

# THE NATIONAL INTEREST

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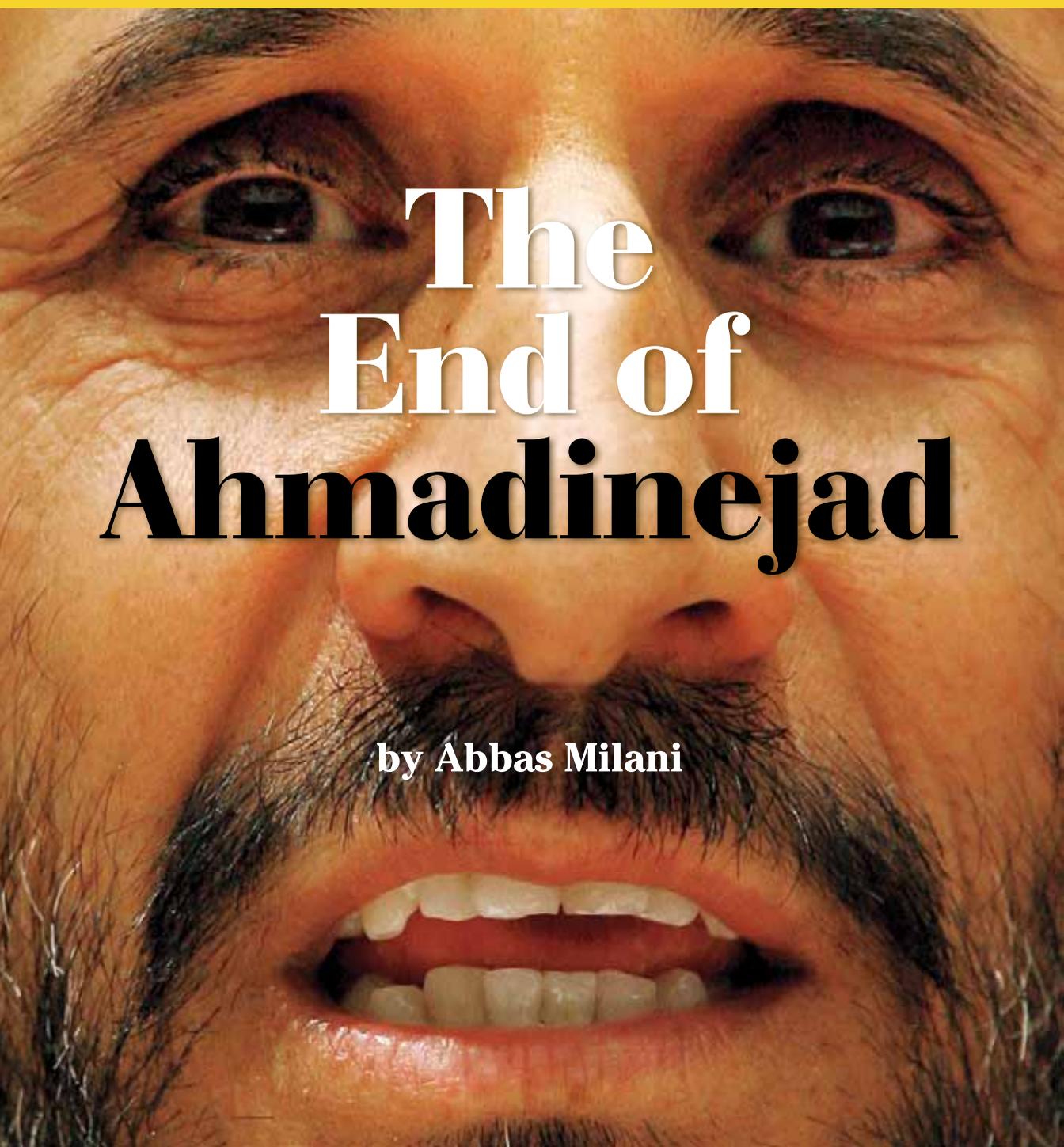
John Gray critiques **The Social Animal**

Aaron Friedberg on **China and Its Discontents**

Patrick French unravels **The Mahatma Myth**

Robert Kaplan finds himself **A Good Autocrat**

**David Rieff on the False Promise of Libya**

A close-up, high-angle photograph of a man's face, likely Ahmadinejad, looking upwards. The image is the background for the main title. The man has dark hair, a mustache, and is wearing a white shirt. His eyes are wide and looking towards the top of the frame. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the texture of his skin and the intensity of his expression.

# The End of Ahmadinejad

by Abbas Milani



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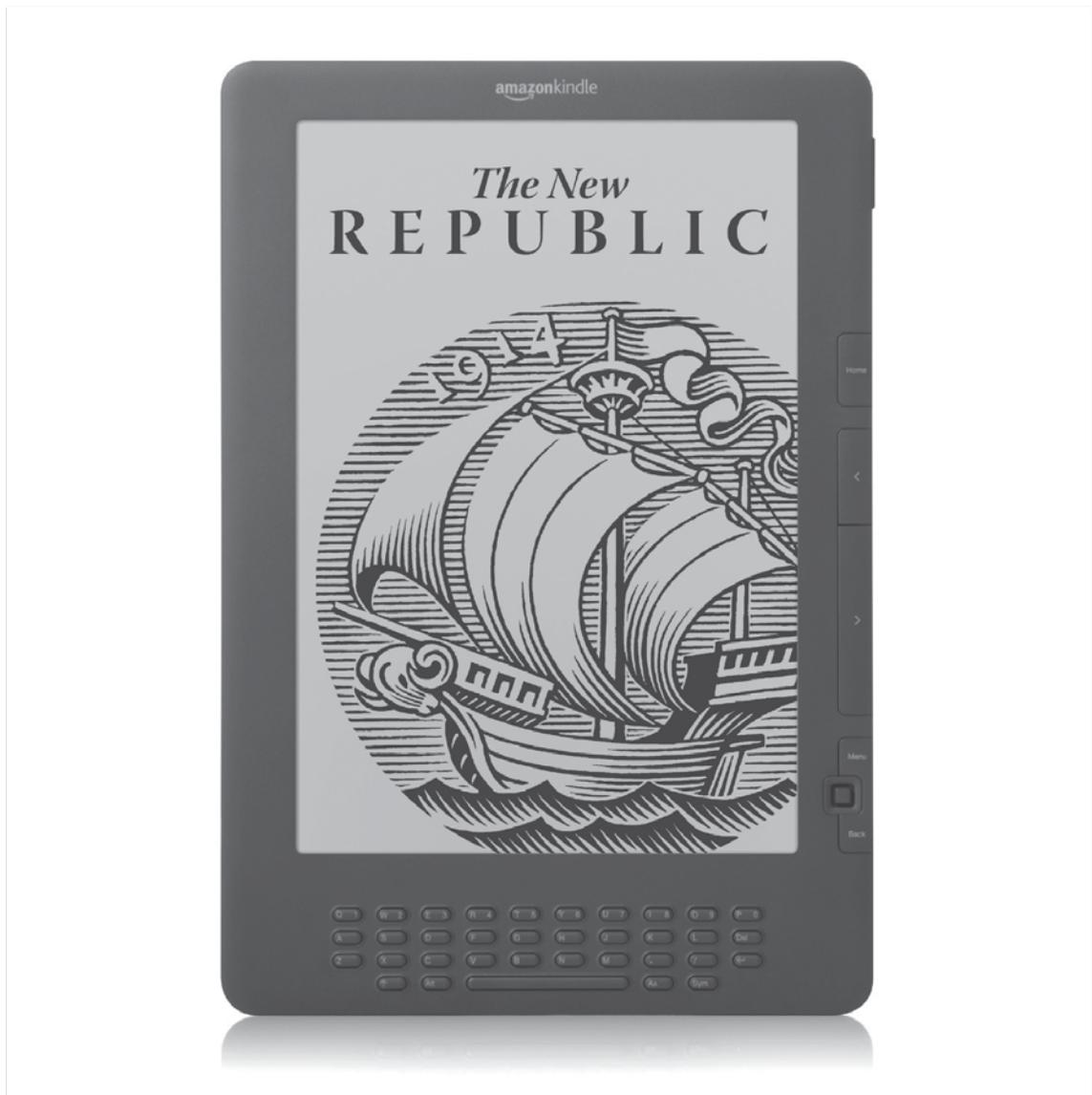
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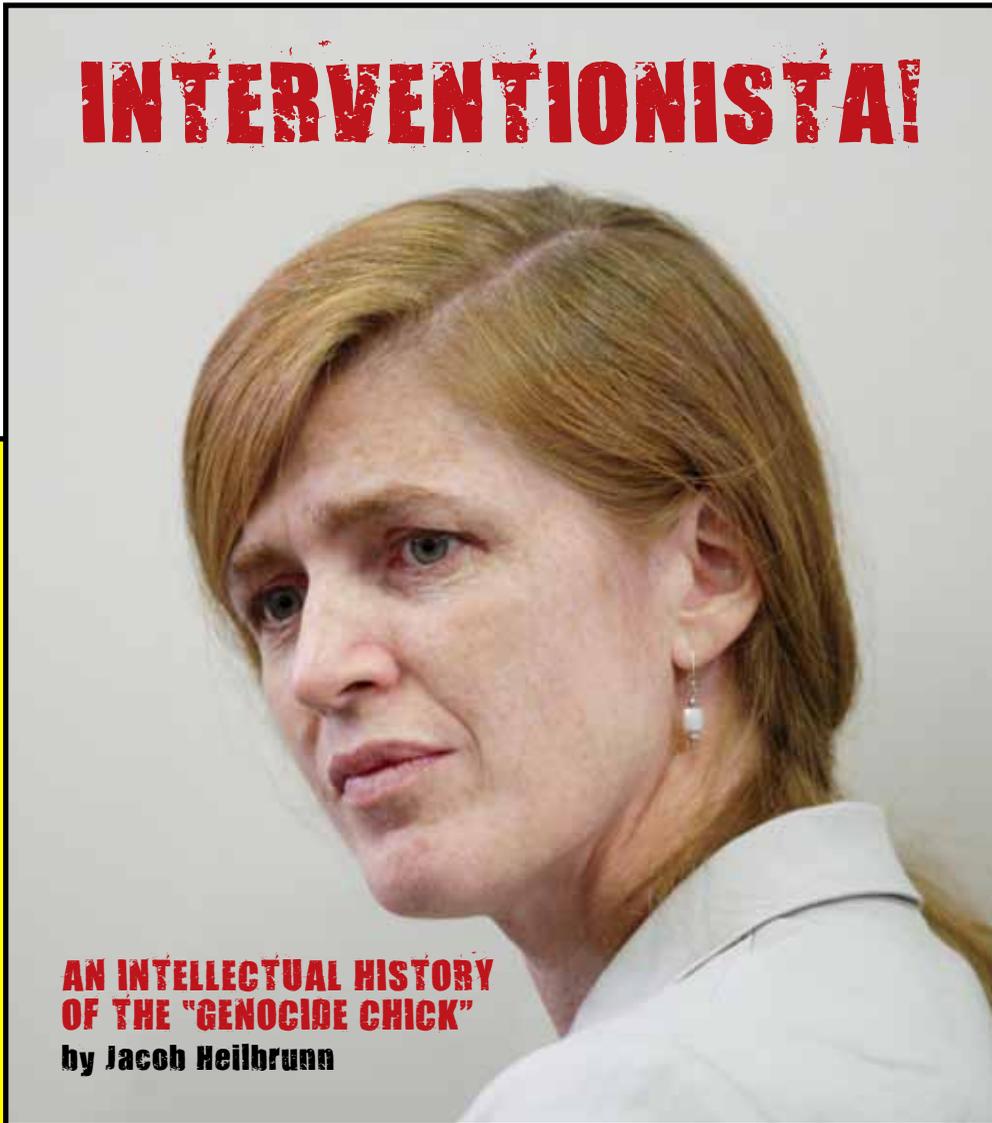
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# Saints Go Marching In

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By David Rieff

Consider the following capsule versions of diametrically opposing views about what it is reasonable for human beings to expect from historical change—or the lack thereof. The first is the work of an Irishman, the mid-twentieth-century poet Ewart Milne, who, having spent the Spanish Civil War delivering medical aid to the Republic, knew something about the subject. “History,” he wrote in “Thinking of Artolas,” “is a cruel country.” Milne’s is surely the traditional view, espoused by most people in most periods. In contrast, the second is unmistakably contemporary, progressive (one might even say revolutionary). It, too, was delivered by an Irishman, in the instance His Excellency John Paul Kavanagh, the permanent representative of Ireland to the United Nations, in 2009 in support of the responsibility to protect (R2P), the new international-security and human-rights norm for determining when and how the world should intervene in the affairs of states abusing their own populations. “If we truly wish to consign genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and ethnic cleansing to the history books,” Ambassador Kavanagh insisted, “[instituting this norm] is a path we must take.”

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**David Rieff** is the author of eight books, including *A Bed for the Night: Humanitarianism in Crisis* (Simon & Schuster, 2003) and *At the Point Of a Gun: Democratic Dreams and Armed Intervention* (Simon & Schuster, 2006). He is currently completing a book on the global food crisis.

Can there be any doubt about which side of this argument most decent people today would find themselves on? In a world in which pessimism about the human condition is viewed as mere cynicism, the tragic sense of life expressed by Milne reads like willful defeatism, wholly inappropriate to our times, however much it may have applied to the Europe of the 1930s. After all, we live in the age of the fall of Communism, the color revolutions and now the Arab Spring. And aren’t these events, when taken in aggregate, commonly supposed to vindicate Francis Fukuyama’s claim that liberal democracy is the only “legitimate,” “viable” form of government and Michael Ignatieff’s suggestion that in the last half century, there has been a “revolution of moral concern”? Indeed, in such a world, there are no preordained limits on what international society can accomplish. For most of human history, Ambassador Kavanagh’s proclamation would have seemed as nothing so much as a fairy tale. But today, such ambitions not only seem possible, they have become the conventional wisdom of those pondering and forging policy. In Saul Bellow’s inspired phrase, “A great deal of intelligence can be invested in ignorance when the need for illusion is deep.”

The development, dissemination and UN acceptance of R2P is a perfect illustration of both the power of the illusion and the extent of the investment. In the beginning of the year, the Security Council invoked it in Resolutions 1970 and 1973, impos-

ing sanctions on the Libyan regime and authorizing military force to protect civilians from attacks by Muammar el-Qaddafi's government forces. According to Gareth Evans, the former Australian foreign minister who was one of the principle architects of the doctrine, and who remains one of its most impassioned advocates, the use of R2P set "a hugely important precedent." A little over a month later, he developed this remark, arguing that the Security Council's action, and the subsequent military moves against Libyan government forces and military assets, had given "extraordinary new momentum and authority" to R2P, whose implementation in practice had been "far from assured," despite its having been endorsed by the UN World Summit in 2005, and reaffirmed by the General Assembly in 2009. And then Evans went even fur-

that the second half of the journey toward this human-rights promised land was at last under way.

As Mark Twain once said, "Denial ain't just a river in Egypt." When Evans speaks of bringing an end to genocide, ethnic cleansing, crimes against humanity and war crimes in our time, he is ostensibly talking about ending the criminal excesses of war. In reality, the project that he is outlining is the end of war itself. Mr. Kellogg, Mr. Briand, call your offices. Sarcasm aside, over the past half century a radical transformation of war has taken place. One need not oversimplify the matter, as, regrettably, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) did when it argued that whereas in 1914 there were ten military deaths for every civilian one, today there are ten civilian deaths for every military one, to see



ther than Ambassador Kavanagh had done, insisting not only that the acceptance of R2P held out the prospect that "genocide, ethnic cleansing and other major crimes against humanity and war crimes can be stopped, once and for all, in our time" but that its implementation in Libya meant

that a majority of the wars being fought now are intrastate conflicts. This is a (one hopes at least unconsciously) Eurocentric statistic that entirely ignores the fact that so many of the colonial wars of the great European imperial powers were in fact campaigns of extermination. Furthermore, in

*For the Global South, humanitarian intervention,  
1990s-style, was worryingly reminiscent of  
humanitarian imperialism, 1880s-style.*

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many battles of today the desired end state *is* ethnic cleansing—and the method for getting there is terror. Certainly, there is still a distinction to be made between war and war crimes, but whether there is much of a difference is highly questionable.

Despite the ICRC's determined efforts to deny this, at least some of its delegates will tell you privately that the Geneva Convention, with its rigid distinctions between combatants and noncombatants, simply no longer describes how most of the wars that are going on today are actually being fought. It is a commonplace that in any arena of the law, legal norms that stray too far from reality are more likely than not to eventually fall into desuetude, and in the case of international humanitarian law, the changing nature of war makes this a real possibility, if not in the short then certainly in the medium term. Fearing this, a number of major charitable foundations have held various private meetings over the past decade to discuss how the convention might be at least tweaked to reflect some of the new realities of war fighting. But because they also understand that it is quite unlikely that any revamped mores could be ratified today were they to be presented anew, there is enormous reluctance to reopen the question publicly—for now anyway. Yet Evans and other leading R2P advocates do not see defending the gains of international law that have already been secured as most urgent. Rather than going on the defensive, as the reality of the situation would seem to demand, with R2P they have raised the ante radically, reviving the old utopian project of abolishing war,

presented under the flag of convenience of abolishing or preventing war crimes.

As with so many absolutist projects that make up in vehemence what they lack in nuance and realism, it should probably come as no surprise that R2P is a doctrine borne of a combination of institutional crises and guilt, conceived in the offices of then-Secretary-General Kofi Annan on the thirty-eighth floor of the UN in New York and largely fashioned in Ottawa at the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS). For Annan, the global failure to respond effectively either to the war in Bosnia or to the Rwandan genocide was both a moral stain and a potentially grave threat to the legitimacy of the UN-based international system. Not unreasonably, he believed that one of the principal reasons for these devastating and tragic failures was the absence of any international consensus over how to reconcile respect for a nation's sovereignty (on which the international system has been based, at least in theory, since the Peace of Westphalia) with the need for outside "humanitarian intervention." That somewhat misleading term had been attached to various outside efforts at least since the UN went into Somalia in 1992. At times the armed missions were imbued with the goal of preventing states from systematically committing crimes against their own people—as had been the case with Belgrade's rule in Kosovo; at others, with stepping in when governments were too weak to prevent such crimes from being committed—as had been the case in Sierra Leone when

the Revolutionary United Front guerrillas came close to destroying that country. R2P, which began to take shape in 2000, was an attempt to remedy what had become an ad hoc interventionism.

Already in 1999, Annan had published “Two Concepts of Sovereignty,” an essay in which he argued that whether states liked it or not, globalization was transforming the substance of national sovereignty. The world simply was no longer prepared to stand by “when death and suffering are being inflicted on large numbers of people.” The needed interventions had to be based on what Annan called “legitimate and universal principles.” But these were still sorely lacking. In Kosovo, Annan wrote, a group of states had “intervened without seeking authority from the United Nations Security Council.” In Timor the council had authorized intervention but “only after obtaining an invitation from Indonesia.” And then there was Rwanda, where “the international community stands accused of doing too little, too late.”

The secretary-general could not act directly; too many member states, particularly among the G-77 countries of the developing world, would have been outraged. Instead, he wisely chose to approach the Canadian government to see if it would sponsor a study that could begin to develop an acceptable new norm. In early 2000, he asked David M. Malone, formerly Canada’s number two at the UN and at the time head of the International Peace Academy in New York, to convene a Canadian-funded private meeting of leading specialists in international legal affairs to see whether criteria for intervention (if only of a preventive nature) could be developed that would command a wide consensus among UN member states. But the group failed to reach agreement. It was after that failure that Malone, Lloyd Axworthy, then Canada’s foreign minister, and Robert Fowler and Paul Heinbecker,

the outgoing and incoming Canadian permanent representatives to the UN, decided that Canada would take a more ambitious (and more public) approach, launching the ICISS, chaired by Gareth Evans and the distinguished Algerian diplomat Mohamed Sahnoun. The report they issued a year later was called *The Responsibility to Protect*. Its central theme was that “sovereign states have a responsibility to protect their own citizens from avoidable catastrophe . . . but that when they are unwilling or unable to do so, that responsibility must be borne by the broader community of states.”

As Ronald Reagan famously said, “Trust, but verify.” It is casting no aspersions on the idealistic purposes and high moral and political seriousness of Secretary-General Annan, of the Canadian government, and of Evans and his colleagues at the ICISS to insist that it is almost always a mistake to believe idealism is a sufficient explanation of a new *démarche* in international affairs. Moreover, the fact that the *démarche* in question is well intended, and seeks to remedy a real difficulty, does not put questions about its advisability and legitimacy beyond the boundary of licit inquiry. The context is important. The failure to intervene in Rwanda may rightly be viewed as a moral catastrophe. Yet many of us (including some, like myself, who had been staunch interventionists in the early part of the decade) had come to believe the supposed humanitarian military interventions of the 1990s were being called for with such frequency that no one could now credibly assert intervention was a remedy of last resort. Instead, it was becoming the favored normative response of humanitarian groups (with a few notable exceptions like Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières after 1994). If there were complaints from those quarters, they tended to argue there were too few—not too many—military interventions. And this was simply too close for comfort to the

prevailing attitudes in Europe during the so-called “second imperialism” of the latter part of the nineteenth century, when the colonial powers justified their annexations of what remained unconquered in Africa on the basis of humanitarian concerns—an attitude well summed up by Cecil Rhodes’s assertion that imperialism was “philanthropy plus five percent.” Whether these wars of altruism were undertaken under a UN flag or with utter indifference to the UN Charter, somehow the intervenors almost always turned out to be the United States and the former European colonial powers (in Liberia, an obvious exception, the armed force of the Nigerian-led Economic Community of West African States had made a dog’s breakfast of the operation); and the intervened-upon, the countries of the previously colonized world plus the former Yugoslavia.

Whatever its authors’ intentions, one of the principal effects of R2P was to move the (increasingly skeptical) focus away from the intervenors and onto the intervened-upon, who were defined as victims in the strict sense of the term—that is, people entirely at the mercy of others. This infantilizing rhetoric had always been a moral Achilles’ heel of the humanitarian perspective. At the time of the Kosovo intervention, British Prime Minister Tony Blair dubbed the war one that was waged “in defense of our values, rather than our interests” and promised that this would

not be our last such war of altruism (significantly, Blair was vague about just who that “our” stood for). For Blair, and the many in the West, including large constituencies within the worlds of human rights and emergency relief, who welcomed his commitment,

the only question then was whether the benign action of the outside intervenor could either protect the victims from harm or, if it was already in train, at least halt the harm being done by the malign local actors, whether governments or, as in the case of a largely anarchic place like Somalia, warlords and guerrilla formations.

Secretary-General Annan, the Canadians, Evans and the other members of the commission that devised R2P were absolutely correct

that in the case of a Rwanda, a Sierra Leone or (for all its ambiguities) a Kosovo, large numbers of people would die or be ethnically cleansed if there were no outside intervention. And, at least as Evans conceived it, R2P was meant to bridge the gap between what he called “the absolute-sovereignty and limited-sovereignty brigades,” that is, between many nations in the Global South for whom humanitarian intervention, 1990s-style, was worryingly reminiscent of humanitarian imperialism, 1880s-style, and the enthusiasm for interventions wherever and whenever needs were not being met. The latter, more malleable view of sovereignty was developed in the



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late 1980s by professor Mario Bettati and one of the founders of Médecins Sans Frontières (and, later, French Foreign Minister) Bernard Kouchner, who sought to establish a new international “right of interference” (the phrase in French is “*droit d’ingérence*” and has no exact equivalent in English) for humanitarian NGOs operating in war zones. The genesis of this new doctrine lay in Kouchner’s frustration with governments using sovereignty as a pretext to prevent relief organizations from treating victims of atrocities within their borders.

In many speeches and articles, Evans has steadfastly denied that R2P can legitimately be considered a reworking of this conception of humanitarian intervention. Where, at least as Evans sees it (Kouchner would almost certainly disagree), humanitarian intervention was exclusively coercive, and most often militarized, the R2P is different because its fundamental emphasis is on preventive action, preferably as early as possible, and on using every possible nonmilitary means. Resorting to force is a last recourse. And it is certainly true that it was by de-emphasizing the military aspect of the new norm, and instead focusing on early warning and preventive action, that Edward Luck, current Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon’s special adviser for R2P, succeeded in securing the General Assembly’s endorsement in 2009 over the objections of at least some representatives of the Global South who feared it would provide a legal pretext and a moral warrant for a revival of a neocolonial world order. Luck has called such claims a canard, writing in 2009 that R2P was developed precisely to provide

an alternative to what he dismissed as “the largely discredited notion of unilateral coercive intervention for humanitarian purposes.” But even Evans has recently conceded that the current debate on Libya has raised the possibility of “this being obscured again.”

What Evans has never been willing to entertain is that whatever outcome he and the other architects of R2P might have wished for, its military aspect remains the most usable element of the doctrine because it is the only one that is both coherent and practicable. All the rest—the prevention, the diplomacy, the raising of alarms, the economic and political carrots and sticks—depend for their efficacy on the ability of international actors to identify states at risk and to focus on ameliorating the situation before the horrors R2P was devised to try to prevent begin to occur. That is all very well and good in the abstract, but in reality the list of states where genocide and the like is possible is very long, and the resources needed to attend to all of them are simply unavailable. In his book on R2P, *The Responsibility to Protect: Ending Mass Atrocity Crimes Once and for All*, Evans concedes that prevention requires “detailed knowledge of the countries and regions at risk,” and the “capability to deliver the appropriate responses and the necessary political will to apply those resources.” Indeed it does. That is why, as a practical matter, it is as out of reach as immortality. McKinsey & Company consultants sometimes speak of “blue skying” a problem—that is, trying to imagine what an ideal version of a given

institution, corporation or economic sector would be if it could be created from scratch. But this is more end-of-history nonsense. What Evans is positing are commitments and resources that do not exist and that it is unreasonable to suppose ever will exist. In this, his nostrums are rather too reminiscent of the common specialist prescription that poor country “X” or “Y” needs a Marshall Plan. Assume for the sake of argument that it does: even if the political will were there—and it isn’t—the money is not.

If anything, the opposite is far more likely to be the case for the foreseeable future. Barring some extraordinary transformation of the economies of the developed world for the better, there is likely to be proportionately less aid on hand a decade from now, when there will probably be somewhere around 400 million more people in the world and the economic dislocations brought on by climate change will almost certainly exacerbate the conditions that lead to war and mass atrocities. By then, China will be the world’s largest economy, and it is already clear that in Beijing’s development policies, making aid conditional on good governance, the rule of law and compliance with human-rights regimes is of no significance. One of the signal intellectual failures of R2P (and, if raising false hopes, as R2P has unquestionably done, is an ethical solecism, then moral failures as well) is its insistence that we all agree on its conceptual framework of when, how and why to intervene—with the real prospect of what Evans once rather worryingly called “a reflex consensus reaction” coming into being globally. While everyone concerned with international relations at one point or another uses the term international community, the architects of R2P based their doctrine on the idea that such a thing exists. The diverging perceptions of the European Union and China about the importance of human rights and develop-

ment, for instance, show such a concept is a chimera.

As a former practitioner, Evans knows better than most of us that a UN General Assembly resolution may formally be claimed to incarnate the will of the global community (to use another variant of the self-congratulatory fiction) but is in fact nothing of the sort. But I guess once you believe the world stands at the threshold of abolishing war as it has been fought for most of human history (that is, without restraint or respect for a protected status for noncombatants), the rest must be comparatively easy to swallow. After all, if we can beat the swords into plowshares—except, of course, the swords of those countries willing to enforce R2P—why shouldn’t enough money be found to pay for a Marshall Plan for half of the Global South, and why shouldn’t policy makers in the rich world make heading off cruel wars and otherwise mitigating the sufferings of the poor one of their highest priorities? After all, development has been such a success over the past half century, hasn’t it?

The question, of course, is why do so many intelligent, and in quite a few cases brilliant, people believe such absurdities, and, indeed, present them as methodologies for transforming the human condition? The answer, I suspect, lies in two misconceptions. The first is the narrow legalism that, from its inception, has been the dominant strain in the human-rights movement. It assumes that once a new norm is firmly established in international law, reality will eventually (though not, of course, without difficulties or setbacks) migrate to this utopia. The second is a narrow institutionalism. It holds that there is consensus on what constitutes good governance and the rule of law and that therefore the challenge of building (or rebuilding) failed states or, at least, states in danger of failing is in reality a technical one, albeit in

the broadest sense of the word. What both ideas share is a profound inability to think ideologically (not to mention self-critically), which is to say politically in the classical use of the term. Rather, there is a tendency to insist that there are formulas for engendering that consensus reflex reaction Evans evoked. The problem is that Francis Fukuyama was wrong: liberalism is not the last form of government, as surely contemporary China has demonstrated. Fukuyama may *prefer it*, and perhaps he is right to do so. But his historical assumptions and ideological preferences, like those of the human-rights movement and, now, those embodied by R2P, hardly constitute proof, any more than idealistic longings constitute reality—no matter how luxuriously they are dressed up in the language of international relations, the UN Charter and international humanitarian law.

In truth, the legal and moral consensus on which the authors of R2P based their new norm does not exist. A hundred years from now, their faith in such posthistorical times will almost certainly prove to be as misplaced as the conviction, common among intelligent, enlightened people in Western Europe two generations ago, that religion had had its day. The cognitive failure of rationalism is consistent, whatever the era, because rationalists refuse to recognize the extent to which they are prisoners of their own progress narrative—a narrative in which, for all the challenges, history moves only in one (ever more enlightening and emancipating) direction. The title of Evans's book with its "Ending of Mass Atrocity Crimes Once and for All" would make an excellent prosecution exhibit were such rationalism to be called to account. And yet historical precedents for such utopian conceits abound: in this, the authors and advocates of R2P are in much the same



situation—and are as blind to it—as people like Norman Angell, who wrote in *The Great Illusion*, first published in 1909, that is, five years before the beginning of the First World War, that a major European conflagration had become impossible for economic reasons having to do with what in retrospect, it is now clear, was the first great era of globalization.

But viewed unsentimentally, there seems no more reason, at least none that is empirically verifiable rather than being based on hope and good intentions, to put one's faith in Kofi Annan's argument in "Two Concepts of Sovereignty" that the globalization of this age has fatally undermined a strict Westphalian conception of the state and that this has been over the long term a *positive* development than there was in 1909 to share Angell's irenic sense of what the future held for Europe. To the contrary, this was only possible if one did indeed believe that

*As Libya shows, war and utopia  
should not be mixed up. War is too  
serious, utopia too unserious, for that.*

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the past was no longer relevant, and that history is bunk, to use a phrase commonly attributed to Henry Ford, just as it is really only possible to take R2P with the same seriousness its proponents do if one believes that war, the constant for all of human history, is on the verge of being abolished, and that an international community that has come to an ethical and legal consensus shares common values, as well as a determination to at long last right the wrongs of the world.

Instead, as the Libyan case illustrates, R2P's most immediate relevance is that it can be used quickly and effectively as a legal and moral justification for military intervention. Evans is correct when he insists that the doctrine's ambitions are far larger. Where he is wrong is in continuing to claim that, in practice, there has been all that much movement away from the "*droit d'ingérence*." Some of his recent speeches suggest that Evans himself realizes this. Having greeted the passage of Resolutions 1970 and 1973 with profound satisfaction, noting on March 24 that the Security Council had "written exactly the right script," Evans has since worried publicly that as NATO action failed to dislodge Qaddafi, its military operations began to stretch the UN mandate to protect Libyan civilians to its "absolute limit." For Evans, the great danger is that this mission creep will accelerate the risk "of buyers' remorse from those who did not oppose Resolution 1973, and of a backlash when the next extreme [responsibility-to-protect] case comes before the Security Council."

Had Evans not gone to such lengths to present R2P as not just a further refinement of the idea of humanitarian intervention but instead as a competing way of thinking, he might have seen this coming. After all, this is the lesson that humanitarian emergency-relief agencies learned in Somalia in the early 1990s, when, after they had called for military forces to help them get food aid and medical treatment to starving people, they discovered that when these forces (largely from America and other NATO member states) deployed, the operations they conducted were not to their liking—that is, the military behaved according to its own criteria and its own deontology. They did not see themselves as facilitators for the relief agencies, whatever the NGOs may have imagined beforehand. The "stretching [of the] mandate" that Evans now bemoans was entirely predictable. Indeed, it was ushered in with the statement in May by General Sir David Richards, the UK's chief of Defence Staff, that if NATO did not up the military "ante," there was a risk that Qaddafi might remain in power. "We need to give serious consideration to increasing the range of targets," the general said.

For Evans, such declarations imperil R2P. Having written at the time of the passage of Resolution 1973 that the international military intervention in Libya was "not about bombing for democracy or for Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi's head" but, rather, had only one justification, "protecting the country's people from the kind of murderous harm that Qaddafi" had already showed he would inflict, Evans was confronted with the fact that assassinating the Libyan leader

was clearly one of the aims of the bombing campaign—as NATO’s nonapology for the killing of one of Qaddafi’s children and three of his grandchildren made quite clear. With General Richards’s statement, it is now equally apparent that regime change is precisely the end state NATO is trying to secure, despite all the bluff talk about political change being a matter for the Libyan people not foreign military forces. No wonder Evans recently wrote that “there is a real concern that events in Libya, far from setting a new benchmark for future commitment, will prove to be the high water mark from which the tide will now recede.”

This militarization may not be what Evans and the other architects of R2P intended. But then it is rare that a doctrine with the power to command people’s hearts

and minds ever survives in the pure form those who first promulgated it imagined. Anyone doubting this need only look at the history of Christianity. R2P may not have been designed as the latest version of humanitarian intervention, but with the Libyan action, that is what it has become. It would have been better for all concerned, for the UN as an institution, for the countries deploying military forces and, above all, for the Libyan people, if rather than pouring the old wine of humanitarian military intervention into the new bottles of R2P, we could have simply stayed with the concept of just war, which remains as valid today as it did in the time of Thomas Aquinas. As Libya shows, war and utopia should not be mixed up. War is too serious, utopia too unserious, for that. □

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# Hegemony with Chinese Characteristics

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By Aaron L. Friedberg

**T**he United States and the People's Republic of China are locked in a quiet but increasingly intense struggle for power and influence, not only in Asia, but around the world. And in spite of what many earnest and well-intentioned commentators seem to believe, the nascent Sino-American rivalry is not merely the result of misperceptions or mistaken policies; it is driven instead by forces that are deeply rooted in the shifting structure of the international system and in the very different domestic political regimes of the two Pacific powers.

Throughout history, relations between dominant and rising states have been uneasy—and often violent. Established powers tend to regard themselves as the defenders of an international order that they helped to create and from which they continue to benefit; rising powers feel constrained, even cheated, by the status quo and struggle against it to take what they think is rightfully theirs. Indeed, this story line, with its Shakespearean overtones of youth and age, vigor and decline, is among the oldest in recorded history. As far back as the fifth century BC the great Greek historian Thucydides began his study of the Peloponnesian

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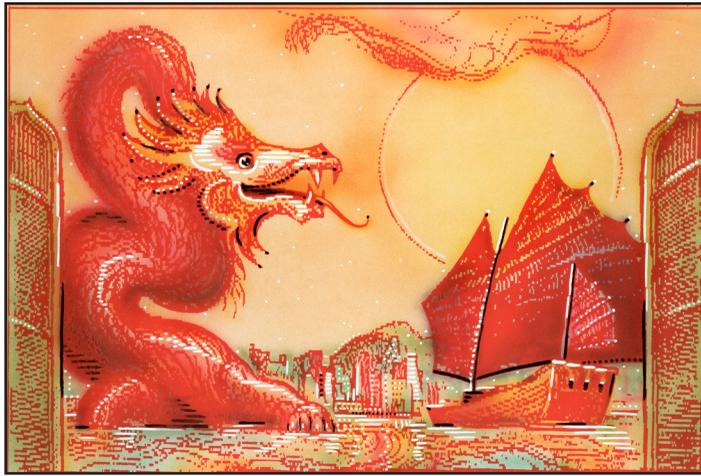
**Aaron L. Friedberg** is a professor of politics and international affairs at the Woodrow Wilson School at Princeton University. His book, *A Contest for Supremacy: China, America, and the Struggle for Mastery in Asia*, will be published in August by W. W. Norton & Company.

War with the deceptively simple observation that the war's deepest, truest cause was "the growth of Athenian power and the fear which this caused in Sparta."

The fact that the U.S.-China relationship is competitive, then, is simply no surprise. But these countries are not just any two great powers: Since the end of the Cold War the United States has been the richest and most powerful nation in the world; China is, by contrast, the state whose capabilities have been growing most rapidly. America is still "number one," but China is fast gaining ground. The stakes are about as high as they can get, and the potential for conflict particularly fraught.

At least insofar as the dominant powers are concerned, rising states tend to be troublemakers. As a nation's capabilities grow, its leaders generally define their interests more expansively and seek a greater degree of influence over what is going on around them. This means that those in ascendance typically attempt not only to secure their borders but also to reach out beyond them, taking steps to ensure access to markets, materials and transportation routes; to protect their citizens far from home; to defend their foreign friends and allies; to promulgate their religious or ideological beliefs; and, in general, to have what they consider to be their rightful say in the affairs of their region and of the wider world.

As they begin to assert themselves, ascendant states typically feel impelled to challenge territorial boundaries, international



institutions and hierarchies of prestige that were put in place when they were still relatively weak. Like Japan in the late nineteenth century, or Germany at the turn of the twentieth, rising powers want their place in the sun. This, of course, is what brings them into conflict with the established great powers—the so-called status quo states—who are the architects, principal beneficiaries and main defenders of any existing international system.

The resulting clash of interests between the two sides has seldom been resolved peacefully. Recognizing the growing threat to their position, dominant powers (or a coalition of status quo states) have occasionally tried to attack and destroy a competitor before it can grow strong enough to become a threat. Others—hoping to avoid war—have taken the opposite approach: attempting to appease potential challengers, they look for ways to satisfy their demands and ambitions and seek to incorporate them peacefully into the existing international order.

But however sincere, these efforts have almost always ended in failure. Sometimes the reason clearly lies in the demands of the rising state. As was true of Adolf Hitler's

Germany, an aggressor may have ambitions that are so extensive as to be impossible for the status quo powers to satisfy without effectively consigning themselves to servitude or committing national suicide. Even when the demands being made of them are less onerous, the dominant states are often either reluctant to make concessions, thereby fueling the frustrations and resentments of the rising power, or too eager to do so, feeding its ambitions and triggering a spiral of escalating demands. Successful policies of appeasement are conceivable in theory but in practice have proven devilishly difficult to implement. This is why periods of transition, when a new, ascending power begins to overtake the previously dominant state, have so often been marked by war.

While they are careful not to say so directly, China's current rulers seem intent on establishing their country as the preponderant power in East Asia, and perhaps in Asia writ large. The goal is to make China the strongest and most influential nation in its neighborhood: a country capable of deterring attacks and threats; resolving disputes over territory and resources according to its preferences; coercing or

*Seen from Beijing, Washington is a dangerous, crusading, liberal, quasi-imperialist power that will not rest until it imposes its views on the entire planet.*

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persuading others to accede to its wishes on issues ranging from trade and investment to alliance and third-party basing arrangements to the treatment of ethnic Chinese populations; and, at least in some cases, affecting the character and composition of their governments. Beijing may not seek conquest or direct physical control over its surroundings, but, despite repeated claims to the contrary, it does seek a form of regional hegemony.

Such ambitions hardly make China unique. Throughout history, there has been a strong correlation between the rapid growth of a state's wealth and potential power, the geographic scope of its interests, the intensity and variety of the perceived threats to those interests, and the desire to expand military capabilities and exert greater influence in order to defend them. Growth tends to encourage expansion, which leads to insecurity, which feeds the desire for more power. This pattern is well established in the modern age. Looking back over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Samuel Huntington finds that

every other major power, Britain and France, Germany and Japan, the United States and the Soviet Union, has engaged in outward expansion, assertion, and imperialism coincidental with or immediately following the years in which it went through rapid industrialization and economic growth.

As for China, Huntington concludes, "no reason exists to think that the acquisition of economic and military power will not have comparable effects" on its policies.

Of course the past behavior of other states is suggestive, but it is hardly a definitive guide to the future. Just because other powers have acted in certain ways does not necessarily mean that China will do the same. Perhaps, in a world of global markets and nuclear weapons, the fears and ambitions that motivated previous rising powers are no longer as potent. Perhaps China's leaders have learned from history that overly assertive rising powers typically stir resentment and opposition.

But China is not just any rising power, and its history provides an additional reason for believing that it will seek some form of regional preponderance. It is a nation with a long and proud past as the leading center of East Asian civilization and a more recent and less glorious experience of domination and humiliation at the hands of foreign invaders. As a number of historians have recently pointed out, China is not so much "rising" as it is *returning* to the position of regional preeminence that it once held and which its leaders and many of its people still regard as natural and appropriate. The desire to reestablish a Sino-centric system would be consistent with what journalist Martin Jacques describes as

an overwhelming assumption on the part of the Chinese that their natural position lies at the epicentre of East Asia, that their civilization has no equals in the region, and that their rightful position, as bestowed by history, will at some point be restored in the future.

Conservative scholar Yan Xuetong puts the matter succinctly: the Chinese people are

proud of their country's glorious past and believe its fall from preeminence to be "a historical mistake which they should correct." If anything, the "century of humiliation" during which China was weak and vulnerable adds urgency to its pursuit of power. For a nation with China's history, regaining a position of unchallengeable strength is not seen as simply a matter of pride but rather as an essential precondition for continued growth, security and, quite possibly, survival.

**D**eep-seated patterns of power politics are thus driving the United States and China toward mistrust and competition, if not necessarily toward open conflict. But this is not all there is to the story. In contrast to what some realists claim, ideology matters at least as much as power in determining the course of relations among nations. The fact that America is a liberal democracy while China remains under authoritarian rule is a significant additional impetus for rivalry, an obstacle to stable, cooperative relations, and a source of mutual hostility and mistrust in its own right.

Relations between democracies and non-democracies are always conducted in what political theorist Michael Doyle describes as an "atmosphere of suspicion," in part because of "the perception by liberal states that nonliberal states are in a permanent state of aggression against their own people." Democracies, in short, regard non-democracies as less than legitimate because they do not enjoy the freely given consent of their own people. In their heart of hearts, most self-governing citizens simply do not believe that all states are created equal or that they are entitled to the same degree of respect regardless of how they are ruled.

Seen in this light, disputes between the United States and China over such issues as censorship and religious freedom are not just superficial irritants that can be dis-

solved or wished away. They are instead symptomatic of much deeper difficulties. To most Americans, China's human-rights violations are not only intrinsically wrong, they are also powerful indicators of the morally distasteful nature of the Beijing regime. While the United States may be able to do business with such a government on at least some issues, the possibility of a warm, trusting and stable relationship is remote to say the least.

Democracies also tend to regard non-democracies as inherently untrustworthy and dangerously prone to external aggression. Because of the secrecy in which their operations are cloaked, the intentions, and often the full extent of the military capabilities of nondemocratic states, are difficult to discern. In recent years, U.S. officials have pressed their Chinese counterparts to be more "transparent" about defense programs, but there is little expectation that these pleas will be answered in any meaningful way. And even if Beijing were to suddenly unleash a flood of facts and figures, American analysts would regard them with profound skepticism, scrutinizing the data for signs of deception and disinformation. And they would be right to do so; the centralized, tightly controlled Chinese government is far better situated to carry off such schemes than its open, divided and leaky American counterpart.

Their capacity for secrecy also makes it easier for non-democracies to use force without warning. Since 1949, China's rulers have shown a particular penchant for deception and surprise attacks. (Think of Beijing's entry into the Korean War in December 1950, or its attack on India in October 1962.) This tendency may have deep roots in Chinese strategic culture extending back to Sun Tzu, but it is also entirely consistent with the character of its current domestic regime. Indeed, for most American analysts, the authoritarian nature of China's govern-

ment is a far greater concern than its culture. If China were a democracy, the deep social and cultural foundations of its strategic and political behavior might be little changed, but American military planners would be much less worried that it might someday attempt a lightning strike on U.S. forces and bases in the western Pacific.

Such fears of aggression are heightened by an awareness that anxiety over a lack of legitimacy at home can cause nondemocratic governments to try to deflect popular frustration and discontent toward external enemies. Some Western observers worry, for example, that if China's economy falters its rulers will try to blame foreigners and even manufacture crises with Taiwan, Japan or the United States in order to rally their people and redirect the population's anger. Whatever Beijing's intent, such confrontations could easily spiral out of control. Democratic leaders are hardly immune to the temptation of foreign adventures. However, because the stakes for them are so much lower (being voted out of office rather than being overthrown and imprisoned, or worse), they are less likely to take extreme risks to retain their hold on power.

But the mistrust between Washington and Beijing is not a one-way street—and with good reason. China's current rulers do not see themselves as they once did, as the leaders of a global revolutionary movement, yet they do believe that they are engaged in an ideological struggle, albeit one in which, until very recently, they have been almost entirely on the defensive. While they regard Washington's professions of concern for human rights and individual liberties as cynical and opportunistic, China's leaders do not doubt that the United States is motivated by genuine ideological fervor. As seen from Beijing, Washington is a dangerous, crusading, liberal, quasi-imperialist power that will not rest until it imposes its views and its way of life on the entire planet. Any-

one who does not grasp this need only read the speeches of U.S. officials, with their promises to enlarge the sphere of democracy and rid the world of tyranny.

In fact, because ideology inclines the United States to be more suspicious and hostile toward China than it would be for strategic reasons alone, it also tends to reinforce Washington's willingness to help other democracies that feel threatened by Chinese power, even if this is not what a pure *realpolitik* calculation of its interests might seem to demand. Thus the persistence—indeed the deepening—of American support for Taiwan during the 1990s cannot be explained without reference to the fact that the island was evolving from an authoritarian bastion of anti-Communism to a liberal democracy. Severing the last U.S. ties to Taipei would remove a major source of friction with China and a potential cause of war. Such a move might even be conceivable if Taiwan still appeared to many Americans as it did in the 1970s, as an oppressive, corrupt dictatorship. But the fact that Taiwan is now seen as a genuine (if flawed) democracy will make it extremely difficult for Washington to ever willingly cut it adrift.

Having watched America topple the Soviet Union through a combination of confrontation and subversion, since the end of the Cold War China's strategists have feared that Washington intends to do the same to them. This belief colors Beijing's perceptions of virtually every aspect of U.S. policy toward it, from enthusiasm for economic engagement to efforts to encourage the development of China's legal system. It also shapes the leadership's assessments of America's activities across Asia, which Beijing believes are aimed at encircling it with pro-U.S. democracies, and informs China's own policies to counter that influence.

As China emerges onto the world stage it is becoming a source of inspiration and ma-

terial support for embattled authoritarians in the Middle East, Africa and Latin America as well as Asia—antidemocratic holdouts who looked to be headed for the garbage heap of history after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Americans may have long believed that growth requires freedom of choice in the economic realm (which is presumed to lead ineluctably to the expansion of political liberties), but, at least for now, the mainland has successfully blended authoritarian rule with market-driven economics. If it comes to be seen as offering an alternative model for development, China's continued growth under authoritarian rule could complicate and slow America's long-standing efforts to promote the spread of liberal political institutions around the world.

Fear that the United States has regime change on the brain is also playing an in-



creasing role in the crafting of China's policies toward countries in other parts of the world. If the United States can pressure and perhaps depose the current leaders of Venezuela, Zimbabwe and Iran, it may be emboldened in its efforts to do something

similar to China. By helping those regimes survive, Beijing wins friends and allies for future struggles, weakens the perception that democracy is on the march and deflects some of America's prodigious energies away from itself. Washington's efforts to isolate, coerce and possibly undermine dictatorial "rogue" states (such as Iran and North Korea) have already been complicated, if not defeated, by Beijing's willingness to engage with them. At the same time, of course, China's actions also heighten concern in Washington about its motivations and intentions, thereby adding more fuel to the competitive fire.

**I**t may well be that any rising power in Beijing's geopolitical position would seek substantial influence in its own immediate neighborhood. It may also be true that, in light of its history, and regardless of how it is ruled, China will be especially concerned with asserting itself and being acknowledged by its neighbors as the first among equals. But it is the character of the nation's domestic political system that will ultimately be decisive in determining precisely how it defines its external objectives and how it goes about pursuing them.

As Ross Terrill of Harvard's Fairbank Center points out, when we speak of "China's" intentions or strategy, we are really talking about the aims and

plans of today's top leaders or, as he describes them, "the nine male engineers who make up the Standing Committee of the Politburo of the Chinese Communist Party." Everything we know of these men suggests that they are motivated above all

else by their belief in the necessity of preserving CCP rule. This is, in one sense, a matter of unadulterated self-interest. Today's leaders and their families enjoy privileges and opportunities that are denied others in Chinese society and which flow directly from their proximity to the sources of political power. The end of the Communist Party's decades-long reign would have immediate, painful and perhaps even fatal consequences for those at the top of the system. Rising stars who hope one day to occupy these positions and even junior officials with more modest ambitions will presumably make similar calculations. This convergence of personal interests and a sense of shared destiny give the party-state a cohesion that it would otherwise lack. Party members know that if they do not hang together they may very well hang separately—and this knowledge informs their thinking on every issue they face.

But the motivation to continue CCP rule is not rooted solely in self-interest. The leadership is deeply sincere in its belief in the party's past achievements and future indispensability. It was the CCP, after all, that rescued China from foreign invaders, delivered it from a century of oppression and humiliation, and lifted it back into the ranks of the world's great powers. In the eyes of its leaders, and some portion of the Chinese people, these accomplishments in themselves give the CCP unique moral authority and legitimize its rule.

Looking forward, party officials believe that they are all that stands between continued stability, prosperity, progress and an unstoppable ascent to greatness on the one hand and a return to chaos and weakness on the other. An analysis of the leaked secret personnel files of the current "fourth generation" of Chinese leaders (with Mao Tse-tung, Deng Xiaoping and Jiang Zemin leading the first three) by Sinologists Andrew Nathan and Bruce Gilley concludes

that, on this question, there is no evidence of dissension or doubt. President Hu Jintao, his colleagues and their likely successors are aware of the numerous internal and external challenges they face, but they are confident that they, and they alone, can find the solutions that will be needed to keep their country moving forward and enable it to achieve its destiny. Indeed, they believe that it is precisely the magnitude and complexity of the problems confronting China that makes their continued rule essential.

The party's desire to retain power shapes every aspect of national policy. When it comes to external affairs, it means that Beijing's ultimate aim is to "make the world safe for authoritarianism," or at least for continued one-party rule in China. Over the last several decades this focus on regime security has led, first of all, to an emphasis on preserving the international conditions necessary for continued economic growth. The party's ability to orchestrate rapid improvements in incomes and personal welfare is its most tangible accomplishment of the past thirty years and the source of its strongest claim to the gratitude and loyalty of the Chinese people. Economic growth, my Princeton colleague Thomas Christensen argues, "provides satisfaction and distraction to the population, and, therefore garners domestic support for the Party (or at least reduces active opposition to the Party)." Growth also generates revenues that the regime can use to "buy off opposition and to channel funds to poorer regions and ethnic minority areas to try to prevent violent uprisings."

As China has grown richer and stronger, the regime's pursuit of security has also led it to seek an increasing measure of control over the world outside its borders. This outward push has both offensive and defensive motivations. As the steward of national greatness, the party has the responsibility of returning China to its rightful place at

*The United States and the People's Republic of China are locked in a quiet but increasingly intense struggle for power and influence, not only in Asia, but around the world.*

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the center of Asia. The visible deference of others will provide evidence of the regime's success in this regard and will help to reinforce its legitimacy at home. Especially if economic growth should falter, "standing up" to traditional enemies and resolving the Taiwan issue and other disputes on Beijing's terms are likely to become increasingly important parts of the CCP's strategy for retaining its hold on power. China's leaders believe that the stronger their country appears abroad, the stronger their regime will be at home.

Conversely, the appearance of weakness or the widespread perception that the nation has been defeated or humiliated could be extremely dangerous to the party's prospects for continued rule. Underlying concerns about its legitimacy make the regime more sensitive to slights and setbacks, and even more determined to deter challenges and to avoid defeat, than it might otherwise be. The best insurance against such risks is for China to accumulate an overwhelming preponderance of power in its neighborhood.

Moreover, the CCP's hypersensitivity to what it sees as "separatism" is a direct result of its belief that it must retain tight central control in all places and at all times. Pleas for greater autonomy from Tibet or Xinjiang are thus seen as deadly threats to national unity and hence to continued Communist Party rule. The regime believes that if it loosens its grip, even a little, the entire country will spring apart. China's leaders see the need to develop sufficient strength to deter its neighbors from providing aid and comfort to separatist groups and will build

the capabilities to intervene directly to stop them, should that become necessary.

Even as it grows stronger and, in certain respects, more self-confident, the CCP continues to dread ideological contamination. Pliant, like-minded states along its borders are far more likely to help Beijing deal with this danger than flourishing liberal democracies with strong ties to the West. The desire to forestall "peaceful evolution" at home gives the regime another compelling reason to want to shape the political development of its neighbors.

To sum up: China's current rulers do not seek preponderance solely because they are the leaders of a rising great power or simply because they are Chinese. Their desire for dominance and control is in large measure a by-product of the type of political system over which they preside. A strong liberal-democratic China would certainly seek a leading role in its region and perhaps an effective veto over developments that it saw as inimical to its interests. But it would also be less fearful of internal instability, less threatened by the presence of democratic neighbors, and less prone to seek validation at home through the domination and subordination of others.

**T**hough not everyone is convinced, it is likely that a more democratic China would ultimately create a more peaceful, less war-prone environment in Asia. In the view of some realists, domestic reforms will only make Beijing richer, stronger and hence a more potent competitor without deflecting it from its desire to dominate East Asia and settle scores with some of its

neighbors. It is undoubtedly true that even if, in the long run, China becomes a stable, peaceful democracy, its passage will prove rocky. The opening of the nation's political system to dissent and debate is likely to introduce an element of instability into its foreign policy as new voices are heard and aspiring leaders vie for popular support. As one observer, economist David Hale, ruefully points out: "An authoritarian China has been highly predictable. A more open and democratic China could produce new uncertainties about both domestic policy and international relations."

Nationalism, perhaps in its most virulent and aggressive form, is one factor likely to play a prominent role in shaping the foreign policy of a liberalizing Middle Kingdom. Thanks to the spread of the Internet and

to great lengths to keep popular passions in check. A democratically elected government might be far less inhibited. U.S.-based political scientist Fei-Ling Wang argues that a post-Communist regime would actually be more forceful in asserting its sovereignty over Taiwan, Tibet and the South China Sea. As he explains:

A "democratic" regime in Beijing, free from the debilitating concerns for its own survival but likely driven by popular emotions, could make the rising Chinese power a much more assertive, impatient, belligerent, even aggressive force, at least during the unstable period of fast ascendance to the ranks of a world-class power.

The last proviso is key. Even those who are most confident of the long-term pacify-



the relaxation of restraints on at least some forms of "patriotic" political expression, the current regime already finds itself subject to criticism whenever it takes what some "netizens" regard as an overly accommodating stance toward Japan, Taiwan or the United States. Beijing has sought at times to stir up patriotic sentiment, but, fearful that anger at foreigners could all too easily be turned against the party, the regime has also gone

ing effects of democratization recognize the possibility of a turbulent transition. In his book *China's Democratic Future*, Bruce Gilley acknowledges that democratic revolutions in other countries have often led to bursts of external aggression and he notes that, since the start of the twentieth century, pro-democracy movements in China have also been highly nationalistic. Despite these precedents, Gilley predicts that, after an

interval of perhaps a decade, a transformed nation will settle into more stable and cooperative relationships with the United States as well as with its democratic neighbors.

Such an outcome is by no means certain, of course, and would be contingent upon events and interactions that are difficult to anticipate and even harder to control. If initial frictions between a fledgling democracy and its better established counterparts are mishandled, resulting in actual armed conflict, history could spin off in very different and far less promising directions than if they are successfully resolved. Assuming the transition can be navigated without disaster, however, there are good reasons to believe that relations will improve with the passage of time. One Chinese advocate of political reform, Liu Junning, summarizes the prospects well. Whereas a “nationalistic and authoritarian China will be an emerging threat,” a liberal, democratic China will ultimately prove “a constructive partner.”

This expectation is rooted in more than mere wishful thinking. As the values and institutions of liberal democracy become more firmly entrenched, there will begin to be open and politically meaningful debate and real competition over national goals and the allocation of national resources. Aspiring leaders and opinion makers preoccupied with prestige, honor, power and score settling will have to compete with others who emphasize the virtues of international stability, cooperation, reconciliation and the promotion of social welfare. The demands of the military and its industrial allies will be counterbalanced, at least to some degree, by groups who favor spending more on education, health care and the elderly. The assertive, hypernationalist version of China’s history and its grievances will be challenged by accounts that acknowledge the culpability of the Communist regime in repressing minorities and refusing to seek compromise

on questions of sovereignty. A leadership obsessed with its own survival and with countering perceived threats from foreign powers will be replaced by a government secure in its legitimacy and with no cause to fear that the world’s democracies are seeking to encircle and overthrow it.

A democratic China would find it easier to get along with Japan, India and South Korea, among others. The trust and mutual respect that eventually grows up between democracies, and the diminished fear that one will use force against another, should increase the odds of attaining negotiated settlements of outstanding disputes over borders, offshore islands and resources. A democratic government in Beijing would also stand a better chance of achieving a mutually acceptable resolution to its sixty-year standoff with Taiwan. In contrast to today’s CCP rulers, a popularly elected mainland regime would have less to gain from keeping this conflict alive, it would be more likely to show respect for the preferences of another democratic government, and it would be more attractive to the Taiwanese people as a partner in some kind of federated arrangement that would satisfy the desires and ease the fears of both sides.

For as long as China continues to be governed as it is today, its growing strength will pose a deepening challenge to American interests. If they want to deter aggression, discourage coercion and preserve a plural, open order, Washington and its friends and allies are going to have to work harder, and to cooperate more closely, in order to maintain a favorable balance of regional power. In the long run, the United States can learn to live with a democratic China as the dominant power in East Asia, much as Great Britain came to accept America as the preponderant power in the Western Hemisphere. Until that day, Washington and Beijing are going to remain locked in an increasingly intense struggle for mastery in Asia. □

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# Romancing the Throne

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By Patrick Allitt

**T**he English-speaking world bubbled with enthusiasm this spring over the wedding of Prince William to Kate Middleton. French, German, Chinese and Japanese audiences weren't far behind in their excitement about the royal couple. Why all the fuss, especially here in the United States, a country that once fought a bloody revolutionary war to get away from one of the prince's ancestors? And does the royal wedding matter, except as an incident in modern celebrity culture?

The case against hereditary monarchy has proved widely persuasive over the last couple of centuries. Nearly everywhere it has either been phased out completely or reduced to no more than a matter of ceremony. No wonder. Monarchy was always inherently unstable, vesting as it did so much power in one individual. If the monarch was strong, wise, resourceful, charismatic, generous, merciful and shrewd, the system could work, but a casual glance at the kings and queens of England shows all too plainly how few of them even remotely approached such a standard. As Thomas Paine remarked in *Common Sense*, "One of the strongest natural proofs of the folly of hereditary right in Kings, is that nature disapproves it, otherwise she would not so frequently turn

it into ridicule, by giving mankind an ass for a lion."

Quite apart from the ass-and-lion dilemma, every monarch had to worry about producing an heir. Kings hoped that their wives would give birth to at least one healthy son. High death rates made second and third sons valuable insurance against the heir's premature death—something that has happened repeatedly in English history. As soon as possible these sons too had to be married in politically advantageous ways. The choice of royal brides was often linked to diplomatic alliances with other kingdoms. With very few exceptions, the princes and princesses involved in marriage treaties were in no position to choose for themselves. Rather, they were forced to do the bidding of their parents, no matter how incongruous the proposed mates might seem from a personal or romantic point of view. The history of royal marriages before the twentieth century is largely a story of misery, exile, incompatibility, xenophobia and a clenched-teeth doing of one's duty. Royal weddings, far from being the feel-good celebrity events of our own time, were often moments of maximum political and personal anxiety.

**R**oyal weddings today are certainly very different from those of five hundred years ago. Think about King Henry VII, the first of the Tudors. In 1485, having just defeated and killed the last leader of the House of York, King Richard "my-kingdom-for-a-horse" III, at the Battle of Bo-

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sworth Field, Henry asserted his claim to the throne by right of conquest. But to end the long and bitter civil conflict that we remember as the Wars of the Roses (1455–1485), Henry recognized the need to marry a prominent figure from the other side. The logical choice was Elizabeth of York, niece of Richard III—the fact that she was a nineteen-year-old fair-haired beauty was just a bonus. Their wedding at Westminster Abbey in January 1486, soon after his coronation, helped reconcile the warring factions in his kingdom. Better still, she bore him three sons and appeared to secure the royal succession.

With the pacification of his own lands well in hand, Henry's next move was to increase his legitimacy in the eyes of his great European contemporaries. What better way to do so than by marrying his eldest son, Prince Arthur, to a daughter of Europe's rising superpower, imperial Spain? Catherine of Aragon was the youngest child of Christopher Columbus's patrons Ferdinand and Isabella. Well educated, admired by the great Renaissance humanists Erasmus of Rotterdam and Thomas More, she was also attractive and a fine linguist. After rigorous diplomatic negotiations and the promise that she would bring a big dowry, she was married by proxy to Prince Arthur before ever seeing him. For two years they exchanged letters in Latin. When he turned fifteen she sailed to England to meet and marry him, but they discovered, on their first encounter, that their pronunciation of Latin was so different that neither could understand a word the other one said.

Their wedding, at the old St. Paul's Cathedral in the heart of London, was followed by a week of wild revelry and jousting. Royal brides in those days did not wear white. Instead they wore *wealth*, loading up on furs, jewels and cloth of gold to emphasize the magnificence of the kingdoms they represented. Henry VII appeared to

have taken another sound step toward securing his dynasty. But joy quickly turned to sorrow. Prince Arthur died suddenly, just five months after the wedding. Now what? The tightfisted Henry did not want to return the dowry that had come with Catherine. So she stayed on in England and even served briefly as Spain's representative at the English court, becoming the first female ambassador in European history. Then the old king died and, after further hard bargaining, she married the new king, Henry VIII, Arthur's younger brother, in 1509. The wedding itself was subdued, and took place not in one of the cathedrals but in Greenwich Church. Two weeks later, however, the couple celebrated a lavish joint coronation. Henry was seventeen; Catherine was twenty-three.

**T**he marriage, auspicious at first, soured, and its unraveling had immense political and religious implications for English history. Of the couple's six children, five died in infancy. The only survivor was Princess Mary. Henry dreaded the prospect of going to his grave without a male heir, lest anarchy and civil war (still a recent memory) return to haunt the kingdom. He tried to get his marriage annulled on the grounds that it was uncanonical to marry your brother's widow. The pope said no: his predecessor had specifically granted a dispensation. Besides, Catherine said that Prince Arthur had never managed to consummate their marriage, rendering it invalid.

Rather than take no for an answer, Henry took the drastic step of severing ties with Rome, appointing himself Defender of the Faith, head of the Church of England. He then dissolved Catholic monasteries throughout England and seized their property, making himself incomparably wealthier than anyone else in the kingdom. The Church of England has had to blush ever since at the knowledge that it owes its

founding, not to a point of high theological principle, but to a sordid royal maneuver to off-load the aging queen. Among Henry's many subsequent brides he tried four local girls—two of whom ended up on the executioner's block—and one more foreigner, Anne of Cleves. That experiment worked better only to the extent that he didn't actually kill her. Having never seen her, and having gained an overoptimistic view of her beauty from a painting by Hans Holbein, Henry suffered a jarring disappointment on encountering the reality. Of their wedding night he told his friends, the next morning:

I liked her not well before but now I like her much worse. She is nothing fair, and have very evil smells about her. I took her to be no maid by reason of the looseness of her breasts, and other tokens, which, when I felt them, strake me so to the heart, that I had neither will nor courage to prove the rest. I can have no appetite for displeasent airs, and have left her as good a maid as I found her.

After six months and no consummation, they separated. She lived on in England with a royal pension and the role of king's "sister" at court. He got busy with the next bride, Catherine Howard, a teenager whose disastrous mixture of promiscuity and indiscretion brought her to an early and violent end.

Henry finally sired a son in the twenty-eighth year of his reign, but the sickly boy, Edward VI, who ascended the throne at the age of nine, lived for only another six years. He never married but was briefly betrothed to Mary, Queen of Scots, when she was just seven months old. Henry's daughters, on the other hand, were a redoubtable pair and ruled England for the rest of the sixteenth century.

**D**uring their reigns, the Catholic-Protestant division racked not only England but all of Europe, complicating

the issues involved in the negotiation of royal weddings. The eldest of Henry VIII's daughters, Mary I (sired with Catherine of Aragon), married Prince Philip, heir to the Spanish throne, in 1554. Both were fanatical Catholics. Hoping to reverse the English Reformation they soon set to work burning prominent Protestants at the stake, hence the queen's nickname, "Bloody Mary."



After a year Philip was called back to his homeland; his father's decision to retire to a monastery made him the new king, Philip II. The couple never met again, but the queen believed herself to be pregnant at the time of his departure. The fact that it was a phantom pregnancy greatly consoled the hard-pressed Protestants, who took it as

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evidence of divine intervention on behalf of the Reformation. It was becoming clear by then that a Spanish king married to an English queen was going to subordinate England and its resources to Spanish policies. When Mary died in 1558, the Protestant majority in England breathed a collective sigh of relief.

Her younger half sister, Elizabeth, daughter of Anne Boleyn, now became queen. Shrewd, tough-minded, a survivor and a Protestant, she realized that to get married as Mary had done would be to deliver her power into her husband's hands. Might it not be better, she speculated, to *avoid* a trip to the altar? Her advisers were constantly suggesting suitable suitors, and she periodically indicated enthusiasm for this or that gentleman. When it came to the point, however, she never tied the knot, being celebrated by courtiers in her later years as the "Virgin Queen." Philip II would have liked to marry her for dynastic reasons but never got the chance. Instead, her navy shattered and dispersed his great armada in 1588, inspired by her declaration: "I know I have but the body of a weak and feeble woman; but I have the heart of a king, and of a king of England too." It was the beginning of England's naval greatness, a period that would last nearly four hundred years.

Elizabeth I was the last English monarch to have to fear encirclement by hostile powers. When she died in 1603, unmarried and childless, King James VI of Scotland succeeded to her throne, becoming the first man to rule both lands. He lived the rest of his life in England, where he was known as King James I. He commissioned the best-

loved and most influential English translation of the Bible, which celebrates its four hundredth anniversary this year.

**T**he religious division of Europe during the Reformation had left France and Spain, the two strongest powers, on the Catholic side of the divide. England was Protestant, yet reasons of state usually made a Catholic marriage alliance more attractive than a Protestant one. The relative political weakness of the Protestant royal families—most of them from Scandinavia or from small German principalities—made Protestant marriage alliances unlikely to enhance English power. On the other hand, the intense religious hatreds of the era made negotiations across the divide difficult and dangerous. Unsuitable personalities made the bargaining harder still.

This situation plagued James and his descendants. His son, Prince Charles, went to Spain for wedding negotiations in 1623, accompanied by his father's handsome favorite, the Duke of Buckingham (King James had a reputation for being far more interested in beautiful men than beautiful women). The Spaniards drove a hard bargain, insisting that in return for marrying the infanta, Charles would have to convert to Catholicism and then stay in Spain for a year to show the sincerity of his conversion. Buckingham was outraged by the proposal and rejected it—in his view it was tantamount to holding the prince hostage. When he and Charles got back to England, they demanded that James avenge their humiliation by declaring war on Spain. He did, but unlike the Virgin Queen in her face-off

against the armada, he was not adequately prepared and suffered a crushing defeat.

Charles ended up marrying a French princess instead, Henrietta Maria, in 1625. Her Catholicism made her unpopular among ordinary Britons, and she was not allowed to attend his coronation. Forty-eight years later *his* younger son, the future James II, married an Italian Catholic, Mary of Modena, who was similarly despised in England and nicknamed “The Pope’s Daughter.” The fact that James *did* become a Catholic—something his father had refused to do—alarmed the Protestant majority, which greeted the news that Mary had given birth to a son with disbelief. They argued that the baby was a changeling, smuggled into court in a bed-warming pan. Rather than accept a Catholic monarchy, England drove James and Mary out in the bloodless coup that we remember today as the Glorious Revolution.

Charles I’s older son, Charles II, meanwhile, had done rather better with a Catholic bride. The downside of his marriage to a Portuguese princess, Catherine of Braganza in 1662, was the lack of an heir. The upside was that her dowry included the city of Bombay, on the west coast of India. Until then, the British East India Company had been finding Portuguese and Dutch competition in the Far East hard to match. With this excellent port, however, and now allied with a former rival, Britain began its rise to dominance in India, a position it would hold until the mid-twentieth century. The Anglo-Portuguese friendship begun by this marriage treaty persisted without interruption for the next 350 years. As was so often the case, the person at the center of the deal, Catherine of Braganza, got no joy from it herself. To the contrary, she lived a life of perpetual mortification. Her husband was the most notorious womanizer in the history of the British monarchy, siring at least fourteen illegitimate children and fet-

ing his mistresses openly at court. To add insult to injury, she was falsely accused of trying to poison the king and of fomenting a Catholic uprising; Parliament regularly petitioned Charles II to divorce her and take a Protestant bride instead.

**I**n 1707, Parliament passed the Act of Succession, specifying that from then on the monarch, whatever else he or she might be, *had* to be a Protestant. The Royal Marriage Act of 1772 added the further refinement that the monarch’s spouse must also be a Protestant and that no prince was allowed to marry without the king’s express permission. Making rules is one thing but living up to them is another. In 1785, George, Prince of Wales and eldest son of George III, married his mistress, Maria Fitzherbert, even though she was six years older than he, twice widowed, a commoner and a Catholic! The ceremony took place in secret at Mrs. Fitzherbert’s London house, with the Reverend Robert Burt officiating, a humble curate whose motive was the prince’s agreement to pay off the debts that had until recently kept him confined to debtors’ prison. Rumors of this wedding circulated in London, but the prince preserved what a later political generation would call “plausible deniability.”

George stands out as one of the most odious men in the history of the royal family. He was widely lampooned at the time for his vanity, profligacy and greed. His father urged him to marry some suitable Protestant princess. Parliament declared that it would not pay off his massive debts or increase his annual allowance unless he did. Though the political power of the monarchy was weaker by this time, it was still a central element of the British Constitution—and George was the heir. His father’s incipient madness also made him the obvious choice in the event of a regency. The unfortunate lady selected to be his bride

was Princess Caroline of Brunswick, who was brought to London in 1795 unaware that she was about to be married bigamously. The French king, Louis XVI, along with all his family, had recently been executed by revolutionaries in Paris. It would have been reasonable for George to fear that monarchs might perish across the whole of Europe, himself included, and that he should be circumspect. In fact, the lesson was completely lost on him.

Historian Steven Parissien describes what happened on the day of the royal wedding in *George IV: Inspiration of the Regency* (incidentally, bringing to mind the dilemma subsequently faced by Jane Eyre):

At the wedding itself . . . the groom was visibly drunk and almost passed out twice. During his carriage ride to the chapel in the company

of “any just cause or impediment,” burst into tears. (The Archbishop was plainly terrified lest the rumoured marriage to Mrs. Fitzherbert be divulged at this point: he stared directly at the Prince as he enunciated the word “impediment,” and repeated the passage regarding “nuptial fidelity” twice.)

The honeymoon was no better, being held at a nearby hunting lodge to which the prince had invited a crowd of his drinking companions. They lolled about, cracking jokes and snoring on the couches. George was too drunk and miserable to consummate his marriage at first but got around to it a few days later. He slept with Caroline only three times but did succeed in making her pregnant. The couple soon separated, and he spent the next twenty-five years spreading rumors that *she* was



of [his close friends] the Prince professed his undying love for Maria Fitzherbert. . . . At the altar, completely inebriated, “he hiccupped out his vows of fidelity” while turning to gaze meaningfully at Lady Jersey [another mistress] and, in the anxious silence after the Archbishop of Canterbury asked whether anyone knew

having affairs and giving birth to children by other men.

This prince, who would eventually become George IV, incidentally, illustrates another of the problems with monarchy—the fact that heirs sometimes have to wait a very long time before succeeding to the throne.

Having nothing to do in the meantime, they tend to misbehave. That was certainly true for him, for his successor William IV, for the man who became Edward VII in 1901, and for the man who is currently waiting to become Charles III and is already sixty-two.

The historian David Cannadine once proposed that the way to think of the morality of British monarchs was by analogy with a pendulum, swinging back and forth between probity and debauchery. The accession of Queen Victoria in 1837 certainly bore witness to a swing in the direction of moral uprightness. A highly principled and virtuous eighteen-year-old with an overdeveloped sense of duty, Victoria soon got busy singling out an appropriate husband from among Europe's Protestant royals and selected the even more upright Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha. Because she was the monarch, she proposed to him, a scene nicely re-created in the recent film *The Young Victoria*. When he said they should have a long honeymoon she chided him gently in a letter, writing: "You forget, my dearest Love, that I am the Sovereign, and that business can stop and wait for nothing. Parliament is sitting, and something occurs almost every day, for which I may be required, and it is quite impossible for me to be absent from London." She permitted them no more than three days at Windsor.

Victoria was, nevertheless, besotted with Albert and married him at St. James's Palace on February 10, 1840, in a state of high excitement. She was the first royal bride to wear white, a decision that greatly contributed to white becoming the standard color for young brides. Hers was also the first of the royal nuptials to feature a wedding cake (displacing an earlier delicacy known as "bride pie," which could contain living birds). After the day's official duties were

accomplished, they retired. In her diary Victoria recalled their first evening together:

I NEVER, NEVER spent such an evening!! MY DEAREST DEAREST DEAR Albert sat on a footstool by my side, and his excessive love and affection gave me feelings of heavenly love and happiness I never could have *hoped* to have felt before! He clasped me in his arms, and we kissed each other again and again! His beauty, his sweetness and gentleness—really how can I ever be thankful enough to have such a *Husband!*

Next morning, "when day dawned (for we did not sleep much) and I beheld that beautiful angelic face by my side, it was more than I can express." They lived happily for the next twenty-one years and brought forth nine children, nearly all of whom married into the other royal families of Europe (perhaps generations of interbreeding among royal cousins contributed to the hemophilia that they inadvertently spread across the continent).

Albert's death in 1861 was a crushing blow from which Victoria never recovered. Although she outlived him for forty years, she never cast off her mourning clothes. When her oldest son, Bertie, later Edward VII, married Princess Alexandra of Denmark in 1863, the bride again wore white. Victoria refused to wear anything but black and would not join the main celebration, watching instead from an enclosed balcony in St. George's Chapel, Windsor. Her diary entry that night was full of self-pity:

All is over and this (to me) most trying day is past. It all seems like a dream now and leaves hardly any impression on my poor mind and broken heart. Here I sit lonely and desolate, who so need love and tenderness, while our two daughters have each their loving husbands and Bertie has taken his lovely, pure, sweet bride to Osborne . . . Oh, what I suffered in the chapel,

where all was joy, pride and happiness . . . Only by a violent effort could I succeed in mastering my emotion.

Alexandra was also destined to lead a long and difficult life, because Bertie represented the opposite swing of the pendulum. He was already developing a scandalous reputation for gambling and womanizing. Among his many mistresses was Alice Keppel, the great-grandmother of Camilla Parker-Bowles, who was to feature in a later generation's royal-wedding scandals.

**I**n the twentieth century, facing a large and literate electorate, the British monarchy began to pay attention to its public image. During World War I, for example, the Britain of King George V fought the Germany of his first cousin, Kaiser Wilhelm II. The two men looked similar; both were grandsons of Queen Victoria, and George's family name, Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, was resonantly Germanic. The sudden surge of blazing hatred for everything German that came with the war prompted the king to change the family name to "Windsor," which it remains to this day. He also encouraged his children to marry in Westminster Abbey, just over the road from the Houses of Parliament, as a way of underlining, and drawing attention to, their Englishness. Kate Middleton and Prince William had their ceremony this year in Westminster Abbey, and it is easy to regard the place as the logical spot for royal weddings. For several hundred years, however, it had been reserved for coronations and funerals, while the weddings took place elsewhere.

One of the first royal couples to take advantage of this new location was George V's second son, another George, and his bride, Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon, who have recently enjoyed a lot of popular attention thanks to the movie *The King's Speech*. They married in the abbey in 1923. George's

older brother became King Edward VIII when their father died in January 1936. Yet again, marriage plans caused a severe political problem. Just as it was illegal for the heir or monarch to marry a Catholic, so was it illegal for him to marry a divorcée, because the king was head of the Church of England, and the Church did not permit the remarriage of divorced people if the former spouse was still alive. Edward, however, was infatuated with a twice-divorced American woman, Wallis Simpson, and declared his determination to marry her. Political power was now vested firmly in Parliament rather than the monarchy. The prime minister, Stanley Baldwin, told the new king that Mrs. Simpson was unacceptable. Edward retorted that he would not live without her and, to the horror and astonishment of politicians and common folk alike, abdicated.

That left his brother to ascend the throne as King George VI. He hated it but had the same flinty sense of duty as Queen Victoria, a sense conspicuously absent in Edward himself. Edward married Mrs. Simpson in France, and among their honeymoon visits was one to see the German dictator Adolf Hitler. Political supporters of the monarchy were relieved that he and his American wife (who became the Duchess of Windsor) had no children since they would have become rival claimants to the throne, challenging the right of succession of George VI's daughter Elizabeth.

**T**he circumstances of Princess Elizabeth's wedding to Prince Philip in 1947 bear witness to the changing fortunes of Britain and the changing nature of monarchy. No longer politically significant, royal marriages were less fraught with the making and breaking of dynasties, leaving slightly more room for the forces of personal attraction. The choice of spouse was narrowly restricted but the future queen had at least some opportunity to decide for herself

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whom she would wed. She had met Philip in 1939, when he was eighteen and she thirteen, and had admired him. Philip, born in Corfu, belonged to the deposed royal family of Greece but grew up in England, served in the Royal Navy during World War II and was thoroughly Anglicized.

By the time they announced their engagement, Britain was undergoing a profound political transformation at the hands of a majority-Labour government that was dedicated to socialism. The major industries were being nationalized, the National Health Service was being established, the British Empire was slated for abolition, India was about to become independent and Prime Minister Clement Attlee was eager to raze, as far as possible, the invidious class distinctions that had bedeviled England for centuries. To add to the drama, the nation was in the midst of an economic crisis, brought about by the stress of fighting World War II. The Marshall Plan had not yet begun, the winter of 1947 was extremely severe, and draconian rationing of food, clothes and other essentials persisted.

Could a regime of this kind, under these emergency circumstances, possibly countenance a lavish and costly royal wedding? Ironically, the answer was yes. Ministers, Attlee included, recognized the overwhelming popularity of the monarchy among nearly all classes, shared the admiration felt by most Britons for the king's willingness to stay in London throughout the Blitz (Buckingham Palace had suffered bomb damage) and understood the political folly of opposing a wholehearted regal spectacle. The princess wore an elaborate white silk

dress with an immense train, the groom looked smart in full navy uniform, the gilded coaches and prancing horses were brought out of storage and stables, and the parade route from Buckingham Palace to Westminster Abbey was lined with great cheering crowds. It seems illogical that the same people who had ejected Prime Minister Winston Churchill two years earlier by voting Labour should love the king and his winsome daughter, the living embodiments of social inequality, yet they did.

Conditions continued to change rapidly in the ensuing decades. Elizabeth ascended the throne upon her father's death in 1952 and was crowned the next year. By then, royalty was becoming a form of celebrity—photographers were to plague her with increasing aggressiveness and diminishing deference for the next sixty years.

As royalty became celebrities, celebrities started to become royalty, a process begun by the marriage of an Irish American movie actress, Grace Kelly, to Prince Rainier of Monaco in 1956. The prince even perpetuated a time-honored tradition by asking the bride's father for a dowry of \$2 million. Mr. Kelly was horrified but eventually did pay up. And then there was Elizabeth II's sister, Princess Margaret, who actually married a photographer, Anthony Armstrong-Jones, in 1960. Such a choice by a princess would have been unacceptable among all former generations. Theirs was also, aptly, the first televised royal wedding in British history.

The story from that point on is well known to anyone aged thirty or more. Of Elizabeth II's four children, three married

only to divorce a few years later. The most celebrated royal wedding of our era was that of Charles, Prince of Wales, to Lady Diana Spencer in 1981. Her innocence, her beauty and her distinguished lineage made her appear an auspicious choice. The mood in Britain at the time is well captured by Tina Brown in her biography of the princess:

The wedding day's magic was so powerful that a mad, unreasonable joy coursed through the nation. The symptoms of royal fever . . . included extreme pulsations of patriotism at the sound of choral music, tears welling up involuntarily in eyes, shivers up spines, and intense envy of the bride and groom. The splendor and hopefulness of it all offered a vision of England that turned every hack into a troubadour, every Roundhead into a cavalier.

Unlike the long-suffering princesses of British and European royal history, however, Diana had not been brought up to endure humiliation in dignified silence; neither did she accept that reasons of state trumped personal well-being. She was forced, after the wedding, to recognize that her life would now be lived almost entirely in the public eye and under the most rigid forms of protocol. To quote Tina Brown again: "It was like an icy wave hitting her in the face. The oldness, the coldness, the deadness of royal life, its muffled misogyny, its whispering silence, its stifling social round confronting sycophantic strangers, this is how it would be until she died." Bad enough by themselves, these conditions were made worse by her husband's long association with Camilla Parker-Bowles, which, it soon appeared, had *not* been broken once and for all at the time of the wedding.

The blame never lies on only one side when a marriage fails, and Diana surely had faults of her own. Anyone who is married knows that, after the early months of euphoric union, there are always going to

be areas of tension and practical difficulties to be worked out between spouses. Imagine trying to wrestle them to the ground when literally thousands of other people are eagerly sowing discord by photographing, gossiping about and magnifying every public moment. Imagine being surrounded by people whose ostensible role is to help protect your privacy but who turn out to be corruptible, willing at the right price to tell the tabloid press every lurid detail. No wonder so many modern royal marriages have turned sour.

Is there any reason to hope that Prince William and Princess Kate will fare any better than their recent predecessors? Without getting carried away, I do think there are grounds for cautious optimism. The circumstances of their early lives have been less different than those of Charles and Diana. They are closer in age. Prince William knows better than anyone what his mother had to endure and surely feels anxious not to put his own bride through the same ordeal. Kate is now playing the role that Diana played in 1981, but this time the bridegroom, every time he smiles, vividly brings to mind Diana herself. There's something auspicious about this configuration, surely.

The bad old world of arranged marriages and domineering husbands has been exchanged for the bad new world of chosen marriages, paparazzi and pitiless publicity. Through it all, however, an intense, burning love of the monarchy has persisted across all social ranks in Britain and throughout the British Commonwealth. There is no significant constituency in Britain in favor of abolishing it. Americans say they love equality and democracy, but they love the British monarchy too and join in wholeheartedly at moments like this. There's even a palpable sense of what might be called dynasty-envy in the United States, by which certain distinguished political families (the Kenne-

dys, the Clintons and the Bushes) take on a pseudoroyal glamour of their own. You only have to compare the muted fanfare around the weddings of Jenna Bush in 2008 or Chelsea Clinton last year, however, to realize that the Americans still have a very, very long way to go.

American excitement over the wedding also suggests an oblique recognition of the *benefits* of monarchy, once shorn of its obvious ancient abuses. Monarchy separates ceremonial leadership from political leadership, functions which, in the United States, are combined in the president. Nearly half of all American voters, in any given election year, voted *against* the person who now represents the nation, and probably don't like him, whereas no British person voted against the queen. She can embody the nation over and above its squabbling politicians and can present a more dignified *idea* of the country to its own citizens and to outsiders.

Royalty has also, in the twentieth century, been a brake on, or antidote to, dic-

tatorship. The restoration of the Spanish monarchy ended the sordid and repressive Franco era, while the constitutional monarchies of Holland and Scandinavia are among

the most moderate and politically stable entities in the world. The fact that accident of birth decides who will be king or queen might offend our sense of meritocracy, but it also protects us against the kind of unscrupulous personalities who often claw their way to the top in democracies.

There are two caveats, however. First, the monarch has to have a well-developed sense of duty and to be-

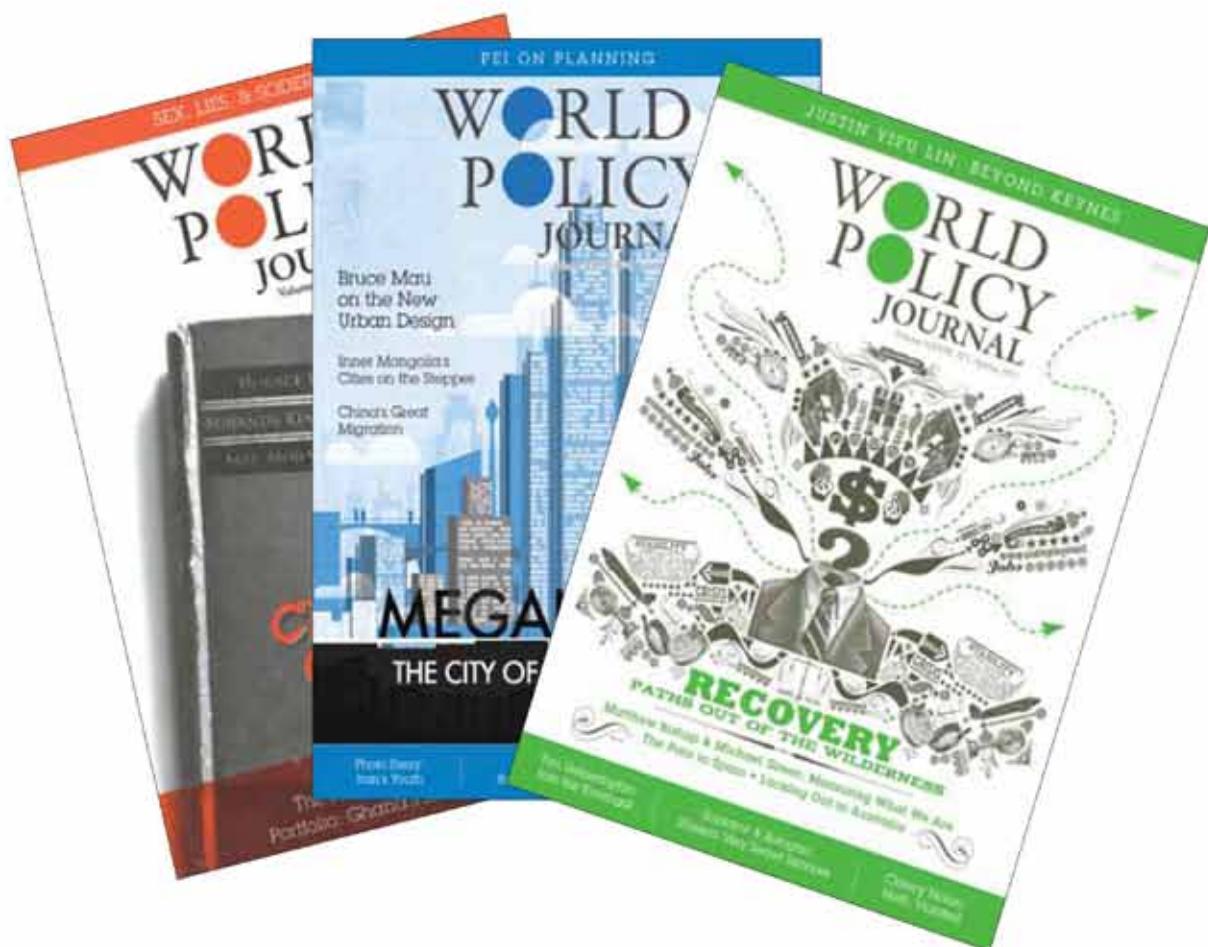
have with political impartiality, a point that Elizabeth II appears to have understood perfectly. Second, the existence of the monarchy must not offend the citizens' essential idea of their own country. The United States, in other words, can never have a king. Nevertheless, its people can look on, with admiration and a disguised form of regret, at monarchy's capable functioning elsewhere, nowhere illustrated better than in a British royal wedding. □



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# Ahmadinejad vs. The Ayatollah

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By Abbas Milani

Ahmadinejad and his oligarch cronies have been having a rough couple of months. The ayatollah is out for blood, and those in “elected” office are under attack. In fact, the dominant narrative taking over the Islamic Republic has lately sounded a great deal more like the magical realism of Gabriel García Márquez than the realpolitik of Hans Morgenthau. It has been two months of bizarre allegations of voodoo and venal sins taking place in the offices and homes of the president’s closest aides and confidants—not to mention the far more run-of-the-mill charges of their financial corruption and sweetheart deals in places like Belarus. It has been a time of repeated open threats of the president’s impeachment, the same president who was not too long ago the darling of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, close as Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was to the supreme leader’s own ideas and ideals. It has been a time when more than a hundred members of Iran’s parliament, the Majlis, have requested an investigation into the last presidential election and the allegation that 9 million votes were purchased through cash payments from government coffers. Amazing how the tables can turn. Indeed, just like

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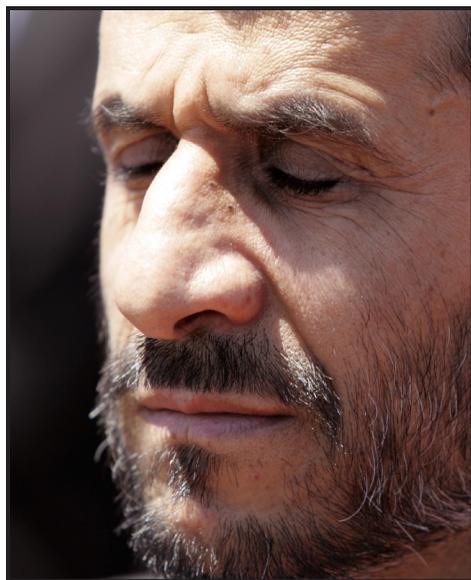
the police chief in *Casablanca*, these conservative (ayatollah-backing) members of the Majlis are “shocked, shocked” that electoral cheating is going on in Iran. Lest we forget, Mir Hussein Moussavi (the “losing candidate” in that same presidential election), his wife, Zahra Rahnavard, Mehdi Karroubi (the other “losing” candidate) and his wife, Fatemeh, have been under house arrest for months—for making the same accusations of fraud. Thousands of Iranians have been imprisoned, and about a hundred of the regime’s past ministers, deputy ministers and directors were put on Stalinist-era-like show trials to confess to the crime of alleging a bought-and-paid-for vote. Hundreds of young women and men were tortured, dozens raped and thousands forced into exile for questioning the June 2009 presidential-election results. It was of course all, according to Khamenei, a sinister U.S. plot to create a “velvet revolution” using Gene Sharp’s model and George Soros’s money.

And it has been months filled with charges of an even broader American-Zionist conspiracy. Naturally, they are the real masterminds behind the recent crisis, placing their “infiltrators” in the president’s entourage. The public has been told not to be fooled when the Western media or governments try to use these reports of voodoo, exorcism and demonic powers in the Iranian president’s office against the clerical regime; a high-ranking official close to Khamenei just announced that while these heresies were rampant and unacceptable

among Ahmadinejad's confidants, it should be remembered that the U.S. military has been tapping into such demonic forces for decades. He went on to opine that European militaries have also begun emulating America in the use of the devil's powers.

For much of the spring, Ahmadinejad and the Iranian regime have stood on the edge of a political precipice. In early May, a commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) predicted that forces loyal to Ahmadinejad, now called "the deviationist line"—yet another reminder of Stalinist- and Maoist-era monikers and purges—would "stand up" to the regime, creating a far greater threat to the country than the instability circa June 2009, when an estimated 3 million people in Tehran came out to protest what they considered a fraudulent election. Another IRGC commander predicted "a bloody year" ahead. And evidence that the looming clash might well be approaching came when forces close to Khamenei confronted the man Ahmadinejad had named governor of Shiraz Province, bringing the local government to a standstill. The president is increasingly attacked by much of the regime's vast propaganda machine, portrayed at best as a gullible dupe. He is surely "possessed," declared Mesbah-Yazdi, Ahmadinejad's onetime guru and spiritual guide.

As spring came to a close, pressure against Ahmadinejad increased. It became clear he had few options left. He chose at least a temporary retreat, agreeing to humiliate himself by appearing on television and reassuring the nation that he is a docile soldier of the supreme leader. Yet even that was not enough to create at least the appearance of a truce. No sooner had Ahmadinejad performed his act of public contrition and reaffirmed his "father-son-like" relationship with Khamenei than the ayatollah's representative to the IRGC attacked the president for his unsatisfactory formulation of fealty. Your relationship with the supreme leader,



Ahmadinejad was reminded in a tone of reprimand, is not one of a son to a father but of a mere follower to a saintly leader (imam vs. mamum).

Since then, many in Ahmadinejad's close circle of friends and allies have "been arrested and vigorously interrogated." Soon thereafter, a prominent Friday-prayer leader (all of whom have great influence as religious figureheads—their statements would normally be read as signs that these were the words of the supreme leader himself) announced that these arrests and interrogations had taken place on direct orders of Khamenei. For reasons that are not clear, only hours after this proclamation, the supreme leader's press office issued an elliptical statement in which it did not directly challenge the allegations but suggested that deeds and words attributed to Khamenei must come only from his press shop and no other. All said and done, it is simply hard to believe that Ahmadinejad's closest aides could have been arrested without Khamenei's approval. There are rumors that of those taken into custody, the one accused of being the president's chief devil conjurer has

confessed to receiving his demonic powers only after desecrating a copy of the Koran. When websites reported that the unlucky disciple of the devil had been condemned to ten consecutive hangings, another site, this one close to Ahmadinejad, indicated its support of the punishment—one more sign the president is willing to make tactical retreats in order to cling to power.

The only indication that some respite is coming to this stranger-than-fiction fight has been the declaration of a prominent member of parliament (generally considered to speak for Khamenei) that the supreme leader now seems inclined to allow Ahmadinejad to serve out the rest of his term—only, of course, if he mends his ways, rids himself of his unsavory aides and accepts his role as a mere foot soldier in the divine deliberations of the ayatollah. Ahmadinejad supposedly has two years left in office. As things stand today, it is unlikely that he will make it that long. And if, at the end, he is still somehow president, Ahmadinejad will surely be but a mere empty shell of the bombastic, combative, feverishly messianic persona he created for himself before the crisis began.

What on earth is going on in Iran? Is it simply a battle over turf and ego, oil money and the perks of power, or is there something more structural, even historical, behind this sudden emergence of tension between the supreme leader, Khamenei, and his handpicked two-term presidential choice, Ahmadinejad?

**T**here is a deep incongruity embedded in the Islamic Republic's body politic: the mix of the modern republican principle of popular sovereignty (and the election of a president by the people as the embodiment of this republicanism) with the medieval notion of *velayat-e-faqih*, absolute personal despotism allegedly anointed by God and altogether independent of any need for the public's support or votes of approval. The

forced marriage of these two mutually discordant ideals was the result of the 1979 revolution gone awry. Democratic in nature and aspiration, that revolution was itself the result of a historic crisis of leadership faced by the institution of absolutist monarchy in Iran. Ever since the mid-nineteenth century, every monarch either died in exile or by an assassin's bullet. Mozaffar ed-Din, in power from 1896 to 1907 (and the only king to die peacefully on the throne), saw the writing on history's wall, signing a decree that gave up all the powers of an absolutist ruler; he agreed instead to become a constitutional monarch, modeled on the Belgian system in which the king's powers were curtailed by the creation of a constitution and a parliament. It did not take long, however, before another absolutist, albeit modernizing, monarch came to power in 1925, creating the Pahlavi dynasty. In fact, the 1979 revolution that finally ended the Iranian royal tradition was launched to protest the shah's (the second Pahlavi monarch's) usurpation of absolutist prerogatives.

That revolution was, of course, abducted by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, who cleverly and disingenuously used it to implement his peculiar theory of clerical dominance. Then, as now, a majority of Shiite ayatollahs reject this notion, suggesting instead that only upon the return of Shiism's Twelfth Imam—believed to be in hiding, or occultation, until the apocalyptic day when he will emerge and usher in a just and perfect society—can a true Islamic state be created. And only an infallible imam can lead such a state, as its rules and commands are divine, absolute and incumbent on every citizen. Khomeini, on the other hand, suggested that the clergy could seize power anytime the occasion allowed. Thus in the constitution, inspired partially by his ideas, a disproportionate share of authority was placed in the hands of the unelected supreme leader. At the same time, as a nod

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to the democratic nature of the revolution, the constitution gave space for a presidency in charge of the executive branch, elected by direct popular vote, and a legislature, also brought to office by the will of the people. Though this division of power was in direct breach of the often-repeated social contract offered by Khomeini to the citizens of Iran in 1978 when he was jockeying to become the leader of their democratic movement—more than once he promised a republic with absolutely no direct role for himself or the clergy in governance—when he eventually took charge, the incongruent constitution, giving Khomeini the lion's share of the power, was passed.

Remarkably, even this disproportionate appropriation of authority in his favor was not enough to sate what one writer called his “lust for power,” and the few remaining freedoms in the governance structure were soon co-opted. The ayatollah immediately sent out to every institution, every city, every province and every branch of the military his own emissaries, called “imam's representatives,” who gradually became the real sources of power and decision making in their respective organizations. (Khamenei has continued this tradition; only now the emissaries are called “leader's representatives.”) And Khomeini's office began to bring centralized, regimented control to the appointment of Friday-prayer leaders, who are each in charge of a mosque and wield great power in their individual neighborhoods, towns or cities. Oftentimes, these individuals can, in fact, be more powerful than any official member of the city or district government. Every week, every Friday-prayer leader receives his talk-

ing points from the supreme leader's office and is expected to shape his sermon around these instructions. Thus, on top of directly controlling the country's radio and television networks (as stipulated in the constitution), the supreme leader dictates the contents of sermons, affording him yet another lever of power—and a critical tool for shaping public discourse in the country. The sudden surge of orchestrated attacks on Ahmadinejad is only the most recent example of this disciplined, centrally controlled power of the pulpit in action.

Moreover, when the first and only free and fair elections to the already-marginalized offices of the president and the Majlis ended in results unfavorable to the clergy and to Khomeini—or more specifically, when Abolhassan Bani-Sadr was elected president and soon developed a surprising streak of independence from Khomeini and his cronies, and when many unaffiliated nationalists and democrats were elected to the Majlis—the clergy soon decided to introduce the concept of *nezarat-e estesvabi* (beneficent supervision), appropriating for themselves the added right to decide who can stand for election to any office in the country.

Further curtailing the republican component of the constitution is the tendency of the supreme leader to micromanage the country and thus enter into domains set aside by law for the president or those in other governmental branches. Khamenei has shown a decided proclivity for this kind of intervention. No surprise, a concept has conveniently been developed to legitimize these encroachments as well. The supreme leader can, at will, issue what is referred to

as a *hokm-e hokumati*, or governing order. Like papal encyclicals, these orders trump all existing executive, legislative or judicial rules, and adhering to them is incumbent on everyone in the country.

This seizure of power to build a monolithic clerical despotism in a country that fought a revolution to win republican freedoms has created a governing structure rife with different sources of tension. On a popular level, the people have continued to use every occasion to protest the fact that the rights of mature citizenship they fought for are still denied them. The personal power now concentrated in the hands of the supreme leader is far greater than that of the shah, overthrown precisely for amassing too much authority for himself.

Many of Iran's most prominent ayatollahs are clearly disgruntled with the status quo. The clerical coalition that helped bring the current regime to power is no longer unified. Some of them disagree with Khomeini's theory of governance, some doubted Khamenei's clerical bona fides to replace Khomeini in the first place, and some are increasingly vocal about Khamenei's attempt to disregard the historic independence of seminaries, trying to control them as he does by giving each school large sums of governmental funds.

And at the pinnacle of authority, linger-

ing contradictions between the power of the president and that of the supreme leader and between democratic and clerical rule have created a house divided. Tensions between elected presidents and the unelected supreme leader have been a constant fact of life in Iran for the last thirty-two years. Ever since 1979 and the passage of the new constitution, every president has had some public falling-out with the supreme leader. Today, of the six presidents in the history of the republic, the first was impeached; the second was assassinated; the third (Khamenei) survived an assassination attempt and had two major face-offs with the then supreme leader, Khomeini; the fourth and fifth presidents, Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and Mohammad Khatami, each served two terms, and each repeatedly butted heads with Khamenei—both are now considered virtual enemies of the state. And today, Ahmadinejad confronts the peril of impeachment and an inglorious end to his rule.

**T**he perks and prerogatives of power are not only, in Henry Kissinger's famous words, an aphrodisiac, they also tend to induce in those in authority delusions of grandeur. Ahmadinejad and Khamenei have been no exceptions to this rule. The middle class is discontent, both a presidential vote and elections to a new Majlis await—the opportunity is ripe for a power play. Ahmadinejad, a true “little man,” ended up with a big office thanks to the Machiavellian guile of Khamenei and some in the IRGC who used government funds and the vast network of members of the Basij (a gang-cum-militia on the regime payroll that numbers in the hundreds of thousands) and families of martyrs who receive regular stipends



from the government to solicit support for Ahmadinejad. But suddenly the president began to believe the myth of his popularity and power. His well-known messianic fervor (his oft-repeated faith in the imminent apocalyptic return of the Twelfth Imam) also guaranteed that equally dogmatic fatalists, or a strange amalgam of opportunists out to use the president's zeal and piety to pillage the public coffers, would gather around him with glee. The fact that during Ahmadinejad's six years in office, Iran has received almost \$500 billion in oil and gas revenue—equal to about half of Tehran's entire oil income from the time the resource was first discovered in the country—has made public funds an even more appealing and rewarding prey for financial predators.

But concurrent with Ahmadinejad's growing delusions about his sway over his domain, Khamenei developed an increasing appetite to concentrate more and more absolute power in his own hands. For months, Khamenei supporters and websites close to the IRGC have been attacking Ahmadinejad for a long litany of alleged sins. He stands accused of advocating Iranian nationalism—something anathema to conservative clerics who promote *ummat* (spiritual community) over *mellat* (nation). He was criticized for lauding past kings, particularly Cyrus, praised in the Bible for freeing Jews from their Babylonian captivity. Cyrus may have been lambasted by the infamous “hanging judge,” a close ally of Khomeini, as a “Jew boy” and a “sodomite,” but the president went out of his way to praise him for his promulgation of human rights. Ahmadinejad was further criticized for celebrating the Persian new year, *Nowruz*, considered pagan by the pious and the subject of numerous attacks by Khamenei himself. Some accused Ahmadinejad of starting secret negotiations with the United States and European powers, and even conspiring with them against Khamenei and his supporters.

In spite of the propaganda blitzkrieg against him, Ahmadinejad has yet to submit to the most important demand of his opponents, namely dismissing his closest ally and confidant Esfandiar Mashaei. Accused of financial corruption, moral turpitude and unsavory conjurations, he is at the heart of the controversy. The two men are old friends and spiritual soul mates. Mashaei is now also the father-in-law of one of Ahmadinejad's sons. More than once, the president has waxed eloquent about Mashaei's sublime spiritual accomplishments. In the language of a disciple heaping praise on his master, Ahmadinejad has talked of Mashaei as belonging to a higher realm and as possessing a kind of gnosis forbidden to the rest of us mere mortals.

Ahmadinejad has appointed Mashaei to a total of thirteen critical jobs, one of which was the position of cultural czar where he had hundreds of millions of dollars at his disposal. He used these funds to create a vast network of personal patronage. Soon enough, rumors began to spread that Mashaei and Ahmadinejad were planning to do a Putin-Medvedev political tango in Iran (though it is unclear whether either man has any idea how tense the relationship is between their Russian counterparts). In recognition of the opposition's popularity, the Ahmadinejad-Mashaei team began to distance itself from the clergy and Khamenei. The police were reportedly ordered to be less brutal in forcing women to wear the Islamic hijab. Conservative clerics and a few commanders of the IRGC threatened to enforce the law requiring women to don Islamic garb themselves. One cleric claimed that “blood must be shed” to uphold the practice. There were even rumors that the Ahmadinejad-Mashaei team had sent secret messages to the United States and the EU, naming Khamenei the culprit in the violent suppression of the democratic movement and in Iran's intransigence in nuclear negotiations.

Ahmadinejad has also kept in place another controversial deputy president accused of massive financial malfeasance. Moreover, the president continues to defy the parliament on key issues, including his decision to merge ministries against their will, while refusing to create an independent ministry of sports. Even more critically, Ahmadinejad declared he would place himself in the role of acting minister of oil, a key position in a regime that survives on petroleum-funded patronage and where the government budget is more than 80 percent dependent on oil and gas revenues. And though the Guardian Council, in charge of interpreting the constitution in Iran, declared the decision to play the dual roles of president and minister of oil illegal, Ahmadinejad continued to insist on keeping both jobs. Only when his case was sent to the judiciary by the Majlis in early summer did he back down, appointing a “caretaker” for the oil ministry. In reality, this effectively leaves Ahmadinejad in control while abiding by the letter of the law.

The brewing crisis came to a boil when Ahmadinejad fired the clergyman in charge of the ministry of intelligence. This was the second cleric he had fired from that position in less than two years. Both had been allies of Khamenei. A few weeks earlier, Ahmadinejad pointedly sacked and embarrassed the foreign minister, another key Khamenei supporter. The hapless official learned of his own dismissal through local African media and leaders with whom he was supposedly negotiating. Khamenei showed no public reaction to the first two challenges to his authority. Even the third time, he initially sent a private letter to Ahmadinejad ordering him to reinstate the minister. When Ahmadinejad still refused, Khamenei finally decided to teach his handpicked president a lesson in power. He wrote and published a letter to the dismissed minister, ordering him to return to work. Ahmadinejad was

neither copied nor even named in the missive. (For eleven days after the minister’s reinstatement, Ahmadinejad refused to go to work in protest of what he saw as an egregious interference with his power.) Websites close to Khamenei then published reports that those in “the deviationist line” had a “mole” in the ministry of intelligence and that the minister had been fired for the sin of finding and dismissing the mole! Indeed, it was alleged that the president and his allies had taken sensitive classified documents from the intelligence ministry and intended to use them against their enemies. Ahmadinejad, praised until but a few months ago as the most reliable devotee of the notion of *velayat-e-faqih*, refused to heed the allegedly divine commands of Khamenei.

Khamenei’s supporters have since offered a variety of theories to justify the supreme leader’s encroachment on the power of the executive (and according to the constitution, naming ministers is a clear prerogative of the president). Some have suggested that past presidents deferred to the supreme leader in choosing ministers of intelligence, defense and foreign affairs—it is Ahmadinejad who stepped over the line. A few have used a more honest “explanation,” suggesting that in Iran today the supreme leader enjoys “divine legitimacy” and speaks for God, and thus his words and wishes trump any law or tradition. One sycophantic mullah—and a Friday-prayer leader in the holy city of Meshed—declared that “all the zeros in the number of votes a person gets” mean nothing until the supreme leader “validates” the vote and appoints the man president. Another claimed that challenging Khamenei’s words is tantamount to *shirk*, or heresy. Yet another apologist argued that Khamenei was not elected to his post by the eighty-six-man body of experts, as stipulated by the constitution, but was “discovered” by them, clearly implying that only God, having imbued him with his saintly sagacity,

*Khamenei and his allies are methodically and ruthlessly establishing the planet's most unabashed theocratic despotism.*

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can “undiscover” him. In short, the crisis is being used to jettison any vestiges of republicanism left in the constitution.

In the apparent random maze of these allegations, there is a common thread: Ahmadinejad is seen as trying to distance himself from the clergy and endear himself to the moderate middle classes of Iran. While the president’s assumption that there, in fact, exists the possibility that the democratic opposition or the wealthy and erudite will coalesce around him might be an indication he’s truly gone off the deep end, to the outside observer, the effort itself should indicate the continuing appeal of democratic ideals.

While the world is rightly rejoicing a much-belated Arab Spring (a spring that saw its first blossoms in Tehran in June 2009), in Iran, Khamenei and his allies are methodically and ruthlessly establishing the planet’s most unabashed theocratic despotism. And as many thinkers and scholars have long pointed out, the spirit and rhetoric of republican democracy is inevitably founded on respect for reason, science and the rule of law. The recent assault on the faint hints of republicanism in the Iranian constitution has been, as expected, accompanied by a frightening attack on rationalism, the social sciences and democracy as tools of “Western arrogance” intended to undermine true Islam. Just as the rise of Khomeini in 1979 bred radical Islam, the success of Khamenei in his new antidemocratic project can only reinvigorate the now-declining forces of that radicalism. Without a democratic Iran, the Arab Spring is unlikely to change the face of the region.

Most dangerously, the more isolated the regime becomes, the more intensely it needs to attain the status of at least a virtual nuclear state—one that has demonstrated the technological capacity to build a bomb should it make the political decision to do so—and use this status as a deterrent against outside pressure and domestic challenges to its hold on power. The most recent statement by the IRGC cautioning the world about the nature of the Iranian regime’s military might, touting the country’s new domestically produced and reportedly nuclear-capable warheads, is perfect evidence of that. The IAEA’s recent statement indicating it is no longer able to guarantee the peaceful nature of Iran’s nuclear program is yet another sign of Tehran’s growing capabilities. It may be that only a democratic government can genuinely solve Iran’s nuclear issue, but the road to this transition is treacherous. For, though a war of attrition between the president and the supreme leader is sure to expedite the possibility of a more open political system, it is also highly likely to beget a kind of Bonapartist resolution in which an entrenched absolutist regime led by the IRGC is the result.

Indeed, the Iranian leadership has long followed the advice of one of Shakespeare’s characters who suggested that giddy minds must be kept busy with foreign wars. The regime’s true Achilles’ heel remains the economy, and so long as it faces these domestic pressures, there will be a distinct motivation to become increasingly belligerent with the outside world and more repressive at home. Almost a million young men and women are added to the labor force each year. The



Islamic Republic faces an uphill battle in its attempt to end subsidies on most basic commodities without serious social dislocation. Up until now, leaders have navigated their way out of such disruption by ensuring cash payments to the poorest strata of society. Most economists predict that the current pattern is untenable, and the false quiet of today presages a storm tomorrow. Khatami, as a self-appointed peacemaker of conflicts of late, recently attempted to once again save the regime by finding a workable compromise between Khamenei and the opposition. In a speech, he claimed that both sides have been wronged and argued that they must forgive each other. His plea has been met with cold derision from all involved.

As the economic situation worsens, Khamenei and his allies in the IRGC have the perfect opportunity to confront Ahmadinejad and wrest him from power, whether figuratively or literally. The blame game has already begun. There has been a remarkable series of revelations and claims about Ahmadinejad's mismanagement of the economy. Government sources have

declared the real unemployment rate to be above 30 percent. And the inflationary rate for basic foodstuffs is rumored to be about 25 percent. A couple of leading members of parliament have accused the government of publishing false statistics about the economy, including announced rates of inflation and economic growth. With hyperinflation on the horizon, Depression-era unemployment numbers already a reality (a high-ranking government official announced that one in three young men and women is unemployed in the country), and the democratic winds in the region continuing unabated—not to mention that Syria, the Islamic Republic's sole regional ally, faces grave challenges—Khamenei might soon need a sacrificial lamb. And Ahmadinejad is the perfect candidate. The IRGC will no doubt be happy to oblige; the fight between a populist president and an increasingly isolated supreme leader makes the latter more and more dependent on the power and muscle of the IRGC and the gangs of street thugs and bullies it controls and uses to intimidate the disgruntled population. In the short run, then, the IRGC is in a win-win situation in this confrontation. It is only how their power will be shaped in the future that remains to be seen.

Unless Ahmadinejad has a few still-unused aces up his sleeve, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that he and his allies clearly overestimated his power and popularity. Hitherto, no one has shown any desire to defend the president. More than once, his allies threatened to bring out millions in support of his cause, but so far it has been all empty bluff and bluster. The rancorous fight between the ambitious, weakened president and the embittered, isolated Khamenei is both a symptom of a structural crisis and an added ingredient for its continuation. One can be but strategically optimistic about Iran's future and tactically benighted about its immediate fate. □

# The Good Autocrat

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By Robert D. Kaplan

**I**n his extended essay, *On Liberty*, published in 1859, the English philosopher John Stuart Mill famously declares, “That the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others.” Mill’s irreducible refutation of tyranny leads him to—I have always felt—one of the most moving passages in literature, in which he extols the moral virtues of Marcus Aurelius, only to register the Roman’s supreme flaw. Mill writes:

If ever any one, possessed of power, had grounds for thinking himself the best and most enlightened among his contemporaries, it was the Emperor Marcus Aurelius. Absolute monarch of the whole civilized world, he preserved through life not only the most unblemished justice, but what was less to be expected from his Stoical breeding, the tenderest heart. The few failings which are attributed to him, were all on the side of indulgence: while his writings, the highest ethical product of the ancient mind, differ scarcely perceptibly, if they differ at all, from the most characteristic teachings of Christ.

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And yet, as Mill laments, this “unfettered intellect,” this exemplar of humanism by second-century-AD standards, persecuted Christians. As deplorable a state as society was in at the time (wars, internal revolts, cruelty in all its manifestations), Marcus Aurelius assumed that what held it together and kept it from getting worse was the acceptance of the existing divinities, which the adherents of Christianity threatened to dissolve. He simply could not foresee a world knit together by new and better ties. “No Christian,” Mill writes, “more firmly believes that Atheism is false, and tends to the dissolution of society, than Marcus Aurelius believed the same things of Christianity.”

If even such a ruler as Marcus Aurelius could be so monumentally wrong, then no dictator, it would seem, no matter how benevolent, could ever ultimately be trusted in his judgment. It follows, therefore, that the persecution of an idea or ideals for the sake of the existing order can rarely be justified, since the existing order is itself suspect. And, pace Mill, if we can never know for certain if authority is in the right, even as anarchy must be averted, the only recourse for society is to be able to choose and regularly replace its forever-imperfect leaders.

But there is a catch. As Mill admits earlier in his essay,

Liberty, as a principle, has no application to any state of things anterior to the time when mankind have become capable of being improved by free and equal discussion. Until then,

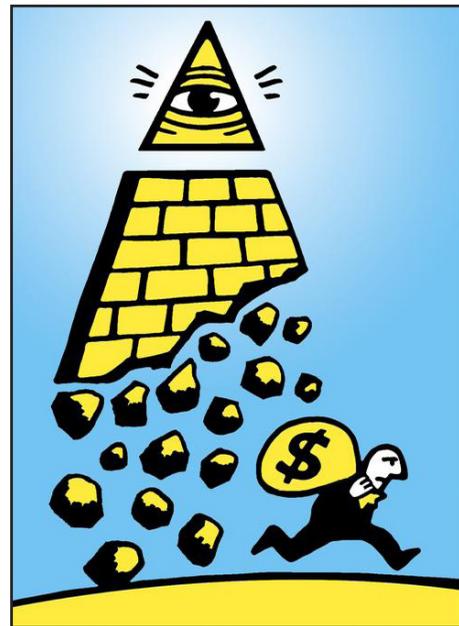
there is nothing . . . but implicit obedience to an Akbar or a Charlemagne, if they are so fortunate as to find one.

Indeed, Mill knows that authority has first to be created before we can go about limiting it. For without authority, however dictatorial, there is a fearful void, as we all know too well from Iraq in 2006 and 2007. In fact, no greater proponent of individual liberty than Isaiah Berlin himself observes in his introduction to *Four Essays on Liberty* that, “Men who live in conditions where there is not sufficient food, warmth, shelter, and the minimum degree of security can scarcely be expected to concern themselves with freedom of contract or of the press.” In “Two Concepts of Liberty,” Berlin allows that “First things come first: there are situations . . . in which boots are superior to the works of Shakespeare, individual freedom is not everyone’s primary need.” Further complicating matters, Berlin notes that “there is no necessary connection between individual liberty and democratic rule.” There might be a despot “who leaves his subjects a wide area of liberty” but cares “little for order, or virtue, or knowledge.” Clearly, just as there are good and bad popularly elected leaders, there are good and bad autocrats.

The signal fact of the Arab world at the beginning of this year of democratic revolution was that, for the most part, it encompassed few of these subtleties and apparent contradictions. Middle Eastern societies had long since moved beyond basic needs of food and security to the point where individual freedom could easily be contemplated. After all, over the past half century, Arabs from the Maghreb to the Persian Gulf experienced epochal social, economic, technological and demographic transformation: it was only the politics that lagged behind. And while good autocrats there were, the reigning

model was sterile and decadent national-security regimes, deeply corrupt and with sultanic tendencies. These leaders sought to perpetuate their rule through offspring: sons who had not risen through the military or other bureaucracies, and thus had no legitimacy. Marcus Aurelius was one thing; Tunisia’s Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali, Egypt’s Hosni Mubarak and Syria’s Bashar al-Assad, quite another. Certainly, the Arab Spring has proved much: that there is no *otherness* to Arab civilization, that Arabs yearn for universal values just as members of other societies do. But as to difficult questions regarding the evolution of political order and democracy, it has in actuality proved very little. To wit, no good autocrats were overthrown. The regimes that have fallen so far had few saving graces in any larger moral or philosophical sense, and the wonder is how they lasted as long as they did, even as their tumultuous demise was sudden and unexpected.

Yet, the issues about which Mill and Berlin cared so passionately must still be ad-



dressed. For in some places in the Arab world, and particularly in Asia, there have been autocrats who can, in fact, be spoken of in the same breath as Marcus Aurelius. So at what point is it right or practical to oust these rulers? It is quite possible to force through political change, which leads, contrary to aims, into a more deeply oppressive, militarized or, perhaps worse, anarchic environment. Indeed, as Berlin intimates, what follows dictatorial rule will not inevitably further the cause of individual liberty and well-being. Absent relentless, large-scale human-rights violations, soft landings for nondemocratic regimes are always preferable to hard ones, even if the process takes some time. A moral argument can be made that monsters like Muammar el-Qaddafi in Libya and Kim Jong-il in North Korea should be overthrown any way they can, as fast as we can, regardless of the risk of short-term chaos. But that reasoning quickly loses its appeal when one is dealing with dictators who are less noxious. And even when they are not less noxious, as in the case of Iraq's Saddam Hussein, the moral argument for their removal is still fraught with difficulty since the worse the autocrat, the worse the chaos left in his wake. That is because a bad dictator eviscerates intermediary institutions between the regime at the top and the extended family or tribe at the bottom—professional associations, community organizations, political groups and so on—the very stuff of civil society. The good dictator, by fostering economic growth, among other things, makes society more complex, leading to more civic groupings and to political divisions based on economic interest that are by definition more benign than tribal, ethnic or sectarian divides. A good dictator can be defined as one who makes his own removal less rife with risk.

While the logical conclusion of Mill's essay is to deny the moral right of dictatorship, his admission of the need for obe-

dience to an Akbar or a Charlemagne at primitive levels of social development leaves one facing the larger question: Is transition from autocracy to democracy always virtuous? For there is a vast difference between the rule of even a wise and enlightened individual like the late-sixteenth-century Mogul Akbar the Great and a society so free that coercion of the individual by the state only ever occurs to prevent the harm of others. It is such a great disparity that Mill's proposition that persecution to preserve the existing order can never be justified remains theoretical and may never be achieved; even democratic governments must coerce their citizens for a variety of reasons. Nevertheless, the ruler who moves society to a more advanced stage of development is not only good but also perhaps the most necessary of historical actors—to the extent that history is determined by freewilled individuals as well as by larger geographical and economic forces. And the good autocrat, I submit, is not a contradiction in terms; rather, he stands at the center of the political questions that continuously morphing political societies face.

**G**ood autocrats there are. For example, in the Middle East, monarchy has found a way over the decades and centuries to engender a political legitimacy of its own, allowing leaders like King Mohammed VI in Morocco, King Abdullah in Jordan and Sultan Qaboos bin Said in Oman to grant their subjects a wide berth of individual liberties without fear of being overthrown. Not only is relative freedom allowed, but extremist politics and ideologies are unnecessary in these countries.

It is only in modernizing dictatorships like Syria and Libya—which in historical and geographical terms are artificial constructions and whose rulers are inherently illegitimate—where brute force and radicalism are required to hold the state together.

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To be sure, Egypt's Mubarak and Tunisia's Ben Ali neither ran police states on the terrifying scale of Libya's Qaddafi and Syria's Assad nor stifled economic progress with such alacrity. But while Mubarak and Ben Ali left their countries in conditions suitable for the emergence of stable democracy, there is little virtue that can be attached to their rule. The economic liberalizations of recent years were haphazard rather than well planned. Their countries' functioning institutions exist for reasons that go back centuries: Egypt and Tunisia have been states in one form or another since antiquity. Moreover, the now-fallen dictators promoted a venal system of corruption built on personal access to their own ruling circles. And Mubarak, rather than move society forward by dispensing with a pseudomonarchical state, sought to move it backward by installing his son in power. Mubarak and Ben Ali were dull men, enabled by goons in the security services. The real story in the Middle East these past few months, beyond the toppling of these decrepit regimes, is the possible emergence of authentic constitutional monarchies in places like Morocco and Oman.

Both of these countries, which lie at the two geographical extremities of the Arab world, have not been immune to demonstrations. But the protesters in both cases have explicitly called for reform and democracy within the royal system and have supported the leaders themselves. King Mohammed and Sultan Qaboos have moved vigorously to get out in front of popular demands by reforming their systems instead of merely firing their cabinets. In-

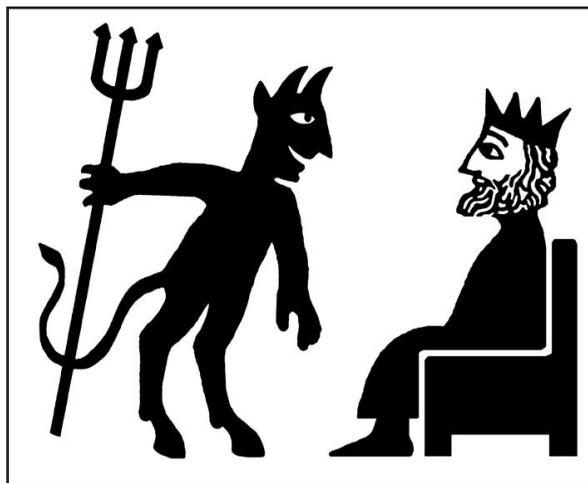
deed, over the years, they have championed women's rights, the environment, the large-scale building of schools and other progressive causes. Qaboos, in particular, is sort of a Renaissance man who plays the lute and loves Western classical music, and who—at least until the celebrations in 2010 marking forty years of his rule—eschewed a personality cult. The characteristics, then, of the benign dictator are evident, at times hewing to propositions set forth by the likes of Berlin: freedom may come as much from stability as from democracy; leaders must adhere to the will of the people, they need not in all cases be chosen by them. Yet in the Middle East these dictators remain the exception to the rule, and this is why quasi monarchies of the iron-fisted Assad or the crazed and tyrannical Qaddafi are now under assault.

**T**he place where benevolent autocracy has struck deep and has systematic roots is Asia. Any discussion of whether and how democracy can be successfully implemented might, because of the current headlines, begin with the Arab world, but the answers such as there are will, nevertheless, ultimately come in from the East. It is in those Asian lands that conventional Western philosophical precepts are challenged.

The ideology by which Asian autocrats stand in opposition to the likes of Mill and Berlin falls—to some extent—under the rubric of Confucianism. Confucianism is more a sensibility than a political doctrine. It stresses traditional authority, particularly that of the family, as the sine qua non of political tranquility. The well-being of the

community takes precedence over that of the individual. Morality is inseparable from one's social obligation to the kin group and the powers that be. The Western—and particularly the American—tendency is to be

dramatically raising the living standard of hundreds of millions of Chinese in such a comparatively short space of time—which, likewise, led to an unforeseen explosion in personal freedoms across China—was, de-



suspicious of power and central authority; whereas the Asian tendency is to worry about disorder. Thus, it is in Asia, much more so than in the Middle East, where autocracy can give the Western notion of freedom a good run for its money. The fact that even a chaotic democracy is better than the rule of a Mubarak or a Ben Ali proves nothing. But is a chaotic democracy better than the rule of autocrats who have overseen GDP growth rates of 10 percent annually over the past three decades? It is in places like China, Singapore, Malaysia and Vietnam where good dictators have produced economic miracles. These in turn have led to the creation of wide-ranging personal freedoms, even as these leaders have compelled people against their will on a grand scale. Here the debate gets interesting.

Indeed, probably one of the most morally vexing realizations in the field of international politics is that Deng Xiaoping, by

spite the atrocity of Tiananmen Square that he helped perpetrate, one of the great men of the twentieth century. Deng's successors, though repressive of political rights, have adhered to his grand strategy of seeking natural resources anywhere in the world, wherever they can find them, caring not with which despots they do business, in order to continue to raise the economic status of their own people. These Chinese autocrats govern in a collegial fashion, number many an engineer and technocrat among them, and observe strict retirement ages: this is all a far cry from the king of Saudi Arabia and the deposed leader of Egypt, sleepy octogenarians both, whose skills for creating modern middle-class societies are for the most part nonexistent.

Park Chung Hee, in the 1960s and 1970s, literally built, institutionalized and industrialized the South Korean state. It was Park Chung Hee's benign authoritarianism,

as much as the democracy that eventually followed him, that accounts for the political-economic powerhouse that is today's South Korea.

Then, of course, there is the founder of current-day Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew. In 1959, Lee became prime minister of what was then a British colony. He retired from that post over thirty years later (though he continued to exert significant power until very recently). As the British prepared to withdraw in the 1960s, Lee attached Singapore to Malaya, helping to form Malaysia as a bulwark against Indonesian expansionism. When racial tensions between ethnic Malays in the Malay Peninsula and ethnic Chinese in Singapore made the new federation unworkable, Lee seceded and the independent city-state of Singapore was born. When Lee assumed power, Singapore was literally a third-world malarial hellhole beset by ethnic tensions and communist tendencies; it was barely a country in any psychological sense and it certainly could not defend itself against powerful neighbors. Lee turned it into a first-world technological dynamo and transportation hub, with one of the highest living standards worldwide, and with a military that is among the best anywhere pound for pound. Along the way, a strong national consciousness was forged in the vein of a twenty-first-century trading state. Lee's method of government was not altogether democratic, and his intrusion into people's lives bordered on the petty and anal-retentive: banning spitting, the use of tobacco and chewing gum. The press, of course, was tightly controlled. Whenever criticized, Lee scoffed at how an uninhibited media in India, the Philippines and Thailand had not spared those countries from rampant corruption; multinationals love Singapore in large measure because of its meritocracy and honest government. Yes, Singapore is green with many parks, and so immaculate

it borders on the antiseptic. But it is also a controlled society that challenges ideals of the Western philosophers.

For Lee has provided for the well-being of his citizens without really relying on democracy. His example holds out the possibility, heretical to an enlightened Western mind, that democracy may not be the last word in human political development. What he has engineered in Singapore is a hybrid regime: capitalistic it is, but it all occurred—particularly in the early decades—in a quasi-authoritarian setting. Elections are held, but the results are never in doubt. There may be consultations with various political groupings, yet, in fifty years, there is still little sign that the population is fundamentally unhappy with the ruling People's Action Party (though its majority has fallen somewhat). Unsurprisingly, Lee makes liberals supremely uncomfortable. Fundamentally Mill, Berlin and many other Western philosophical theorists and political scientists—from Thomas Paine and John Locke to Francis Fukuyama of late—hold that people will eventually wish to wrest themselves from the shackles of repressive rule. That the innate human desire for free will inevitably engenders discontent with the ruling class from below—something we have seen in abundance in the lands of the Arab Spring. Yet, Confucian-based societies see not oppression in reasonably exercised authority but respect; they see lack of political power not as subjugation but as order. Of course, this is provided we are talking about a Deng or a Lee and not a Pol Pot.

To be sure, Asian autocracies are not summarily successful. Elsewhere, political Confucianism is messier. In Malaysia, Mahathir bin Mohamad lifted his people out of abject poverty and easygoing cronyism to mold another high-tech, first-world miracle; but he lacks virtue because of the tactics he employed as methods of control: vicious

campaigns against human-rights activists and intimidation of political opponents, which included character assassination. The Vietnamese Communist leadership has lately overseen dynamic economic growth, with, again, the acceleration of personal freedoms, even as corruption and inequalities remain rampant. Think for a moment of Vietnam, a society that has gone from rationing books to enjoying one of the largest rice surpluses in the world in a quarter of a century. It recently graduated in statistical terms to a middle-income country with a per capita GDP of \$1,100. Instead of a single personality with his picture on billboards



to hate, as has been the case in Egypt, Syria and other Arab countries, there is a faceless triumvirate of leaders—the party chairman, the state president and the prime minister—that has delivered an average of 9 percent growth in GDP annually over the past decade. Nevertheless, Vietnam's rulers remain fearful of public displays of dissatisfaction spread across the Internet. And there is China: continental in size, it produces

vastly different local conditions with which a central authority must grapple. Such grappling puts pressure on a regime to grant more rights to its far-flung subjects; or, that being resisted, to become by degrees more authoritarian. So terrified is its regime of its own version of an Arab Spring that it has gone to absurd lengths to block social media and politically provocative areas of the Web.

**H**ere is the dilemma. Yes, a social contract of sorts exists between these citizens and their regimes: in return for impressive economic-growth rates the people agree to forego their desire to replace their leaders. (Truly, East Asian autocracies have not robbed people of their dignity the way Middle Eastern ones have.) But even as such growth rates continue unabated—to say nothing of if they collapse or even slow down—at higher income levels, this social contract may peter out. For as people become middle class, they gain access to global culture and trends, which prompts a desire for political freedoms to go along with their personal ones. This is why authoritarian capitalism may be just a phase, rather than a viable alternative to Western democracy.

To be sure, once the basic issues of food and security have been addressed, pace Mill and Berlin, democracy retains a better possibility of getting it right than autocracy. This is because virtuous autocracies are hard to come by and usually rely on the genius of personality; whereas democracy, regardless of the personalities involved, is systemically better positioned to lead citizenries along the path of development. Of course, we will have to wait until China's economic growth slows down, or, failing that, continues until enough Chinese have more access to global culture. Only then can we really

*It is in Asia, much more so than in the Middle East, where autocracy can give the Western notion of freedom a good run for its money.*

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begin to draw conclusions about whether democracy represents the final triumph of reason in politics.

The genius of both Rome and America lies ultimately in their institutions, which allowed in the first place for their freedoms. True, the history of Rome—and particularly the death of the Roman Republic—is not in the least uplifting relative to the cause of political expression. But it was Rome's ability to provide a modicum of stability to parts of central Europe and the entire Mediterranean basin—and thus further the cause of personal freedoms (mind you, by the dismal standards of the era)—that is key to its achievement; and something which, in turn, is owed to its imperial superstructure. And as that superstructure became too unwieldy, an emperor like the gruff soldier Diocletian could allow for the division of the empire itself into several administrative parts, thus furthering its life span. America, for its part, is unique in its division of federal, state and local power over a

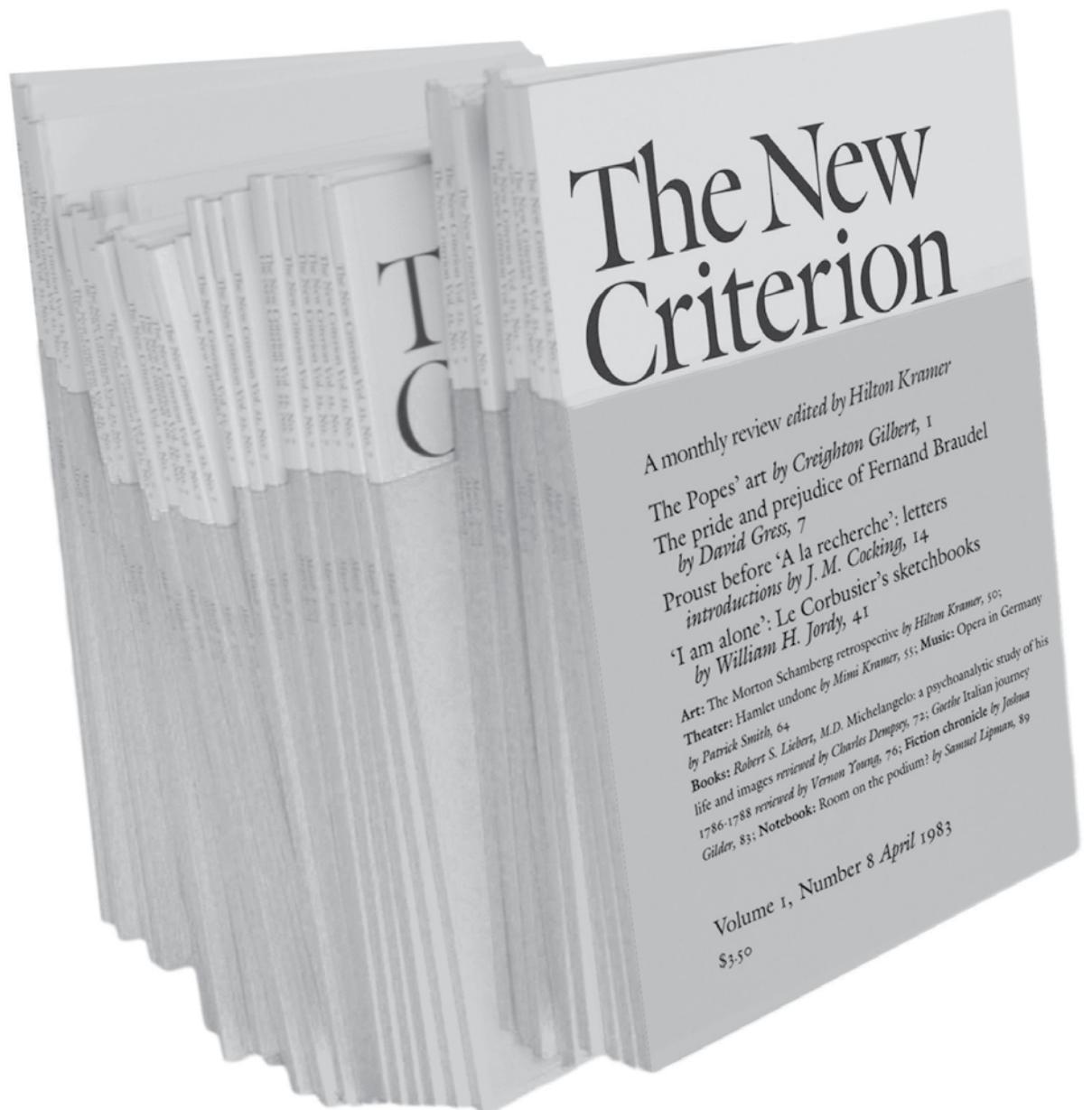
vast continental landscape, allowing for the full expression of its boisterous democracy. Say what you will about the deficiencies of the United States and particularly those of Rome, but they both indicate a very difficult truth central to the outcome of the Arab Spring: it is not about the expressions of freedom in Tahrir Square so much as it is about the building of legitimate institutions to replace illegitimate ones. And because institutions are hierarchical—and social media like Twitter and Facebook dismantle existing hierarchies—revolutions enabled by new technology do not necessarily lead to the building of governing organizations. Criticism is not enough, someone must wield power; hopefully in a way less coercive than before.

Meanwhile, the Arab Spring has raised the pressure on autocrats the world over to truly be good—or at least better. Though, even if they are, they can never ultimately get it right, as demonstrated by Mill's example of Marcus Aurelius. □

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## On My Way to the Colosseum...

By Mary Beard

**R. J. B. Bosworth**, *Whispering City: Rome and Its Histories* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), 368 pp., \$35.00.

**W**hispering City begins at the Colosseum metro station in central Rome, where a couple of tired “Roman legionaries” are taking a break and enjoying a cup of coffee at the station bar. Dressed up in hot, sweaty leather uniforms, with shiny helmets and unwieldy swords, these hucksters seem to make a reasonable living by selling themselves as a photo opportunity to weary tourists at the vast Roman amphitheater that still stands in the middle of one of the city’s busiest traffic islands, just across the road from the station. In fact, alongside the banks of souvenir stalls and the touts flogging what must be some of the most expensive bottled water in the Western world, these fancy-dress soldiers have become—over the last twenty years or so—a distinctive part of the landscape around Rome’s most iconic ancient monument.

Their presence has not been entirely trouble free. Some years ago, the “legionary business” got very nasty, when rival gangs

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**Mary Beard** is a professor of classics at Cambridge University and classics editor of the *Times Literary Supplement*.

tried to oust each other from the most visible and profitable pitches on the tourist route. The authorities were forced to step in with regulations: no more than fifty legionary licenses were to be issued at any one time, no one with a criminal record could be accredited and, as a precautionary measure, all swords were to be made of plastic. But there was no move to ban the trade entirely. This was largely because these characters were—and remain—very popular with the public. The truth is that the Colosseum is a stunning monument from the outside; on the inside, it is sadly disappointing. Over the last century of modern archaeology, it has been turned from a picturesque “site of memory” to an unattractively dilapidated ruin—hard for anyone to imagine in its original lavish form, and even harder to picture complete with the violent shows of fighting men and beasts that once took place there. The legionaries (or are they meant to be gladiators?) are one of the few things that can still bring it to life.

R. J. B. Bosworth’s *Whispering City* focuses on the religious, political and cultural disputes that have surrounded these monuments of the city of Rome over the last two centuries (“the jangling histories that clamor to be acknowledged in the Rome of the third millennium after Christ”). In the case of the Colosseum, one of these disputes has been about its sacred status. Is this a monument of the Catholic Church and a hallowed place of Christian martyrdom, or is it an archaeological site and symbol of the secular city? Across several chapters, Bosworth nicely tracks the swings of influence backward and forward between church and

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state by charting the appearance and disappearance of the prominent cross in the Colosseum's arena. First installed in the mid-eighteenth century, it was removed by the Napoleonic regime in Rome at the very end of the 1700s; a replacement was installed after the fall of the French and then taken down again when Rome became capital of Italy (and the pope was more or less penned up in the Vatican) in the 1870s. Mussolini had a cross put back again in 1927 (and it is still there, though to one side of the arena, and goes largely unnoticed).

In fact, Mussolini had other, secular ambitions for the Colosseum. For, in one of his bravest, or most shameless, interventions into the Roman cityscape, he also turned it into the landmark at one end of his new arterial road, the Via dell'Impero ("Empire Street")—which plowed through swaths of the idyllic old city (or slums, depending on your point of view) to end up in the Piazza Venezia at the foot of the Victor Emmanuel Monument (the "wedding cake" or the "typewriter"). This road has since been renamed the Via dei Fori Imperiali ("Street of the Imperial Fora," after the ancient monuments which it also partly destroyed); but it is still a major Roman highway, or more often bottleneck, and is still decorated along one side with four marble maps showing the growth of the ancient Roman Empire put up by "Il Duce." The fifth map, which documented the extent of the Fascist empire, including Libya, Eritrea and Somalia—with Albania added later—was removed after Mussolini was overthrown; parts of it are said to have turned up in Kansas in the 1990s, apparently taken

home in the 1940s by a member of the Forty-Fifth Infantry Division.

But as Bosworth shows, the question of who really *owns* Rome has long been at the center of controversy across the city as a whole. The Colosseum debate proves to be only one of many archaeological victims of circumstance. And the push and pull between the papacy and the secular state is but one aspect in the proprietary battle for the city.

Rome—how to manage it, arrange it, beautify it and interpret it—has been debated by scholars, politicians and critics, both local and foreign, from antiquity to our own day (but especially in the West since around 1800). For centuries, elite travelers from northern Europe and America treated the city as somehow "belonging" to them, as if they were the more authentic heirs of ancient Roman culture than the modern population. Bosworth has unearthed some devastating passages of cultural imperialism—none more telling than an op-ed in the *London Times* in 1911 which greeted the completion of the Victor Emmanuel Monument. "The Romans themselves," the writer observes, "are not content that Rome should be a city for tourists and students. They regard it as their own city." As if it *wasn't* their own city? But more generally, there is a repeated pattern in the history of modern travelers' responses to Rome—one that is often found in reactions to Athens and other Mediterranean "classical" towns as well. First the (let's say) nineteenth-century visitor laments the appalling unsanitary

conditions of the town in question: the disease, the dark, narrow streets, the dirt. Ten years later, the slums have been cleared, the people have been rehoused in modern blocks with modern conveniences, and the same writer now laments the loss of the

detail at each stage. This memorably includes the mad plan of the elderly Garibaldi in the 1870s to solve Rome's flooding problems by diverting the river Tiber through a canal well away from the city. The plan was scotched for lack of funds, and also because,



picturesque streets that had been the distinctive hallmark of the old city. It is as if the towns of the Mediterranean had been built as a stage set for the travelers from the north and the west to enjoy, and to decry.

Then there are the reactions and debates of bona fide Romans to the extraordinary environment in which they live. The whole of the history of Rome is in Bosworth's sights, right back to its mythical foundation by Romulus in 753 BC. But his narrative of the Romans' engagement with their past concentrates on the period from the Napoleonic occupation, through the Risorgimento, on—unearthing marvelously revealing

for most Romans, the Tiber (uncontrollable or not) was itself one of the indispensable monuments of the city. Some people even argued that the Tiber floods were markers of great events in Rome's past. Indeed, it was only because the Tiber overflowed all those centuries ago that the baby twins, Romulus and Remus, had been washed up and rescued by the wolf.

*Whispering City* is not, for the most part, a history of the outsider's view of Rome; it looks hard at the micromanagement of the city's history from the inside and has a sharp eye for significant clues. Part of the story emerges in the apparently simple

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change of street names. Neither the United States nor the UK commemorates its history quite so emphatically in the coining of its thoroughfares. In Italy and other European countries, a national story is regularly on display at every street corner—not just the country’s heroes, but dates of battles and key victories. London may have a Trafalgar Square, but it has nothing like a Via XX Settembre (named for the date on which the Italian forces broke through the walls of Rome in 1870) or a Via XXVII Aprile (named for the date on which Mussolini was captured) or, for that matter, a Piazza dei Cinquecento (named not, as many imagine, for a glorious century of the Italian Renaissance but for the—almost—five hundred Italians killed at the Battle of Dogali in Ethiopia in 1887).

Throughout the book, Bosworth points to the changing politics of this particular form of naming in Rome. Mussolini’s Via dell’Impero was by no means the only highway to be given a new title to fit new politics. The Via dei Legionari (“Legionary Street”) was renamed “Via Antonio Gramsci” in 1944, after the Marxist critic and philosopher imprisoned by Mussolini. (Bosworth does not mention that the part of the Via Gramsci in front of the British School at Rome was later renamed “Piazzale Winston Churchill”—making a pair of rather unlikely political neighbors.) And changing times had drastic effects on other names and locations. The “Viale Adolf Hitler,” named for the Führer’s famous visit to Rome in 1938 (when, ironically, he was shown round the major antiquities of the city by one of Rome’s best-known young

Marxist archaeologists), was swiftly and pointedly changed after World War II into the “Viale delle Cave Ardeatine,” to commemorate a Nazi massacre in 1944.

He also seeks out modern statues and memorials that have played a key role in defining, or redefining, the Romans’ view of their own history. One fascinating section tells the tale of the statue of Giordano Bruno—sent to the stake for heresy by the Inquisition in 1600—which was erected in 1889 as the centerpiece in the Campo dei Fiori (the very spot on which he had been burned). On the surface this was a moment of triumph for the new secular nation, canonizing a martyr to the cause of free inquiry, persecuted by the tyranny of the Church. The inscription on the base of the statue states that it was put up by “Roman students with the approval of the civilized nations.” Crowds came to witness the unveiling of the statue (inaugurating, as one speaker put it, “the religion of reason”), and the Vatican duly huffed and puffed, then holding a rival “expiatory mass” in St. Peter’s Basilica a couple of weeks later. Yet, as Bosworth explains, there remained unresolved questions about exactly what Bruno stood for. How far was he being promoted as a symbol of out-and-out anticlericalism, in a city where the overwhelming majority of the population were professing Catholics? How far was the creation of this nationalist icon in fact connected to an increasingly expansionist foreign policy—disastrous as that often was, as the Dogali massacre shows? Or how far was Bruno a symbol created more by the outside world than the Italians themselves? After all, the original idea may have

*The point is that the history of Rome is always a “work in progress” and remains so right up to the present moment, with all the ambivalences and contradictions that implies.*

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come from Italian students, but the organizing committee included the likes of Victor Hugo and Henrik Ibsen.

How local history, foreign policy and the status of religion can all be erected in but one Roman monument is quite remarkable. For whatever its origins, the statue has certainly continued to be a focus of conflict between the Catholic Church and its critics. In the 1920s, Pope Pius XI tried to persuade the new Fascist administration of the city to have it taken down. When that failed, the Church retaliated in 1930 by canonizing Bruno's main prosecutor, Robert Bellarmine. Even now, it gets covered in decidedly anticlerical graffiti (“Morte ai preti” or “Death to all priests” is about as clearly anticlerical as you could get). This is carefully removed by the “antigraffiti squads,” acting under the instructions of left- and right-wing city governments alike.

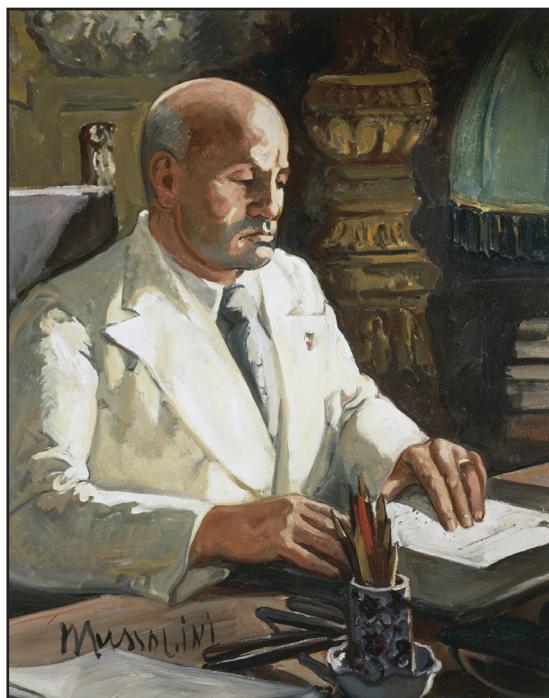
**B**osworth is, however, at his absolute best on the Fascist period, and on Mussolini's attempts to refashion the history of the city in the 1920s and '30s. Even though, as Bosworth reminds us, Mussolini claimed in 1922 never to have visited a museum, his increasing engagement with the ancient Roman past of the city is well-known and has often been regarded with amused tolerance or even sneaking admiration by modern classicists and ancient historians who would strenuously denounce every other aspect of his policies. True, the Via dei Fori Imperiali may now be deemed an urban eyesore; and the pretensions of Il Duce to be the new emperor Augustus, complete with laurel wreath and fasces in

some elaborate fancy-dress spectacles, appear more than slightly ridiculous. Yet, it is commonly and rightly said, our knowledge of the archaeology of Rome was transformed under his regime. His archaeologists rediscovered some of the most important monuments of the city, now its best-known landmarks. It is thanks to them that we have the four republican temples that are visible in the center of the square known as the “Largo Argentina.” And, most famously of all, it is to them that we owe the rediscovery of Augustus's “Ara Pacis” (“Altar of Peace”), with some of the finest sculptures to have survived from antiquity. This was reerected in a prominent position next to the Tiber, within a pavilion designed by one of the regime's favorite architects, Vittorio Morpurgo, with considerable hands-on interference from Mussolini himself. This has recently been demolished and replaced (rather more than “refashioned” as Bosworth has it, in a rare misrepresentation) with a stark, brilliant-white new pavilion designed by Richard Meier—a controversial postmodernist intrusion into the cityscape which makes Morpurgo's old version look relatively modest.

Of course there are now qualms about Mussolini's archaeological methods. Under the regime's slogan of *romanità* (“Romanness”), his team cheerfully dug through the remains of all other eras to reach the ancient Roman remains they prized, thus destroying all kinds of information that might have been gleaned on later periods of the city's history. And the policy of “preservation through isolation”—that is, of clearly marking off, and separating, the archaeological

remains from their urban surroundings—is at odds with more recent ideas of preservation and urban planning. Yet it is still the case that “our” ancient city of Rome is in large part a rediscovery and a re-creation of Il Duce and his archaeologists.

These developments are deftly placed in a wider context. Bosworth explains, for example, that these archaeological initiatives



were part of a much bigger picture which involved the Vatican too. If, on one side of the city, Mussolini was constructing a road to link the Colosseum to the Piazza Venezia, on the other side, in celebration

of his “pact” with the Catholic Church, and with the keen support of the pope, he planned an equally aggressive highway (the Via della Conciliazione—“Reconciliation Street”) leading from the Vatican to the Castel Sant’Angelo, so joining the papal city to the secular city center. These schemes were, in a way, an answer to that old question of “Who owns Rome: church or state?”

Mussolini came closer than most to squaring the circle, and to suggesting that (at least on the level of city planning) it might be both.

But the main message that underlies *Whispering City* is how fragile the boundaries are between the Fascist regime and the periods earlier and later. It now suits almost everyone to bracket off the rule of Mussolini, to treat it as a clearly defined period of dictatorship. But the truth is that a host of the historical initiatives of Il Duce found their roots in far earlier times. Many politicians of the Risorgimento and before had already cast themselves as ancient Romans, much as Mussolini tried to take on the mantle of Augustus. And the idea of “isolating” the ancient monuments had been an aim since the Napoleonic period (Mussolini was different only in the sense that he had the determination, power and resources to carry it out). Looking

forward, the boundaries are just as porous. As Bosworth reminds us, many of the classic Fascist plans and schemes were not completed, or in some cases even started, until the 1950s. The Via della Conciliazione itself



was not finished until 1950, nor was the distinctively Fascist main train station (Roma Termini). Some monuments were even later: the Palazzo dei Congressi and the Church of St. Peter and Paul at Mussolini's suburban development known as EUR (Esposizione Universale di Roma) were not open for business until 1958. Even in 1960, some of the major venues of the Rome Olympics were Fascist sports halls—Mussolini's stadium, "Foro Mussolini," having been cleansed under the name "Foro Italico."

The point is that the history of Rome is always a "work in progress" and remains so right up to the present moment, with all the ambivalences and contradictions that implies. One nice irony is that in his first chapter Bosworth explores Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi's recent dealings with Libya: just a couple of years ago Berlusconi apologized for Italian imperial rule there and welcomed Muammar el-Qaddafi ("a great and wise leader of the Libyan people") to Rome, adding in a pledge of \$5 billion compensation for past Italian atrocities. Meanwhile, Qaddafi cast himself as a descendant of the North African emperor, Septimius Severus. How different this story looks only a few months after Bosworth must have written it.

I, for my part, cannot help thinking back to the legionaries at the Colosseum and wondering how their story will change now that the Italian government has taken sponsorship for restoring the building from a firm of luxury shoemakers. When big private enterprise meets small-scale private enterprise, how long will the little guys survive? □

## Gods in Flight

By *Richard Overy*

**Martin van Creveld**, *The Age of Airpower* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2011), 512 pp., \$35.00.

**A**lmost exactly a hundred years ago, a young Italian airman dropped a couple of grenades from a small biplane on Turkish soldiers in the war between Italy and the Ottoman Empire for control of the largely desert territory. The grenades were difficult to use, and the crew had to pull out the pins with their teeth. But according to most accounts of the history of aerial warfare, this launched the bombing age. Now, a century later, expensive high-tech fighter-bombers are patrolling over the same desert areas, this time destroying the ground units of Colonel Qaddafi's discredited army (and occasionally civilians). The power of the weapons and how they are delivered has been transformed. The questions that first arose in 1912 about the effectiveness and morality of air attacks remain.

Martin van Creveld completed his new history of the airpower century just before NATO provided a neat top-and-tail to the story. But he would no doubt argue that the effectiveness of the new strikes on Libya

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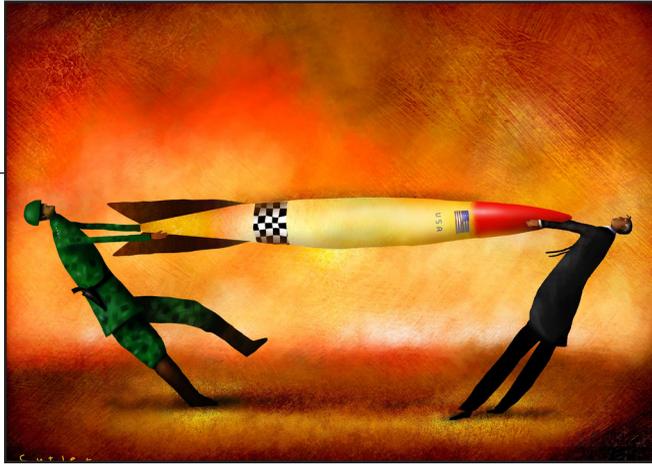
is questionable. His thesis is broadly that the importance of modern air forces has been greatly exaggerated: they can neither hold land nor deploy over long distances; their accuracy is not a great deal better than the German Ju-87 “Stuka” dive-bomber of World War II; modern aircraft are expensive to maintain in the field and too few in number to confer a formidable advantage. In this case he might well add that the strategic confidence that air strikes would make the difference in the Libyan civil war has, like so much airpower extrapolation, proved to be misplaced. Qaddafi’s forces are taking evasive precautions, the ebb and flow of the conflict is difficult to gauge, and NATO has never really spelled out its aims. Invasion and occupation might do the trick, but as the legacy of Afghanistan and Iraq has shown, this is a much riskier business than it might once have looked.

On issues of morality, van Creveld plays his cards close to his chest. His real beef is not about the ethical questionability of using aircraft in the knowledge that they will also kill civilians, but about the waste of resources and the unredeemed promises which result from the wrong choice of strategy and weapons. It is not perhaps bad faith on the part of the century’s air-force generals—who seem to have sincerely believed in the power of their armaments—but misplaced optimism and blind disregard of the facts. From Libya in 1912 to Iraq in 2003, van Creveld argues that it is really armies that matter (and occasionally navies). Airpower has been a misnomer.

This is a deliberate polemic. Ever since it was clear that aircraft could carry bombs

and machine guns to inflict damage on enemy aircraft and troops, nations have wanted to have them. The suggestion that they actually achieve very little on their own would scarcely have stopped the stampede for larger, faster and more destructive air platforms. When nation-states had the chance to stop the rush—in 1922–23 at the Hague conference or the disarmament conference of 1932–34—they balked at the idea. Even the antiwar lobby of the 1930s thought that an international air-police force would be sufficient to ensure a permanent state of world peace, without ever thinking how this might work. Van Creveld focuses on one of the key reasons for the failure of air disarmament—the strong desire of the imperial powers to be able to use aircraft to quell the rising tide of anti-colonial protest. The *Royal Air Force War Manual* called these colonial peoples “semi-civilised” and assumed that they would be cowed when they saw the bombing plane, symbol as it was of civilization.

Very soon came World War II, and civilized people became the target of air attacks on a scale unprecedented, before or since. Van Creveld sees this as the high point of airpower, when its claims were less spurious than throughout the rest of the century. But the real success story, he argues, comes with combined operations: the German air force powering forward with the armored fist of the army to protect its advance from enemy aircraft while destroying ground obstacles in the way; or American naval aircraft supporting the thrust across the Pacific by obliterating the Japanese air force and sinking ship after ship of the Japanese



navy. Even here it is still necessary to temper the argument. Bombing an enemy tank or ship was difficult and often wasteful; building and sustaining large air forces diverted resources from possible alternatives. The best that can be said is that without airpower in World War II, it was difficult to win (though the disorganized Russian army held out against the German air force through to 1943, when the Red air force at last became a half-serious threat). This is not a wholly negative conclusion. The current fashion for “jointery” between the three armed services reflects a long learning curve in which arguments that aircraft would replace armies and navies have been swallowed back in favor of the idea that each arm supports the others.

It is nevertheless the case that from 1945 onward, airpower has been seen as the god in the machine over and over again, from the bombing of North Korea, the Rolling Thunder operation against Vietnamese Communists and the Soviet battle against the mujahideen (in which an estimated 456 aircraft were lost against a guerrilla enemy with none), to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, still going on today. Van Creveld is critical of all the claims made for airpower

during this long half century; the sheer cost and complexity of modern aviation has reduced even the richest air forces to a few hundred fighter-bomber aircraft. And however high the lethality of these planes, they cannot be risked too much because of the replacement cost. In the end, this means they merely serve to create conditions in which ground forces have to do the real work of holding ground and fighting insurgency. Van Creveld points out that the landmark manual on counterinsurgency produced under U.S. General David Petraeus in 2006 has just five pages on the exercise of airpower, in an appendix. Even in the 1950s and 1960s, when “old-fashioned” aircraft were still in use, the major air powers were defeated, despite having overwhelming air support. From Malaya to Algeria to Vietnam, it was the insurgents who won out and the great power that had to withdraw. This is a lesson, van Creveld insists, that has never really been learned despite the many examples. This might well explain why NATO planes are being forced to crank up their activity; in almost all cases where the efficacy of airpower has not been proven, it has led to escalation. The result has usually been a lot more dead civilians.

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**I**t might well be asked why airpower has in general not delivered on its promise. The one thing that van Creveld credits aircraft with is reconnaissance, which cannot easily be carried out any other way. This, of course, was what armed forces thought military aviation was for when they first started using it a century ago. But the combat effectiveness of aircraft has been compromised throughout its history by the development of effective countermeasures of a variety of kinds—fast fighters to intercept bombers, ground antiaircraft artillery, concealment, dispersal, ground-to-air missiles, air-to-air missiles—so that a constant seesaw results, aircraft move on a stage, antiair measures develop in tandem. The Soviet use of this weaponry (principally helicopters) in Afghanistan was undermined by mountain-based guerrillas armed with Stinger missiles (which could be operated by just one or two insurgents), or by infiltration of Soviet air bases, where aircraft could be disabled as they landed or took off. The whole point of asymmetric warfare is that the weaker side needs to find ways of restoring some kind of operational symmetry, and they usually do.

The second enemy of airpower has been technological advance. That may seem to contradict the one thing airmen always claimed for their service—that aviation was the threshold technology. But, antiair efforts have also been a major source of technical development (radar is perhaps the most critical one to recall), while the evolution of new weapons—from nuclear missiles to drones to satellites—has superseded that of simple planes. It is this fact

that has rendered airpower increasingly redundant. Van Creveld speculates that the real danger to the Western world might now be a sudden “space Pearl Harbor” in which a malign but technically advanced enemy disables key satellites and brings about the financial and social collapse just avoided in the recent economic crisis. This is as tantalizing as H. G. Wells’s prophetic vision in his 1908 *War in the Air* that German bombers would annihilate cities in minutes and destroy the fragile crust of modern civilization. Of course, it is worth noting that much of the world’s economic and social life managed to function without PCs, mobile phones, eBay or cash machines just twenty short years ago.

That still leaves nuclear weapons, the true successors to airpower. They are capable, in the wrong hands, of obliterating an entire city or, in the right numbers, the globe. They are also the epitome of how and why airpower has been a disappointment—they are both too destructive to use and irrelevant to winning battles, that is, unless you were willing to incinerate continents of people. The logical end point of airpower development ever since the Italians used small grenades in the Libyan Desert has been the search for the perfect delivery system and the perfect armament. During World War II, the Royal Air Force thought it had found the solution with the Lancaster bomber, which could carry thousands of incendiaries and proved itself capable of doing to Hamburg something not very different from an atomic bomb. But the firestorm could not easily be reproduced, since it depended on certain meteorological conditions and a

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highly inflammable target, while its strategic effects were negligible, since Hamburg was producing 80 percent of its pre-raid output within three months. The answer to these shortfalls was the Manhattan Project, and by 1945 only the United States was rich enough and free enough of war damage to see it through. Even today there are thousands of nuclear warheads and hundreds of missiles waiting to deliver an awful apotheosis from the Pandora's box opened a century ago. That still begs the question of whether Hiroshima and Nagasaki were actually necessary, or made the difference in 1945; much more emphasis is put by today's historians on the conventional fire-bombing and the Soviet destruction of the Japanese Kwantung army in Manchuria in ten days. Van Creveld hedges his bets on this one, though it is surely a classic case of airpower overkill—huge expense to deliver a weapon whose effects could be reproduced as easily by conventional incendiaries on inflammable Japanese cities, if it could be justified.

By the early 1960s, a U.S. nuclear strike could have killed an estimated 80 million Soviet citizens; by the late 1960s, perhaps 300 million. These were figures too grotesque even for the modern discourse of "total war." Airpower had reached a paradox. Either airmen gave up and relied on nuclear weapons, or they carried on developing sophisticated weaponry knowing that nuclear warheads could not be used. The result has been massive military spending by the richest states on technologies that can never be fully exploited. The effort bankrupted the Soviet system both literally and

metaphorically; it threatens to bankrupt America, which spends as much on defense as the rest of the world put together.

There will be complaints van Creveld is too critical of the airpower age, and that there is a remorselessness to his pursuit of the ill-judged strategy or misplaced technological confidence which he sees as characteristic of so much of this narrative. But there are two questions that he does not really answer: Why were aircraft such sources of fascination to the generations that lived through the world wars and the early Cold War? And why did the great powers engage in bombing campaigns that resulted, often deliberately, in the death of over one million civilians, most of them killed by America and Britain, two states dedicated in the 1930s to searching for peace and outlawing city bombing?

Part of the answer lies in the crude democratization of war making after 1914. The world wars involved huge numbers of civilians in home-front activities. There was soon a sense that modern war, in some awful Darwinist sense, was always going to be about survival in a contemporary jungle of competing nation-states or social systems. Aircraft were an obvious product of that age, requiring a vast tail of ground crews, factory hands, designers and technicians before they even reached the battlefield. There was also something supremely, if ironically, democratic about bombing, which was regarded as a uniter of all social classes and both sexes. George Orwell's claim in 1944 that there was no reason why young men in uniform should be the only ones made

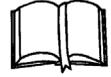


to suffer expressed the logic of democratic war. Though the modern age thinks that bombing cities in World War II was ethically unacceptable, the surprising thing is that German and British citizens expected it to happen and did not see it as a war crime. Bombing was the open manifestation of a new age of conflict, something to be coped with but not something to be outlawed. The one curious exception was the mutual restraint shown in not using biological and chemical weapons, the most egalitarian armaments of all.

This raises an important point. All sides saw biological and chemical weapons as unethical and waited to use them only if the other side started it. Moreover, no Allied commander would have sent his troops into Hamburg with orders to machine-gun thirty-seven thousand of its inhabitants. It would unquestionably have been a war crime. But Allied aircraft killed just that number in July 1943, and there has never been even the merest suggestion that those who ordered the raid ought to have stood trial after 1945 (though there is now a widely held view that this was a war crime). Indeed, bombing killed hun-

dreds of thousands in horrible ways. What made this kind of airpower different? It can partly be explained by the fiction that only military targets were being hit, a policy which the Royal Air Force in practice abandoned in 1941. Or it can be explained as an unfortunate escalation provoked by the desperate struggle for victory and the relative morality that all such discourses generate—the war on terror as much as the war against Hitler.

In the end it happened because no one stopped it from happening. Enthusiasm for airpower as a new way of waging war, perhaps the real war winner, infected Allied and German politicians as it infected popular enthusiasm. It is striking that in the UK the key moments immortalized in modern memory are the Battle of Britain, the Blitz and the Dambuster Raid. The Lancaster bomber and the Spitfire fighter plane are universal symbols, embedded in popular culture. Where are the submarines, tanks, artillery pieces or handguns to rival this imagery? There have been films made of B-17s and modern fighters, of the Red Baron and the designer of the Spitfire. But who would make a film about the man or men or women who pioneered



centimetric radar or designed the T-34 tank or built the first drone? In a way, we have only ourselves to blame for the airpower age, for its sense of urgent modernity, for its sheer excitement, for its daring defiance of the rules of engagement first laid down in the late nineteenth century. A Geneva convention on bombing was possible in the 1930s, it just was not wanted enough.

Perhaps the message at the heart of van Creveld's book is simply that it is time for the modern world to grow up and accept the mistakes that the airpower age has made. Aviation has to be put into perspective and the claims of its enthusiasts set aside. Airpower has inherent limitations and they are growing more evident year by year. The cost of civilian damage, in violation of the Additional Protocol to the Geneva Convention that protects victims of armed conflicts (finally signed by some countries only in 1977, though not ratified by all), is no longer justifiable in the name of exporting "democracy." The strategy of "shock and awe," exploited against Baghdad in 2003, is not only ethically unacceptable but evidently achieved almost nothing. Coalition troops are still in Iraq eight years later; insurgents were neither shocked nor awed and have taken a huge toll on the occupying ground forces. In Afghanistan, it is the NATO soldiers that see a mounting number of losses; and the high casualties from aircraft strikes have promoted insurgency rather than limiting it. With Libya now, the same mistakes are being made: Qaddafi's fall from power will not be enough to claim that airpower did the trick. It is surely time to close Pandora's box. □

## Mohandas and the Unicorn

*By Patrick French*

**Joseph Lelyveld**, *Great Soul: Mahatma Gandhi and His Struggle with India* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011), 448 pp., \$28.95.

If celebrity is a mask that eats into the face, posthumous fame is more like an accretion of silt and barnacles that can leave the face unrecognizable, or recognizable only as something it is not. We might feel we know Mohandas Gandhi, Abraham Lincoln, Albert Einstein, Joan of Arc or Martin Luther King Jr., but, rather, we know their iconic value: their portraits or statues, their famous deeds and sayings. We have trouble seeing them as their contemporaries did—as people. Jawaharlal Nehru, writing in the 1930s when he was in a British prison and some distance from becoming India's prime minister, said that Gandhi's views on marital relationships were "abnormal and unnatural" and "can only lead to frustration, inhibition, neurosis, and all manner of physical and nervous ills. . . . I do not know why he is so obsessed by this problem of sex." Nehru was writing publicly, in his autobiography, but it is fair to say that few Indian politi-

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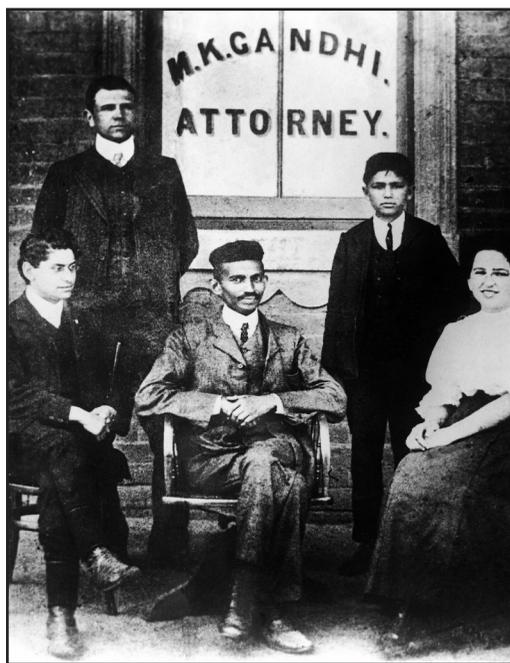
**Patrick French** is a British writer and historian. His most recent book is *India: A Portrait* (Alfred A. Knopf, 2011).

cians today would speak of the Father of the Nation in this unfettered way. Gandhi has become, in India and across the world, a simplified character: a celibate, cheerful saint who wore a white loincloth and round spectacles, ate small meals and succeeded in bringing down an empire through non-violent civil disobedience. Barack Obama, who kept a portrait of Gandhi hanging on the wall of his Senate office, is fond of citing him.

Joseph Lelyveld has already found himself in some trouble over *Great Soul*, not for what he wrote, but for what other people say he wrote. In a contemporary morality tale of high-speed information transfer and deliberate misconstruction, his book has been identified as something it is not. The *Daily Mail*, one of London's lively and vituperative tabloids, ran a story saying *Great Soul* claimed Gandhi "was bisexual and left his wife to live with a German-Jewish bodybuilder." The paper took its lead from a review written by the historian Andrew Roberts, who had suggested Gandhi was, among other things, "a sexual weirdo, a political incompetent and a fanatical fad-dist." When the *Mail's* story was recast in India, Narendra Modi, the combative chief minister of Gandhi's home state of Gujarat, banned *Great Soul* saying it was "perverse in nature. It has hurt the sentiments of those with capacity for sane and logical thinking. Mahatma Gandhi is an idol not only in India but in the entire world."

Modi, who is unable to obtain a visa to enter the United States because of

his complicity in anti-Muslim pogroms in 2002, was seeking to redeem his own damaged reputation by appropriating Gandhi—a project he has been engaged in for some time—so as to soften his image. Modi knew this move would appeal to his constituents, who admire his muscular nationalism as well as his efficiency as chief minister. As usual, a politician was laying claim to Gandhi's retrospective endorsement. The ban was almost enforced nationally by India's law minister, Veerappa Moily, until some Gandhi scholars and descendants dissuaded him. *Great Soul* rose up the best-seller lists. As Andrew Roberts told me, "Banning books is a fail-safe way of giving them huge free publicity. The



Gujarat government has just spectacularly shot itself in the foot.” In India, however, a book ban is not really a book ban: it is a way for politicians to gain credence. Anyone who wishes to read *Great Soul* can still do so, in any part of the country, and it remains freely available in Gujarat’s high-end bookshops. If India’s frequent book bans were genuine curtailments of free speech, it might be assumed that New Delhi’s literary types would make a more serious effort to overturn them.

Rather than a work of sensation, Lelyveld’s book is a measured, judicious attempt to understand Gandhi’s career as a social thinker and activist. It looks forensically at crucial moves and legends that are part of his accepted life story. Instead of focusing on the constitutional machinations that led to Indian independence from British rule in 1947, the author devotes much of his attention to Mohandas Gandhi’s time in South Africa, during which he laid down the principles of direct action and personal sacrifice that could be used to promote social or political change. Lelyveld is well placed to do this: before he became executive editor of the *New York Times*, he was a correspondent in both India and South Africa, and is also the author of a Pulitzer Prize-winning study of apartheid, *Move Your Shadow*. He situates the formation of Gandhi’s creative ideas of protest in the rough, churning, ethnically diverse South Africa of the two decades leading up to the First World War.

The starting point is, of course, the episode when the newly arrived Gandhi was

ejected from a first-class railway carriage at Pietermaritzburg after a white passenger objected to sharing space with a “coolie” (an Indian indentured laborer). According to a plaque at the railway station, the experience “changed the course of his life” and his “fight against racial oppression” commenced that day. Letter writing was one of his early methods of protest, pursuing righteous causes on behalf of educated Indians in the amalgam of colonies, kingdoms and territories that then made up South Africa. Although he had come to fight a legal case for an Indian Muslim merchant, most of the friends he made were European, and they were often members of ecumenical religious sects. In a newspaper advertisement that went along with a letter to the editor written in 1894, Gandhi described himself as an “Agent for the Esoteric Christian Union and the London Vegetarian Society.” Much of his time was spent trying to work out new ways for people to live, which involved escaping his family and moving to rural communes. In his thirties he took a vow of lifelong celibacy, without first consulting his wife, Kasturba. Lelyveld gently shows that many of Gandhi’s later tales about these days were exaggerated, such as a story of helping countless Indian indentured laborers with their legal problems. In fact, writes Lelyveld: “Initially, his goal was social equality within the empire for his benefactors and clients, the higher-class Indian merchants.”

Like other Indians of his generation who had traveled to Britain—the “home country”—to study, he had what today seems a surprisingly benevolent view of the em-

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pire. He took seriously Queen Victoria's proclamation of 1858, which had formally extended British sovereignty and legal protection in India. In the monarch's words:

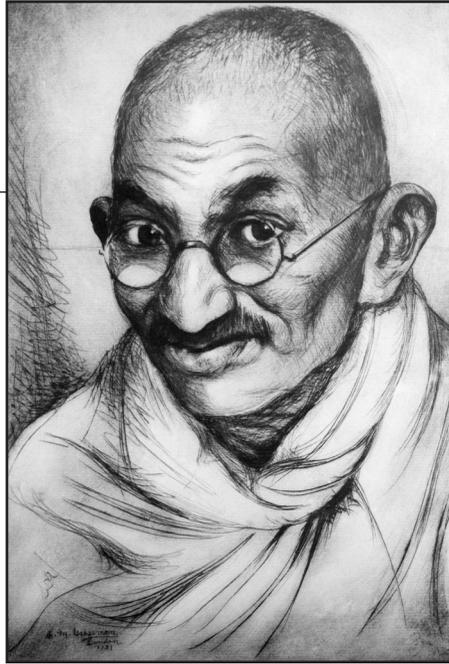
We disclaim alike the right and the desire to impose our convictions on any of our subjects. We declare it to be our royal will and pleasure that none be in any wise favored, none molested or disquieted by reason of their religious faith or observances, but that all shall alike enjoy the equal and impartial protection of the law.

(The influence of this statement can be seen in postwar Britain's policy of separatist multiculturalism, where each immigrant community was encouraged to pursue its traditional customs rather than to integrate.) It would take Gandhi several decades and much heartache to realize that, for most nonwhite colonials, British promises of partnership and equality of opportunity were meaningless in practice.

By 1910, when the new Union of South Africa came into being as an imperial dominion, people like Gandhi were left with no defined status. As Lelyveld writes, South Africa was now "firmly under indigenous white control, with the result that a lawyerly spokesman for a nonwhite immigrant community, which was what Gandhi had become, could no longer expect to get anywhere by addressing petitions or leading missions to Whitehall." Gandhi may have been a loyal subject who had worked as an overseer for Indian stretcher-bearers in the Boer War, carrying wounded British soldiers away from the front, but now he was discriminated against by racial laws. He reacted

by engaging in a campaign of nonviolent resistance (this was to be critical in the development of the techniques he would later use in India). Deploying flying columns of women and thousands of indentured laborers who chanted Hindu slogans as they marched, he brought the mines and plantations of eastern South Africa to a standstill. Lelyveld has a lovely description of Gandhi "serving as quartermaster, cutting the [bread] loaves into three-inch hunks, then . . . digging with his thumb a small hole into each hunk, which he then filled with coarse sugar as the men filed by in successive batches of a dozen strikers each." Mobilization and direct action were accompanied by tactical letters to people in power, and by extensive, manipulative self-promotion.

Despite violent repression, many of the strikers' demands were conceded, with the British viceroy across the sea in India praising their "resistance to invidious and unjust laws" in South Africa. The revolt was, according to Gandhi, "a religious struggle"—and as it unfolded, he happily lectured the strikers against evils like smoking and drinking. Lelyveld remarks that by "assuming for himself sole authority" over the campaign, "Gandhi was short-circuiting normal politics, including protest politics." It was this understanding of the power of unarmed mass movements to challenge injustice that was to be his greatest legacy. He had a genius for "reading" social protests, for taking their temperature and deciding when to step back the efforts and when to march them forward—often for reasons that were unfathomable to those around him, relying simply on his own intuition.



When he moved back to India at the start of the First World War, he took the sense of national cohesion he had developed in South Africa—joining himself to the cause of the masses he had initially spurned—and gradually turned the previously staid Indian National Congress into a popular movement. Gandhi became the figurehead—or incarnation—of India’s demand for self-rule. He wore the clothes of the poor and lived in the style of an ascetic, using the mode of Hindu renunciation in which a believer forsakes worldly and materialistic pursuits in favor of spiritual development. Disciples arrived. The daughter of a British admiral, renamed by him “Mirabehn,” shampooed his legs each night to soothe the marks left by those who had touched his feet in homage. His return to his homeland coincided with a change of tack in Whitehall, as “the gradual development of self-governing institutions” became government policy in India. At first, Gandhi put the same faith in this promise as he

had in Queen Victoria’s proclamation and tried to recruit soldiers to fight in the war, arguing that helping the British in a time of need was “the straightest way” to self-rule. But it became clear that his opponents were thinking in terms of decades or even centuries before India would be ready to govern itself, while Gandhi and his colleagues were thinking in years.

In the succeeding period, one of his key methods was to alter the focus of his campaigns as he went along: spinning, cow protection, caste reform, village living, the reestablishment of the recently abolished Islamic caliphate—any of these might be presented as his chief objective, working on the precept that true self-rule was impossible without social change. Underlying this was a pragmatic need to bridge contradictions and to appeal to as many interest groups as possible. His backing for the thugs who ran the caliphate movement in India seems in retrospect to have been a cynical way of attracting mass Muslim

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support. In several cases, he would appropriate a minority and sideline its own leaders. When faced in negotiation with Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar, arguably an equally iconic social activist, who spoke for India's 60 million "untouchables," Gandhi simply announced: "I claim myself in my own person to represent the vast mass of the untouchables." His ability to change the rules as he went along and to play on ambiguity was consistent; sometimes he would disappear when he reached an impasse, only to reappear with a fresh mission. Obsessed throughout his life with control of the body, diet and the need to eliminate sexual desire, Gandhi became in his later years—after he had formally retired from the Indian National Congress—increasingly troubled and eccentric, a spiritual or moral figure rather than a political actor. A new generation made the proximate decisions which led to Indian independence, and he fell to a Hindu assassin's bullet soon afterward.

**T**he victors write history, and although Lelyveld offers sharp rewrites, he cleaves broadly to the iconic version of Gandhi's life propagated by the Indian National Congress—namely that he was a mahatma, or "great soul." Instead of being seen as a particularly brilliant political maneuverer, he is examined and interrogated more as a unicorn, a one-off, a man who must be judged by a different standard than other nationalist leaders. But if you look at Mohandas Gandhi dispassionately, the important constituent parts of his creation myth do not hold together.

Take the episode at Pietermaritzburg. As Lelyveld observes, it is often forgotten that Gandhi's demand to be allowed to travel in a first-class carriage was accepted by the railway company, and he boarded the same train the following night under the protection of the stationmaster. The privilege was essentially financial; aged twenty-four, he was rich enough to place himself in a category separate from the indentured "coolie." Rather than marking the start of a campaign against racial oppression, as the legend has it, this episode was in fact the start of a campaign to extend racial segregation. Throughout his time in South Africa, Gandhi was adamant that "respectable Indians" should not be obliged to use the same facilities as Africans. He petitioned the authorities in the port city of Durban, where he practiced law, to end the indignity of making Indians use the same entrance to the post office as blacks, and counted it as a victory when three doors were introduced: one for Europeans, one for Asiatics and one for Natives. Whichever way you parse it, Gandhi's views on Africans do not make happy reading. His writings contain references to "raw Kaffirs" and their "indolence" and to the fact that he thinks they are "troublesome, very dirty and live almost like animals." But perhaps more important than the words of abuse—which might have been written in haste, or in a particular context—is that however hard you hunt in the archives, Africans remain invisible in Gandhi's writings about Africa. As Lelyveld concludes, reluctantly, "In the several thousand pages Gandhi wrote in South Africa . . . the names of only three Africans are mentioned. Of the three, he

*Gandhi was not, contrary to later reworkings of his story, a liberal: he liked to lay down rules, was often undemocratic and his ideas were in certain respects traditionally Hindu.*

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acknowledges having met only one.” The explanation for this may be quite simple: anti-black prejudice was and is endemic in India.

If, as a privileged Gujarati born in 1869, Gandhi harbored the bias of his background and generation, we should hardly be surprised. He was not, contrary to later reworkings of his story, a liberal: he liked to lay down rules, was often undemocratic and his ideas were in certain respects traditionally Hindu. Lelyveld describes him traveling to the Godavari River in central India after his return from England in order to go through purification rituals, to rid himself of the pollution. His views on caste were malleable, and his campaigns against untouchability were tempered by circumstance. He never accepted Ambedkar’s demand for constitutional protection and distinct civic rights for those outside the caste system; instead Gandhi insisted the Hindu majority would bestow favors upon them. When a deputation of “untouchables” wanted to join his organization the Harijan Sevak Sangh, dedicated to uplifting the Harijans (meaning “children of god”—a phrase now rejected as patronizing), Gandhi told them it would not be permitted:

The Board has been formed to enable savarna [upper-caste] Hindus to do repentance and reparation to you. It is thus a Board of debtors, and you are the creditors. You owe nothing to the debtors, and therefore, so far as this Board is concerned, the initiative has to come from the debtors.

It was typical Gandhian logic, and the Harijans went away defeated. Ambedkar

suggested angrily that the whole purpose of Gandhi’s board was “to create a slave mentality among the Untouchables towards their Hindu masters.” It is not insignificant that former untouchables in India today often have great hostility toward Gandhi and the way in which he treated their emerging community leaders. In his approach to Indian Muslims, he had something of the same attitude. Although at times of bloodshed he would use public fasts and marches effectively to promote communal harmony, Gandhi’s underlying precept was majoritarian, believing that Hindu compassion and goodwill rather than structural safeguards would bring India’s large Muslim minority into a wider national fold. As an idea it was imaginative, but many followers of Islam found the Indian National Congress before independence to be, in practice, redolent of Hindu culture—and upper-caste culture at that. Gandhi combined orthodoxy and radicalism. If he had not been, in many respects, an identifiable Indian type—the Hindu renunciate—it is unlikely he would have gathered such extensive support for his cause in an ethnically and linguistically varied land like India. By the 1930s, most Muslim politicians of national stature were migrating to other parties, and the demand for a separate homeland grew, leading finally to the creation of Pakistan.

**G**andhi’s greatest achievement was to invent a new form of public assertion that could, under the right circumstances, change history. His method depended ultimately on the existence of a democratically

responsive government. He figured, from what he knew of Britain, that the House of Commons would only be willing to suppress uprisings in India to a limited degree before conceding. And so he launched a vast movement of noncooperation to push for Indian independence—the British responded with violent crackdowns; they arrested Gandhi and tens of thousands of protesters, even throwing most of the Indian National Congress leadership in jail during the Second World War. By 1947, nearly bankrupt and dependent upon American loans, the British caved. Had Gandhi been up against a different opponent, he would have had a

different fate. When the former viceroy of India, Lord Halifax, went to see Adolf Hitler in 1938, the German leader suggested he should have Gandhi shot; if nationalist protests continued, members of the Indian National Congress should be killed in increments of two hundred until the problem went away.



During the British general election last year, the outgoing prime minister, Gordon Brown, had a pavement encounter with an angry voter, Gillian Duffy, who berated him about pensions and taxes. It was the sort of televised public humiliation that is now obligatory every few years in a democracy, as the leader is shouted down by a “normal” person and obliged to pretend to listen politely while the cameras are rolling. Unfortunately for Mr. Brown, he was still wearing a radio microphone when he got in his car to escape and was heard to say of his tormentor: “Och, she’s just this sort of bigoted woman.” For several days afterward, Brown’s groveling apology to Mrs. Duffy, first

to the media and later in person, became the main topic on the news.

The Egyptian writer Alaa al-Aswany commented in an essay that:

If Gordon Brown ruled Britain by fraud and by emergency law, he would not have apologized to Gillian Duffy. In fact he would probably



have had her arrested and sent to the nearest State Security office, where she would have been beaten, strung up by her legs, and electrocuted in sensitive parts of her body. Maybe Duffy would be tried in a State Security emergency court on charges of causing trouble, insulting a symbol of the state, and endangering social peace in Britain.

His point was that any response to political events is conditioned wholly by circumstance. We can see this now in the unfolding events in west Asia: the initially successful protests in Egypt, the civil war in Libya, the killings in Bahrain. In each case, the protests carried out by those who wish to see change are a mortally dangerous gamble—literally a matter of life or death. If you judge the government correctly, mass protests may overwhelm the state. The security forces may switch sides and join the crowd. Perhaps a few hundred people will be killed, but you will have changed history in your country—and overthrown a tyrant. If you judge it wrongly, protesters may end up being killed in very large numbers, and your children or your parents may be rounded up and killed too, or taken to prison to be tortured. In the terrible balance between inertia and protest, between acceptance and revolution, Gandhi's legacy is central to the decisions that are now being made. The idea of sit-ins, occupying public spaces, peaceful marches, refusing to be moved, and facing down guns with slogans and flags stems from the methods he created. No single figure in the last two hundred years has done more to create a transferable idiom of protest. □

## Mr. Brooks's Miracle Elixir

*By John Gray*

**David Brooks**, *The Social Animal: The Hidden Sources of Love, Character, and Achievement* (New York: Random House, 2011), 448 pp., \$27.00.

**D**avid Brooks is not the first contributor to the airport book stand to whom our leaders have turned for enlightenment and instruction. In the search for insight on the issues of the day, the politicians who are meant to be guiding us toward a better world have nudged, blinked, pirouetted on tipping points and anxiously pondered the wisdom of crowds. Yet none of these brightly packaged manuals has proved to have the practical usefulness that was promised. But not to worry, those who govern us are invincible positive thinkers who will never give up the hope of finding someone who will tell them how to conjure away all our problems. The political appeal of Brooks's book *The Social Animal* has been nowhere more pronounced than in Britain, where the youthful David Cameron leads a rebranded Conservative Party in a coalition government. Having instructed all members of his cabinet to read this best seller, Cameron then sought the author's

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counsel when Brooks was promoting the book in the UK. A seminar at 10 Downing Street was duly arranged and the prime minister's media advisers seem to have been much impressed by Brooks's performance. Not to be left on the sidelines, the Labour opposition leader, Ed Miliband, also met the writer. What is it about the *New York Times* columnist's book that gives it such an irresistible appeal to politicians?

"This is the happiest story you've ever read. It's about two people who led wonderfully fulfilling lives. They had engrossing careers, earned the respect of their friends, and made important contributions to their neighborhood, their country, and their world." These first lines go a long way toward explaining why Brooks's book litters the desks and bedside tables of elected officials.

For what Brooks is attempting to sell the world is his brand of positive thinking, a vision of the power of the individual as an emotional being with the capacity to lead the "good life," all the while bettering himself and those around him by empowering his mind with the definitive knowledge of what it means to be "moral." Presented in the form of a life history of two fictional characters, Erica and Harold, it ends with Harold's death and a capsule version of Brooks's message. Harold reaches the end of his life on earth satisfied that he "had achieved an important thing in his life. He had constructed a viewpoint. Other people see life primarily as a chess match played by reasoning machines. Harold saw life as a never-ending interpenetration of souls." Despite its pretensions to realism, Brooks's

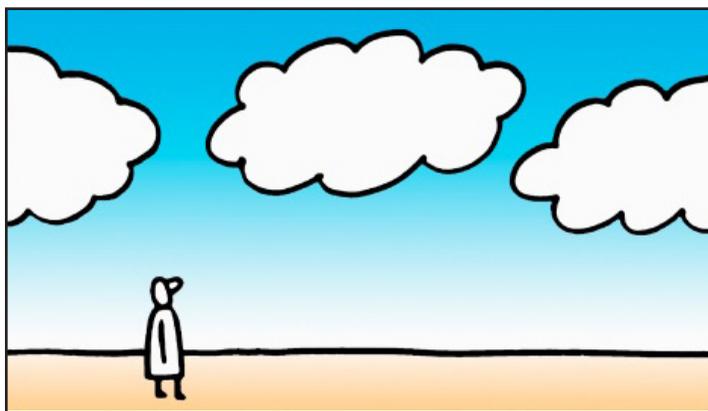
account of Harold and Erica's journey is a morality tale of the most transparent—and unconvincing—kind.

So we see the attraction of Brooks's fable to politicians in the face of overwhelming difficulties and Brooks's promise that all will be well if they place the burden of responsibility on the individual and small communities. Our rulers are noted for their adamant protestations of unconquerable hope; but the precise content of that hope is nebulous, if not wholly indeterminate. It is not hard to discern that those who govern us—along with sizable sections of those they govern—are actually becoming just a little desperate. A fable of happiness is never more appealing than in circumstances such as these, when the future seems to have become dauntingly problematic, and from one point of view *The Social Animal* can be seen as an early-twenty-first-century version of Frank Capra's *It's a Wonderful Life*—a tale in which a decent, ordinary guy ends up happily reconciled to the world. One difference between Capra's film and Brooks's book is that the hero of the movie is saved from disaster by a miracle—it is supernatural intervention, not his own sterling qualities, that allows the central protagonist (magnificently played by James Stewart) to prevent his savings-and-loan company from going under. The charm of Capra's film comes from the fact that it is a fairy tale in which the fatal chain of events is broken and shattered lives are made whole again by magic. In Brooks's novelettish study in pop psychology, by contrast, there is nothing that can remotely be seen as miraculous. The two central characters spend their lives

striving for a remarkably insipid version of self-realization, which despite setbacks—such as a spot of infidelity by Erica, which she soon regrets—they succeed in achieving. “Harold and his friends were not rebels,” Brooks writes. “By and large, they still wanted a stable marriage, two kids, a house in the suburbs, and a secure income.” The trouble with this vision of the good life is not only that it is beyond the reach of growing numbers of people. It is also a vision that many of his readers will not share. Where are the millions of happy singletons and gays and cheerful individualists in Brooks’s “happiest story”? It is in fact an unrelentingly banal tale, lacking not only the charm of Capra’s narrative but also the compelling interest and unexpectedness of ordinary human life.

**W**hen Capra’s film was released in 1946, America was rebuilding itself (and much of the world) after a global conflict in which the United States had acted

decisively to defeat an unprecedented threat to civilization. Certainly the postwar scene was showing signs of major problems—an emerging cold war, for one—but having triumphed over Nazism, America had every reason to feel confident of its strength. The world’s preeminent power, it could be sure that when it spoke, other countries would listen. Today, the United States is undergoing an irreversible shift in its international position—from being the only hegemonic actor to being one among a number of great powers. The “Arab Spring” may prove to be significant not so much for the changes it brings to the Middle East and North Africa—changes that are still far from clear—but for marking the time when American power began unmistakably to retreat and U.S. economic primacy passed into history. No longer the most successful economy—Germany’s boom shows how a quite different version of market capitalism has adapted better to globalization, while China’s experiment in turbocharged state capitalism



has produced over thirty years of fast growth—Americans cannot claim to enjoy the highest living standards. Worse, U.S. decline is not only relative but also absolute. Stagnant for decades, the incomes of the American majority

are now falling, or else are maintained only by taking on multiple jobs in a depressed and insecure labor market. Worse yet, there is no prospect of this process ending anytime soon. How the United States can fix its federal-debt overhang remains obscure; quite possibly it will not be resolved by any act of Washington, but instead by a write-down of U.S. credit and the dollar in global markets. However that drama plays out, there can be no realistic basis for the hope that the American majority will be better off in the near or medium term than it is today.

The unstoppable momentum of decline is but one reason for the appeal of Brooks's book, laden as it is with optimism for the future. Nowadays the very idea of decline has ceased to be legitimate—as soon as any sign of such a thing emerges, we are told, action can be taken to reverse the process. The result is that the fact of the decline is adamantly denied, while history—the fall and rise of great powers—goes on as it has always done. It might be thought that in Britain, with its long experience of accepting decline, the situation would be differ-



ent. But the present generation of British leaders is innocent of history, and it has not noticed how the crash has accelerated Britain's multigenerational retreat from power. While a further process of contraction is under

way with planned reductions in the UK's armed forces, the leaders of all three main political parties have endorsed an open-ended intervention in Libya that Britain will soon lack the capability to maintain. Britain's economic position is dangerously exposed. The policy of austerity pursued by the Cameron government is as much of a gamble as the American policy of expecting emerging economies to bail out U.S. debt by accepting the ongoing debasement of the dollar. Along with other Western countries, Britain and America are struggling to cope with a financial crisis that has left problems in its wake that can only be solved by accepting a diminished place in the world.

**I**t is a commonplace that the economics profession failed to foresee the crisis that definitively ushered in the end of American primacy. What may be more pertinent is that with a few honorable exceptions, so many economists refused to accept that such a crisis was possible—captivated as they were by the belief that quantitative

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models could predict the future, sheltering the field from messy reality. Economists were thus incapable of perceiving the dangers that were mounting around them. The attempt to domesticate the uncertainties of the future by turning them into calculable risks was discredited by the crash. A mode of thinking that was supposed to be supremely rational has proved in practice to be little more than an exercise in hare-brained cleverness.

The discrediting of economics is the second reason for the success of Brooks's book with its emphasis on the power of emotion and intuition and its debunking of the power of reason devoid of sentiment. Yet who—aside from one or two recent Nobel Prize-winning economists—has ever imagined humans to be calculating machines? After all, classical economics fully acknowledged the central role of emotion in human conduct. It was not for nothing that Adam Smith entitled his treatise on ethics *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Brooks acknowledges that there are strands in Enlightenment thinking that stress the limitations of reason. As he writes, "If you want to put the philosophic implications in simple terms, the French Enlightenment, which emphasized reason, loses; the British Enlightenment, which emphasized sentiments, wins." Brooks may overpraise British Enlightenment thinkers—who include Jeremy Bentham, the founder of utilitarianism and a thoroughgoing rationalist—but he is right in noting that the Enlightenment has not entirely neglected the limits of reason. Regarded by many as the supreme Enlightenment philosopher, Im-

manuel Kant was quite explicit in stating that there are questions that human reason cannot answer. One could go back further and note that Aristotle—commonly regarded as one of the greatest Western rationalists—insisted that virtuous conduct was a matter of habit and character just as much as rational deliberation.

Of course there is more to Brooks's message than these familiar observations. The core of Brooks's argument is his claim that the forces controlling human behavior are not just nonrational, they are *unconscious*—and can be controlled. As he puts it, "The central evolutionary truth is that the unconscious matters most." Significantly, Sigmund Freud appears hardly at all in the four hundred or so pages of this treatise on the role of the unconscious in social life. According to Brooks, this is because Freud has been superseded:

When Freud came up with his conception of the unconscious, it had a radical influence on literary criticism, social thinking, and even political analysis. We now have a more accurate conception of the unconscious. But these findings haven't yet had a broad impact on social thought.

Freud's view of the unconscious has been rendered obsolete by the new cognitive science: "Brain research rarely creates new philosophies, but it does vindicate some old ones." It is true that Freud's theorizing was not exactly scientific—as he accepted in some of his later work. But I suspect it is not because Freud's thinking has been scientifically superseded that Brooks is so quick

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to dismiss it. Rather, it is because Freud did not share Brooks's hopes of happiness. The greatest twentieth-century Enlightenment thinker had more than a little in common with the ancient Stoics. He was not preaching anything resembling Brooks's sunny optimism when he wrote to a patient,

I do not doubt that it would be easier for fate to take away your suffering than it would for me. But you will see for yourself that much has been gained if we succeed in turning your hysterical misery into common unhappiness. Having restored your inner life, you will be better able to arm yourself against that unhappiness.

Freud never imagined that his research into the unconscious mind would open the way to happiness. Instead, it could be used to fortify the mind against unhappiness, which the founder of psychoanalysis accepted as the normal human experience.

In stark opposition to Freud, Brooks thinks he has found in the unconscious something like a technology of human fulfillment. "The central humanistic truth," he writes, "is that the conscious mind can influence the unconscious." Because of the advance of science, we can now do what Freud believed was impossible—take control of the unconscious mind, so that it functions to promote happiness:

We are living in the middle of a revolution in consciousness. Over the past few years, geneticists, neuroscientists, psychologists, sociologists, economists, anthropologists, and others have made great strides in understanding the building blocks of human flourishing. . . . The

unconscious parts of the mind are most of the mind—where most of the decisions and many of the most impressive acts of thinking take place. These submerged processes are the seedbeds of accomplishment.

It is not just individuals who can reshape their lives by tapping the power of the unconscious. By applying these new findings, governments can enable society to function more harmoniously. The "big policies"—of education reform, poverty alleviation, democracy promotion—pursued over the past generations failed, Brooks believes, because they did not harness the unconscious. But for Brooks they failed for another reason, too: they did not understand that humans are above all social animals.

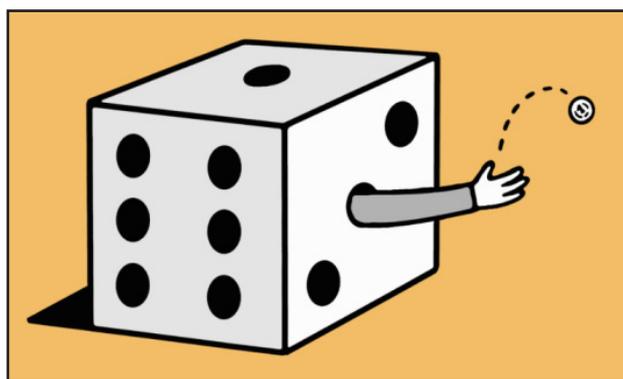
Again, this is hardly news. David Hume criticized Thomas Hobbes for having a view of human beings that was asocial, while Aristotle pronounced members of our species to be political animals (where "political" meant something more like what we now mean by "social"). It is only because economists have in recent times operated with an abstract conception of human motivation as maximizing the satisfaction of individual preferences that the idea that humans are *au fond* social beings seems at all striking. Here as elsewhere the illusion of novelty is kept alive by a loss of memory. No one who had read and digested Adam Smith or Edmund Burke—or indeed John Maynard Keynes—could possibly imagine that the life of man would ever be carried on by unaided reason, or believe that humans were anything other than quintessentially social. Only those who have forgotten most of the Western tradi-

tion could find Brooks's propositions arresting or in any way instructive.

One might be tempted to say that the political success of Brooks's book is testimony to the callowness of our leaders, who have lost touch with the intellectual traditions that shaped Western cultures. This would be a little unfair, for what our rulers have to cope with is a larger loss of continuity in society. The deep changes that go with globalization have left governments depleted of authority. One response is a more modest conception of government: let it attend to the framework in which society

society" program, based as it is on empowering individuals and communities in order to lessen the burdens on government.) But this does not solve the problem of authority. Governments may decide to delegate to society the task of promoting the good life. But they will still find themselves—even in the very act of devolving its pursuit—having to take a view on what the good life consists of. How do our rulers decide what values to promote?

At this point we can discern a third factor in the success of Brooks's book: the fashionable cult of science. Over the past few years, a succession of writers has claimed that sci-



does its business—including dealing with social problems—while leaving that business largely to voluntary organizations. A view of this kind is congenial to politicians at a time when resources are tight and the scope of state action is limited. (In Britain, it is the necessity of spending cuts that drives Cameron's otherwise inchoate "big

ence can instruct us as to how to live. Sam Harris's *The Moral Landscape: How Science Can Determine Human Values* shares with Brooks the faith that what humans need in order to flourish is a matter that can be decided by scientific investigation. For Harris, the moral quandaries of the past were the result of ignorance; now that science has

*The Social Animal: an instruction  
manual for politicians, the chief virtue of  
which is that it is practically useless.*

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revealed the “moral facts” of human nature there is little room for doubt in ethics, since knowledge can replace faith and intuition in settling disputes about the essence of human well-being. Without emulating Harris’s dogmatism or sharing his enmity toward religion, Brooks also seems to believe that science has made these ethical dilemmas of the past redundant. Like Harris, he is sure that human progress will continue, and even accelerate, as long as people and governments are prepared to make use of the results of advancing scientific knowledge.

There are several problems with this view. If there are moral facts, the ethical ambiguity of science must be among the most important of them. It may be true that humans cannot flourish under tyranny, at least of a severe kind; but if the realistic alternative to such tyranny is anarchy, which also thwarts any prospect of human flourishing, there is a dilemma that no scientific advance can resolve. More importantly, there is no reason to assume those who know the human cost of tyranny will cease being tyrannous. The knowledge provided by cognitive science and evolutionary psychology—the disciplines in which those who worship at the altar of science have the most faith—is no different from any other kind of understanding: it can be used for all manner of purposes, including the most atrocious. The Nazis understood the workings of crowd psychology better than almost anyone at the time; if they had remained in power long enough to benefit from scientific advance, their ability to perpetuate their peculiarly horrible form of tyranny would undoubtedly have been improved

upon. Contrary to postmodern relativists, the growth of human knowledge is a fact. But that fact does not make human beings any more likely to be virtuous, or rational. However fast and far science may advance the dilemmas that beset us, ethics will remain as problematic as before. Indeed, since the increase in knowledge enlarges the power to do evil, these dilemmas may be more formidable.

The dangers that come with this increased knowledge are captured in the story of Genesis, which used to be one of the West’s guiding myths. Now this biblical story has lost its power, and another—the Socratic myth that says knowledge and virtue go together—has replaced it. Even among those who profess to be religious, the idea that advancing knowledge can deliver us from moral and political conflict has a powerful allure. Brooks’s book is testimony to this faith in science. To be sure, his grip on the new sciences of human behavior is shaky, and he exaggerates what we can learn from them. A great deal in cognitive science and evolutionary psychology remains speculative and controversial. Where they seem reasonably well established, the findings of these new sciences do not always support Brooks’s conception of virtue. Recent inquiry—as well as centuries of literature—may suggest that we should favor “the idea that we have multiple selves over the idea that we have a single self”; but it is hard to square this plural view of selfhood with old-fashioned notions of character. Advancing knowledge may undermine simpl-minded rationalism, but it also undercuts traditional morality. As to the overall

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impact that science may have on human values, no one knows.

The fact that the new sciences of human nature are in their infancy will not diminish their appeal to governments. The deflation of economics as a discipline has not shaken their hope that science can show us how to live; it has only led them to embrace another kind of scientism. Importantly, it is a version that has the advantage of not requiring any radical reassessment of economic orthodoxies. For the present generation of politicians—here the charge of callowness is not unjust—the hegemony of the market is all they have ever known. Even now, when global markets are falling apart under the strains of sovereign bankruptcy, currency wars and resource conflicts, our rulers continue to insist that there is no alternative. Rather than making the effort—intellectual as much as political—of deciding what can be entrusted to the market and what cannot, they look for gimmicks that will serve as proxies for new thinking.

This is where Brooks comes in. Whatever he may say, the view of human beings that is presented in *The Social Animal* has no definite implications for public policy. For our rulers, that is a positive feature: it allows them to use Brooks's ideas as they please. Most of the books that have purported to show how to reinvigorate government over the past decades—consultant David Osborne and government official Ted Gaebler's *Reinventing Government* comes to mind—made the mistake of being too specific in their prescriptions, whose ineffectiveness was soon apparent. Brooks is more prudent.

Offering little in the way of specific advice, he is really selling a tone of voice—a way of talking about politics rather than anything more substantive. In the United States and Britain (it is difficult to imagine it being taken seriously anywhere else) the book's appeal seems to lie precisely in this lack of specificity. In America, Brooks's disdain for “big policies” can be invoked to evade the painful fact of ongoing impoverishment. The consoling message is that if only American creativity can be freed from the dead hand of government, the cycle of decline can be reversed. Brooks's readers can then turn their minds from the discomforting shifts that are under way—such as the palpable erosion of public infrastructure, which leaves the United States looking more and more like the third-world countries of a few decades ago—and seek refuge in an American pastoral. How the United States fits into a post-American world can be left to future generations to decide.

In Britain, *The Social Animal* can be used to reinforce a Burkean conceit of sound government. The reality has long been a succession of dodges, slogans and ephemeral “initiatives” which serve to conceal the government's inability to control—or for that matter understand—history as it happens. Here too the fact that it gives no clear guidance may be the book's principal strength. Brooks cites Michael Oakeshott's observation that in politics we “sail a boundless and bottomless sea; there is neither harbor for shelter nor floor for anchorage, neither starting place nor appointed destination.” It is a refreshing reminder of what conservative thinking might once



have been. But Brooks would have done better to cite another passage from the same volume, where the skeptical British philosopher notes that

there seems little to stand in the way of the appearance of a vulgar counterpart to this literature of political inquiry. . . . A little book on *How to Restore old Cottages* may be flanked on the bookstalls by one on *How to Restore old Monarchies*; an article on “A face-lift for the kitchen: new and exciting materials” in a *Do It Yourself* magazine will be followed by others on “Dos and Don’ts in making a Revolution,” “How to win an Election.”

Oakeshott comments that “writings of this kind (with perhaps less obvious titles) have been available for more than a century.” It is doubtful, though, whether Oakeshott envisioned a book like *The Social Animal*: an instruction manual for politicians, the chief virtue of which is that it is practically useless.

This appealing emptiness will not ensure the book’s longevity, however. Soon enough, Brooks’s manual of positive thinking will be consumed and discarded. History will move on and yesterday’s gurus will be remaindered and forgotten. But if Brooks’s book will hardly be remembered, the reverence with which it has been received tells us something important about how we have come to be ruled. *The Social Animal* is an exemplar of political discourse as we know it today; the chief function is to distract attention from intractable realities, which governments and those they govern prefer not to think about. □

## Next Year in Jerusalem!

By Benny Morris

**Simon Sebag Montefiore**, *Jerusalem: The Biography* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2011), 696 pp., £25.00.

Where I (partly) grew up, in the Mevor Hayim and Rassco neighborhoods, it wasn’t really the Jerusalem of history. The western half of the town, which Israel controlled and which, for most of the time, served as the Jewish state’s capital, was a sleepy, untouristy, provincial backwater with barely a holy site or archaeological ruin worthy of the name. The one English-language bookstore, at the bottom of Shamai Street, which sold both new and secondhand books, could have featured in a small English town, say Luton in the 1950s (and, indeed, its quiet, bespectacled owner, a yekke, eventually drifted off to Australia, perhaps like some Lutonites). The restaurants closed on Friday afternoon and reopened on Saturday night or Sunday at midday; a soldier on weekend leave could barely find a place, outside his home, to go eat.

Then came the Six-Day War and everything changed. Jerusalem was, in the Israeli

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*The real problem in peacemaking is one of mutual trust,  
which decades of Arab suicide bombing and Israeli rule and  
oppression have undermined (perhaps definitively).*

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government's phrase, once again "united," reverting to its former glory (or notoriety) at the center of the world, the holy city of the three monotheistic religions, the prize and bane of never-ending regional and imperial conflicts. Montefiore has described it, in various places, as "the cockpit of the Middle East" and "the battlefield of Western secularism versus Islamic fundamentalism," "in the crosshairs" of a variety of conflicts and visions. It is a city awash in history: the ruins, layer upon layer, of Judean and Roman Jerusalem, and subsequent Arab, Persian and Ottoman constructions; the Temple Mount, set upon the rock and hill on which Abraham had almost sacrificed his son Isaac, on which the Jews had built their temples, Christ had disdainfully confronted priests and money changers, and Muhammad had, at least in dream or vision, ascended to the seventh heaven; the Old City's sixteenth-century walls, encompassing Golgotha and countless tombs—of Christ and Husayn ibn Ali, the king of Hejaz, to name just two; and the burial places outside, of Queen Helena of Adiabene, of Theodor Herzl, political Zionism's founder and prophet, and of Yitzhak Rabin.

This is the grist of Montefiore's highly readable, highly enlightening mill. He takes us, systematically and anecdotally, through the ages of Jerusalem, sketching miniporraits of the successive, often bestial, sometimes winning protagonists, from the first Davidian kings through the crusader conquerors and their Muslim nemeses, Saladin and Baibars, to the Ottoman sultans and the British governors, down to the Palestinian chieftains and Zionist settlers—who

are, for the time being, victors. Montefiore devotes a great deal of space to the evolving physical contours of the town, which was constantly expanding and contracting, and to its architecture, buildings rising and falling. Archaeology buffs will find a great deal of illumination in these pages.

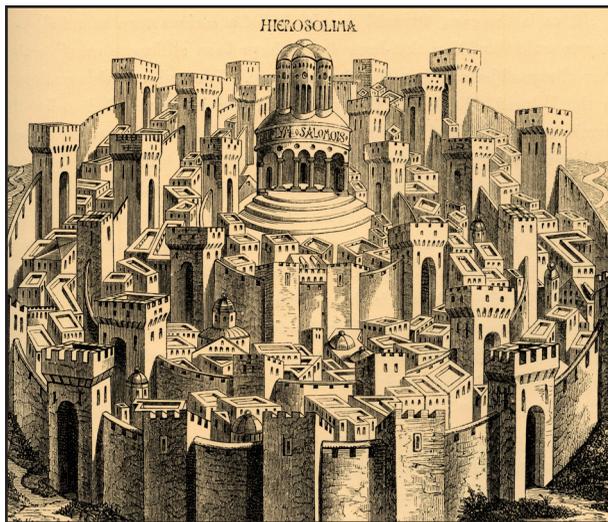
Montefiore bases his text on the available written records (histories, both classical and recent, travelogues by visiting Muslim and Christian writers and scholars, and contemporary memoirs) and on archaeological discoveries. He gives a great deal of credence to the Biblical narratives in reconstructing the city's history during its post-Jebusite first six hundred years (roughly 1000–400 BC).

What emerges is a bloody tale of politics and religion in which sets of peoples and leaders successively battle over the town for three millennia. In the penultimate scene in Ridley Scott's take (*Kingdom of Heaven*, largely filmed, incidentally, in Morocco) on one of these struggles between the twelfth-century Christian crusaders and the Muslims, he has the Christian commander, Balian of Ibelin (Orlando Bloom), ask Saladin (Ghassan Massoud), who is about to enter the city as conqueror, what Jerusalem's "worth" is to him. The Kurdish Egyptian general responds: "Nothing"—and, after a pause—"Everything." The glib exchange sticks in one's mind. But in reality, Montefiore's pages demonstrate that most everyone throughout history believed that "everything" was the only possible answer.

Which, in a sense, brings us to the present and its politics, to which Montefiore devotes (I think rightly—this is a history, not a political tract) relatively little space.

Jerusalem figures large as an issue, and Jobstacle, in Israeli-Palestinian (and Israeli-pan-Arab) peacemaking. Montefiore is balanced and fair. Though I'm not sure it was the 1967 conquest and, since then, "possession of Jerusalem" that "gradu-

Jewish Quarter of the Old City; the City of David; the slopes and pool of Silwan/Shiloah and, to its east, the Mount of Olives with its Jewish graveyard—made Israeli indifference to the fate of East Jerusalem much less likely.



ally changed Israel's ruling spirit, which was traditionally secular, socialist, modern" as Montefiore claims. Rather, it was demography and unrelenting Arab rejectionism that brought this about, coupled with the fillip of the return to Jewish control of that crucible of Judaism, Judaea and Samaria, of which East Jerusalem is a key part.

But he is right that concretely taking possession of the holy city and its sites—the Wailing Wall, to which the Jordanians denied Israelis access during their two decades of rule; the Temple Mount and the

Yet in July 2000, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak "boldly"—as Montefiore rightly puts it—offered the Palestinians a reasonable two-state deal, which involved Arab control of parts of East Jerusalem, including over three-quarters of the Old City (the Christian, Muslim and Armenian quarters), with the Temple Mount under Palestinian "sovereign custodianship." Yasser Arafat, the Palestinian leader at the time, said "no." American President Bill Clinton then bettered the offer in December, with his "parameters," awarding the

Palestinians sovereignty over the Temple Mount though leaving the Israelis some form of control of the earth beneath the surface (the substratum presumably containing the remains of the First and Second Temples—the original, built by King Solomon, housed the Ark of the Covenant and was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar; its successor was razed by the Romans). Archaeologists have never been allowed to plumb the depths of the mount because of Muslim objections. Clinton also consigned all of the Arab-majority sections of Jerusalem to Arab sovereignty (with areas with Jewish majorities remaining under Israeli control). More widely, Clinton increased the portion of the West Bank to go to the Palestinians (from the 91 percent offered by Barak to the even greater 94–96 percent). This meant, in effect, that the West Bank, minus some border-hugging Israeli settlements, would be part of the Palestinian state, with Israel compensating the Palestinians for the ceded territory with land of its own. To this proposal Barak grudgingly agreed; Arafat again said “no.” Arafat, of course, also demanded Israeli acceptance of the “right of return” of the Palestinian refugees from 1948, which Israel rejected.

Now alongside that political “no,” Arafat added a historical—or perhaps ideological—“no”; he denied, to the incredulous Clinton and Barak, that any Jewish temples had ever adorned the Temple Mount, thus denying the reality of Jewish ties to Jerusalem and the legitimacy of Jewish claims to the city and, by extension, to any part of Israel/Palestine. Which gives rise to the suspicion that Arafat’s “no” had nothing to do

with the details of the offer but was a principled rejection of a two-state compromise.

Montefiore in effect endorses the Barak-Clinton formula for resolving the problem of greater Jerusalem, with its current population of just over 780,000 (of whom 265,000 are Arabs and 164,000 ultra-Orthodox Jews). He also makes a powerful case for Jerusalem as one of Islam’s holiest cities (especially during the Middle Ages) despite the fact that the name of the city nowhere appears in the Koran. (Over the centuries, the city’s importance in Islam increased as others coveted and assailed it, and waned when it was uncontestedly in Muslim hands.)

For peace to take hold, however, almost all West Bank Israeli settlements would need to be evacuated. He grants that Israeli rule in the city itself was “uniquely impressive by historical standards, as guardian of a Jerusalem for all faiths.” But in an Israeli-Palestinian deal, it must, somehow, serve as the capital of both the Jewish state and an emergent Palestinian Arab state, with the “Arab suburbs . . . Palestinian” and the “Jewish suburbs . . . Israeli”—Montefiore here is quoting current Israeli President Shimon Peres.

As to the Old City—the principal “challenge,” as Montefiore, quoting Shimon Peres again, puts it—it should be “a demilitarized Vatican, policed by joint Arab-Israeli patrols or an international trustee.” Perhaps the committee could be comprised of NATO and Russia. The problem would then remain the Temple Mount, which Montefiore says cannot be internationalized; nor can it

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be retained—in terms of sovereignty—by Israel (the Arabs would resist) or transferred to the Arabs (Israel would resist). Similarly, the site is difficult to physically divide, the Wailing Wall being part of the mount's surrounding structure. In line with the Clinton parameters, Montefiore essentially returns to the formula of the surface area, with the Dome of the Rock and Al-Aqsa Mosque going to the Arabs and the interior of the mountain (theoretically) remaining under Israel's control.

But he concedes that the real problem remains psychological, one of mutual trust, which one hundred years of conflict, and decades of Arab suicide bombing and Israeli rule and oppression, have undermined (perhaps definitively). While most Arab historians know that Arafat's dismissal of Jewish history, as well as the Jewish linkage to the Holy Land and the Temple Mount, is absurd, they lack the courage (or political will) to publicly question it. But Montefiore seems to believe that the psychological barrier, often translated into a mutual rejection of each other's historical narratives, can be overcome. Or, rather, that it must be if peace is to be achieved.

Montefiore has a wonderful eye for anecdote and quotation. (These have served him well, and comparably, in his best-selling books on Stalin's Russia. *Jerusalem* was a best seller in Britain for weeks.) And these, deftly handled, easily hold the reader's attention as he wades through this fulsome text which spans over six hundred pages and three thousand years. Here and there, wit too obtrudes. Take the following,

about Egypt's Ptolemaic dynasty (it appears in a footnote, where one often encounters interesting digressions):

Even by the family's vicious standards, Ptolemy VIII Euergetes, nicknamed Fatso (Physkon) by the Alexandrian mob, was a monster. . . . The climax of his cruelties was the murder of his own fourteen-year-old son who totally trusted his father: Fatso had the boy's head, legs and hands cut off and sent to his own mother, Cleopatra II. When another of the family, Cleopatra Thea . . . decided to murder her own son, she offered him a cup of poison. But the son forced the mother to drink it. Such was family life among the Ptolemies.

Moving on in the centuries, Montefiore quotes the striking description by Imad al-Din, Saladin's secretary, of the enemy Richard the Lionheart's camp outside Acre in northern Israel, which he visited in 1191 (the combatants through the ages often indulged in parley and limited truce). Actually, he appears to have been captivated by the camp followers rather than the cantonment itself. Imad, by his own account, ogled the "singers and coquettes, tinted and painted, blue-eyed with fleshy thighs," who

plied a brisk trade, brought their silver anklets up to touch their golden earrings, invited swords to sheath, made javelins rise toward shields, gave birds a place to peck with their beaks, caught lizard after lizard in their holes, [and] guided pens to inkwells.

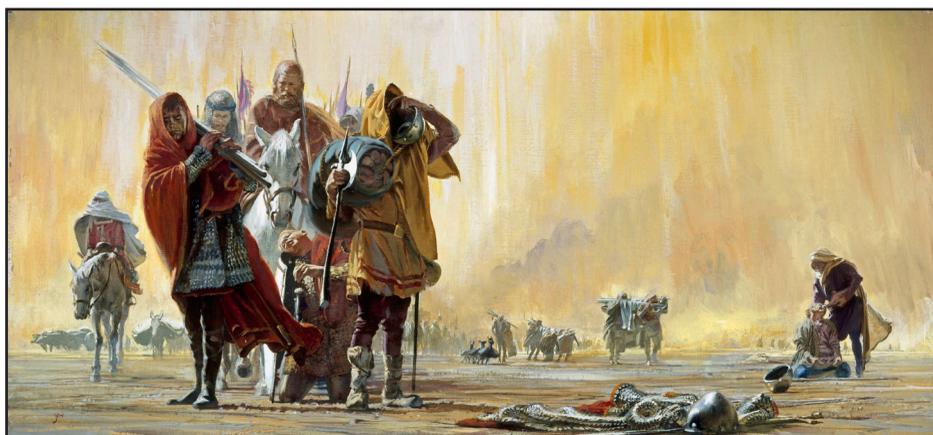
This passage, like many others in the book, raises a serious point about balance:

Montefiore often—and at length—describes the violent episodes and sexual escapades and peccadilloes that dotted Jerusalem’s history or characterized the town’s protagonists. Without doubt, these, as with violence and sex in movies and literary fiction, help rope in the customers and maintain their interest. At times, certainly, Montefiore’s stories are apt and historically enlightening, as when he tells us about the hanky-panky between Katy Antonius,

dislikes as much as any, by striking at their pockets.” In a letter to his lover, Barker called Jews “loathsome people” (the letter lamely ended, “Katy, I love you so much”).

But occasionally one senses that sex and violence are being given too much play and that the space allocated could have been better used to other ends.

A more serious fault is the author’s occasional sloppiness when it comes to facts. Just to peek at the period I am most famil-



wife of Palestinian nationalist and historian George Antonius, and General Sir Evelyn “Bubbles” Barker, the commanding officer of Britain’s army in Palestine during the waning years of the British mandate. Barker famously had ordered his troops, under frequent attack by gunmen of the Zionist terrorist/guerrilla organizations the IZL (the Irgun) and LHI (the Stern Gang), to punish by boycott “the Jews in a way the race

iar with (the first Arab-Israeli war), Montefiore has the famous Mount Scopus ambush, in which a convoy delivering supplies and personnel to Hadassah Hospital was attacked and some seventy Jewish doctors and nurses died at the hands of Arab irregulars, take place on April 14 (actually, it was on April 13). And it is not true that “the [Jewish supply] convoys broke through” to besieged Jerusalem on “15 April” (actually

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at least one got through earlier). Montefiore tells us too that in November 1947, Arabs owned “94 per cent of the land [surface]” of Palestine. Yet, it was closer to 30 percent; the Jews owned some 6–7 percent, and the government “owned” the remainder in one form or another (parks and forests, unregistered desert areas, road and railway tracts, military camps, firing ranges, etc).

“Half the Egyptian forces” battling the Israelis from May 15, 1948, he writes, “were *mujahidin* of the Muslim Brotherhood.” But, the percentage of fundamentalist civilian volunteers was much, much smaller (no more than 10–20 percent, if that). Montefiore calls the British representative in Amman Sir Alec Kirkbridge; it should be Kirkbride. He tells us that Israel signed armistice agreements “with all five of the Arab states”—it signed pacts with only four,

and there were more than five Arab states in 1949. He has General Sir John Glubb being ousted by King Hussein of Jordan from the command of the Arab Legion, Jordan’s army, “soon after” the 1956 Sinai/Suez war, while that occurred before the battle, in March of that year.

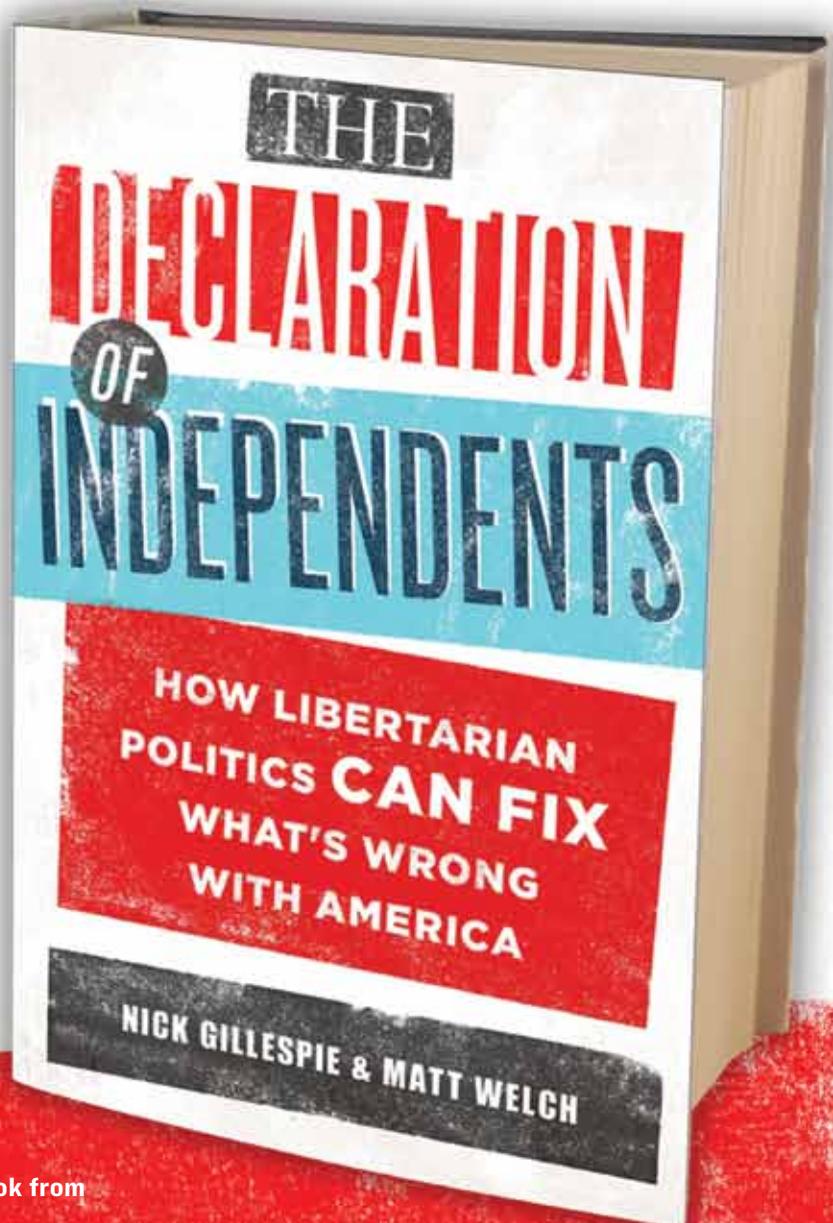
Perhaps this is inevitable in a volume that covers so much, with its vast chronological reach and multitudinous cast of characters: Who can properly know such an extensive period in great detail? Still, a good, knowledgeable editor would have been useful.

In the end, all of this is of minor importance. There is no and cannot be a definitive “biography” of Jerusalem, as there is no definitive religion. But Montefiore’s take can well serve as a fine, generally reliable, highly entertaining introduction to the city’s history. □

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