

INVESTMENT

OUTLOOK



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Rocking The Casbah

At least a little of what I know about the Middle East I owe to my family. My dad, for instance, provided an early introduction with his frightening tales of Algiers in North Africa. He was a worldwide salesman for Armco Steel, and on one of his business trips in the early 50's, a guide had escorted him to the Casbah--surely, according to his tone and the imagination of an eight year old boy, the most sordid place on earth. He had brought back a metal walking stick with a blade at one end that each and every American was imperiled to use for their self defense on the Casbah's public streets. I would rub my hands on it in private moments, as if wishing for the strength of my father to pass into my own hands--and, perhaps, some of it did. He was a fine man, absorbed with his children's future, but in a detached way. Like most men of his generation, he rarely showed his emotions, but the passage of time taught me they were there just the same.

Last week my own son, Jeff, reintroduced me to the Casbah. The crew of one of our F-16's in Saudi Arabia had written an

inscription on a rocket riding just below its wing. "Rock The Casbah" it read. "Sort of a long way from Baghdad", Jeff said, and he was right. The significance was lost until I remembered my daughter Jennifer's favorite song in 1980. It was a rock song by a group quite incredibly called "The Clash", and it spoke of the oil crisis of 1979-80 and how we were going to "Rock The Casbah". It didn't seem to matter that there was little oil in Algiers. It was a mysterious place, people there looked like Arabs, and a famous movie had immortalized it years before. We should rock it, they sang, and get those gas prices back down. Little did "The Clash" know how prescient their song would be. Baghdad is no Algiers, as Senator Bentsen might suggest, but most Americans probably don't see much difference. We're fighting for oil, for lost honor, and for control over the direction of the world's economy as we move into the 21st Century. If we can't accomplish our goals through private enterprise, a la the Germans and Japanese, then we'll do it via the wings of an F-16, a host of Patriot missiles, and a human wave of ground forces yet to come.

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