was home to one of the first. Some of the other journalists eagerly ordered espresso drinks and pastries, but I wouldn't be so easily gulled—this was still McDonald's. Petit began making the rounds with a plate of *macarons* and insisted I try one. I took a pistachio. Not bad, I thought, but no Ladurée. As if reading my mind, Petit immediately chimed in, "We get the *macarons* from Holder, the company that owns Ladurée." Touché.

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