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Morality Play Instead of Policy

By *Richard Burt and
Dimitri K. Simes*

Notwithstanding unsettling developments in the Middle East, Europe and Asia, the 2012 presidential campaign has failed so far to produce a meaningful foreign-policy debate. To some extent this is understandable; the struggling U.S. economy justifiably preoccupies most voters. Campaign aides thus still advise their candidates that “it’s the economy, stupid,” twenty years after this mantra helped Bill Clinton defeat George H. W. Bush. But ignoring the outside world is dangerous, particularly as we approach today’s major turning point in international relations. Avoiding serious discussion of global affairs puts American security at risk and even threatens our economy because foreign-policy decisions can have powerful economic consequences.

Former governor Mitt Romney has of course criticized President Obama’s foreign policy on a range of issues, including Russia, China, Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan. But he offers little to explain specifically how he

Richard Burt, former U.S. ambassador to Germany, is managing director at McLarty Associates. **Dimitri K. Simes** is president of the Center for the National Interest and publisher of *The National Interest*.

would be tougher on Moscow or Beijing, keep troops in Iraq without a status of forces agreement with the Iraqi government or pursue a different course in Afghanistan. At worst, Romney is simply polemical—for example, in his assaults on President Obama’s apologies or his insistence that he would never argue with Israel, including on an Israeli attack on Iran, which could thrust America into war and wreck its economy.

Nevertheless, Romney’s superficial electoral rhetoric should not obscure the fact that Obama and his team provide extensive grounds for criticism in the president’s weak and reactive policy toward the Middle East, his oversold engagement with Russia, his confused and confusing policy in Asia, and his inability to develop a realistic foreign-policy road map. Beyond errors in execution, the administration’s policy also has been sorely lacking in strategy; as a result, Obama’s approach often has permitted domestic politics to trump U.S. national interests, particularly when faced with opposition, as on the issue of Israel’s settlements.

Of course, presidential campaigns rarely provide a good opportunity for serious foreign-policy conversation. Recall Republicans’ 1952 accusations of “cowardly containment” and Democrats’ 1960 charges about the “missile gap.” This is partly structural, in that a sitting president must campaign on actual policy while a challenger seeks votes rather than practical solutions. But two factors make the current situation unique.

First, the absence of responsible conversation about world affairs is not

As the quality of America's foreign-policy discourse has declined, international trends have become less favorable to the United States.

limited to presidential contenders or other elected officials. Since America's Cold War victory twenty years ago, a near consensus has emerged in the United States, and to some extent in Western Europe, that the Soviet Union's demise was a historically inevitable manifestation of America's superior values, way of life, political process and approach to world affairs. America's international dominance is seen widely as a God-given right that is sustainable at minimal cost regardless of how we exercise our power. And those who question the costs, consequences or longevity of Washington's interventionist foreign policy are dismissed as lacking pride, confidence and perhaps even patriotism.

Strangely, it is precisely in this area that the two leading foreign-policy schools—liberal interventionism and neoconservative unilateralism—converge. For example, Princeton professor Anne-Marie Slaughter and *Washington Post* columnist Charles Krauthammer often agree on the need for U.S. intervention abroad. And anyone who follows the media closely knows that when these two groups align, America is headed for an unnecessary war—or at least for serious trouble.

Some voices have challenged the American elite's foreign-policy groupthink in this magazine as well as in *Foreign Affairs* and *Foreign Policy*, but they have not significantly influenced U.S. political discourse. As a result, a dangerous disconnect has emerged between academic discussions and the policy process in which foreign-policy realists have been marginalized. As Henry Kissinger has

observed, the United States has become the only country in which being labeled a realist is derogatory.

Second, as the quality of America's foreign-policy discourse has declined, international trends have become less favorable to the United States. In 1992, when world events seemed to favor America, a lack of foreign-policy focus and discipline may have looked harmless. Paraphrasing Krauthammer, it is not necessarily damaging to take a holiday from history if the holiday is timely and brief. We could withstand a holiday from serious foreign-policy analysis and unflinching self-reflection at the Cold War's end. But when the holiday becomes to many a normal state of affairs, we put ourselves in peril.

We now are witnessing the return of history in full force. History is unpredictable and starkly at odds with deterministic assumptions about America's global triumph. When the Soviet Union collapsed, a balancing factor in world politics—however unattractive—disappeared overnight. The United States became the unchallenged global leader by default. To be sure, America already was well positioned to play this role. But Washington's post-Cold War leadership emerged at least as much from it being sucked into a vacuum as from any strategic plans or policies.

Also, the Soviet empire's disappearance stirred other nations to visualize new global realities. Globalization, rising energy demand and the information revolution—together with cheap labor—allowed many Third World nations to

become emerging powers with increased international aspirations. Their economic success has increased sharply the role of the G-20, which now overshadows the G-8 in world economic discussions. The combined economies of the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) are already three-quarters as large as the total of G-7 economies (the G-8 minus Russia) and are growing at a much faster rate.

In such an environment, U.S. global dominance inevitably will be challenged by new rising powers. Since the Peloponnesian War, extended predominance by one power or one alliance always has led to resistance.

This does not mean the United States is a declining power. The American military has never had such undisputed superiority and reach. According to the International Institute for Strategic Studies, the U.S. defense budget accounts for 45 percent of global defense spending and far exceeds the combined share of the next nine largest spenders, several of which are U.S. allies. America's advanced technologies, such as drones and precision weapons, provide unprecedented capability to strike targets worldwide with minimal risk of U.S. casualties.

Moreover, the United States and its allies—especially in Europe and Japan—continue to define the rules of the global economy. This is made possible by considerable leverage over international finance and insurance. In addition, rising powers such as China, Russia, Brazil and India harbor significant flaws and problems that limit their international influence. These include corruption, economic

distortions, weak governance, poverty and demographic trends. This explains why there is no single challenger to America.

But such limitations shouldn't obscure the West's diminished international leadership over the last decade. At precisely the time when assertive challengers have emerged, the United States and the European Union have experienced a loss of credibility due to financial crises and political paralysis.

Importantly, America's crisis did not stem from forces of nature, global trends or some inevitable historical process. It resulted from decisions made by America's leaders, without serious scrutiny from the media or public. Another factor was mindless greed among financial manipulators who created elaborate and largely unnecessary products principally for self-enrichment, along with unchecked populism among officials and legislators who interpreted the American dream to mean that anyone should be able to secure credit regardless of income or other circumstances. On top of this, before and after the crisis, representatives of both political parties in the White House and Congress failed to develop effective power-sharing arrangements to produce badly needed results. This polarization dealt a heavy blow to pragmatism, a special hallmark of America's genius.

Europe's financial crisis has similar origins in some respects but also is a clear consequence of almost mechanical overreach in pursuing integration and expansion among European elites who disregarded resistance from their citizens, not to mention common sense.

Anyone with a basic understanding of macroeconomics should have perceived the hazards in a single currency without a strong central bank, coordinated budgets or meaningful financial regulations.

These painful experiences have produced remarkably little soul-searching in the United States or Europe, either about their decision making or the wider shortcomings in their political systems. On the contrary, U.S. and EU governance failures are coupled with irresistible urges to promote their models worldwide. Western leaders and pundits seem to view major international economic and political issues as morality plays in which the principal actors are on either the right side or the wrong side of history. One does not need to agree with Edward Gibbon that history is “little more than the register of the crimes, follies, and misfortunes of mankind” to see that history’s movements are not linear—or that no political system, no matter how democratic, is appropriate everywhere at all times and under all circumstances. Similarly, while Westerners may grin and bear their “messy democracy” when it fails to produce responsible policies, those outside the West are much less likely to accept this explanation—particularly when the results spill over into economic instability or foreign interventions.

The central topic of American foreign-policy debates should be the reconciliation of America’s legitimate interest in preserving and enhancing the existing international, political and economic order—established in large part by and for the benefit of the

United States and its allies—with pressures from other new players seeking greater global roles. But outside the academy and a few policy journals, this strategic conversation is lacking. Instead, national debates swirl around immediate, tactical issues such as Libya, Syria and even Iran, which with or without nuclear weapons will not have the capability to reshape the international system on its own. America’s political elites are paying little or no attention to the changing configurations of global power.

Consider the growing geopolitical collaboration between China and Russia, hardly natural partners under normal circumstances. They have a difficult history marked by strong mutual suspicions and a weak record in pursuing far-reaching economic cooperation. Nevertheless, faced with an American policy that Beijing and Moscow see as dual containment mixed with soft regime change, China and Russia increasingly are working together to prevent the United States and its allies from dominating the international system. Syria is a significant example; while neither is particularly committed to Bashar al-Assad, both object to the idea that the United States and the EU have the right to decide who rules where.

Many critics of China and Russia—for example, Robert Kagan, a Romney adviser whose work is also cited by Obama—argue that since Moscow and Beijing often act against U.S. interests, working with them will not produce results, and getting tough will not create new problems. This is dangerously flawed thinking.

*America's political elites are paying little or no attention
to the changing configurations of global power.*

Neither China nor Russia shares American values or particularly desires to defer to American interests. Neither has been a genuinely reliable U.S. partner, but neither wants to provoke America. Each appears to value a good relationship with Washington and seeks to avoid unnecessary conflicts. Among other things, China and Russia each have a major stake in the health of the international economy, of which the United States is a key driver.

However, both countries have become sufficiently frustrated with Washington—China over the U.S. drift toward containment in Asia, Russia over America's tendency to disregard Moscow's perspectives—to ponder seriously what they could do to affect key American interests if their relationships with the United States deteriorate further. If this attitude actually shaped Chinese and Russian policies, it could affect not only their bilateral relationships with America but also wider international dynamics. And it could happen quite rapidly.

Some steps would not even require much exertion. For example, Beijing and Moscow could announce a long-term commitment to expanding global nuclear power as well as a policy of assisting Iran and others in substantially expanding their peaceful nuclear capabilities to the full extent permitted under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. This indirect expression of willingness to rebuild Iran's nuclear infrastructure—if needed—would render U.S. debates about attacking Iran's nuclear

sites utterly meaningless even without anything so grand as a Chinese-Russian security umbrella for Tehran.

If China, Russia and Pakistan were to apply coordinated pressure on NATO supply lines in and out of Afghanistan, with China agreeing to replace or outbid heavily conditioned U.S. financial assistance to Pakistan, U.S. and NATO military forces would face grave new dangers. Pakistan is especially important because it demonstrates clearly how even middling powers cooperating with and dependent upon America have become increasingly resentful of perceived assaults on their sovereignty and dignity, in this case through the use of drones and precision munitions to attack alleged terrorists inside the country.

Even in the worst case, the United States likely would find the will, resources and judgment to manage such challenges and crises. But it is impossible to predict how long it would take and how much it would cost, leaving aside the long-term effects of a sustained contest among the world's major powers. Neither the Obama administration, which has put foreign policy on hold, nor the Romney campaign appears inclined to pursue a probing examination of these fundamental issues before the election. As a result, whoever wins likely will face some nasty surprises. The clock is ticking internationally, and while other governments may understand the constraints of America's electoral campaigns, our constantly changing world is not sitting and waiting for the results. □

TNI Interview: Zbigniew Brzezinski

U.S. Fate Is in U.S. Hands

No one disputes that Zbigniew Brzezinski resides within the circle of America's most brilliant and prolific foreign-policy experts. The former White House national-security adviser under Jimmy Carter has written or coauthored eighteen books, including his most recent, *Strategic Vision: America and the Crisis of Global Order*, a probing analysis of America's challenges in a fast-changing world. Brzezinski is a counselor and trustee at the Center for Strategic and International Studies and a senior research professor at the School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins University. *The National Interest* caught up with Brzezinski at his CSIS office for an interview about his book and the current state of the world. The interview was conducted by TNI editor Robert W. Merry.

In your book, you talk about the Atlantic West's grand opportunity for what you called a "new era of Western global supremacy" after the Soviet collapse. But it didn't happen. To what extent do you think this failure resulted from human folly, and to what extent was it a product of forces beyond the control of the Atlantic West or its leaders?

I think both. But the West was fatigued, and Europe, certainly, lost a sense of its global responsibility and became more provincial in outlook. That, in part, was connected unavoidably with the task of constructing something that was called,

originally, the European Community, that led to the European Union (although the two names should have been in a different sequence, because the European Community had more coherence than the current European Union). And the United States embarked on a kind of self-gratification and self-satisfaction, almost acting as if it really thought that history had come to an end. We did not anticipate the new, novel conditions of the world that were emerging, I think, with increasing clarity, which I try to address in my recent book, *Strategic Vision*.

So these forces were pretty substantial, but to what extent did some of the decisions of that time—the Iraq War, for example—lead to this result?

You know my views on the Iraq War. I think that it was a disaster. A disaster in the sense of undermining American legitimacy worldwide, damaging the credibility of the president and of the office of the president, and entailing costs for the United States, which were not insubstantial in terms of lives lost and people maimed, and enormous economically—all contributing to a more unstable Middle East. Because whether we liked Saddam Hussein or not, and he was obviously obnoxious, he was a strong source of containment of Iranian Middle Eastern ambitions. Today, a divided Iraq, an unstable Iraq, a porous Iraq is very susceptible to Iranian influence and, if need be, destabilization.

How do you think the world today would be different if we had not gone into Iraq?

Well, for one thing, the Middle East might be slightly more stable. And I had no objection to us going into Afghanistan, although I did urge our top decision makers to go in, knock out the Taliban, destroy it if we could, as well as Al Qaeda, and then get out militarily—not stay in for ten years with an ambition to build a modern democratic state within a medieval and fragmented society. So that's not been very

that it doesn't have to happen. I don't deny for a minute the vitality of the Far East, of Asia, but I'm also very much aware that major players there have internal difficulties and potentially very dangerous conflicts in dealing with each other. So we have lots of room for maneuvering, in that respect. But more importantly, for a long time they are not going to be superior to us in overall financial and social well-being, or



beneficial, but at least that would have been only one conflict. But then we had two conflicts, both very costly and not particularly helpful either.

You wrote recently about this consequential shift in the center of gravity in global power and economic dynamism, as you say, from the Atlantic toward the Pacific, and you also write that the West can maintain a powerful position in this new world. But isn't it possible that this shift will simply leave the West and America behind, irrespective of what we do?

It is certainly possible, but if it should happen, it'll be our own fault in the sense

in standards of living. But of course if we flounder, if we stagnate, if we wallow in crisis, they may get ahead of us.

And I am very worried about the fact that we in the United States have a financial system that has become increasingly speculative rather than productive, in which personal greed rather than social growth is the main motive of the players. We have a tax system that favors the rich to a degree that I think is grossly unfair and not economically productive because it contributes to greater social disparities in our society. And such disparities in the long run tend to be very damaging and can even fracture national consensus and

stimulate class conflicts. We have a political system in which privilege has been melded with opportunism. The Congress is a self-perpetuating body of relatively rich and privileged people who are not above passing legislation or making arrangements that favor them as a group. As a result, it's increasingly difficult for us to intelligently address both domestic and foreign problems.

I have been watching this presidential election with dismay. Of all the elections that I have been part of, I think this is about the pits. Because in previous elections—in 2000, for example, which featured divisions as extreme as, say, Goldwater versus Johnson or later McGovern versus Nixon—they still involved large, comprehensive issues in which the outcomes, for better or worse, were predictable. Right now, it's a mess of slogans and total confusion with gnawing societal anxiety.

You talk in the book about today's university students around the world, constituting—in your words—the equivalent of Marx's proletariat: "The restless, resentful postpeasant workers of the early industrial age, susceptible to ideological agitation and revolutionary mobilization." You suggest this is a major force for instability in the world. Do you think this destabilizing force can be tamed or controlled within the next twenty years?

I think it depends very much on the historical context in which these forces manifest themselves. They did in Central Europe, but one has to remember that Central Europe already had experienced the spring of nations more than a century earlier, in 1848. There was a genuine democratic tradition to be brought to the surface and harnessed by outstanding leaders such as Lech Walesa in Poland and Vaclav Havel in Czechoslovakia. So,

the movement was democratic, and it could construct democracies. I think in many parts of the world today, and the Middle East is obviously one of them, you're dealing with a phenomenon that is somewhat similar and yet different. These movements are populist. So were the ones in Central Europe. But they're not imbued with democratic values or a widely shared understanding of what constitutionalism and a system of law really entail.

Therefore, they're much more likely to be driven by either passions or historical narratives that are one-sided, potentially intolerant, maybe fanatical and in some cases even intolerantly religious. So I'm not so confident that every so-called populist uprising against a dictatorship is necessarily a turn toward democracy. It may be a rejection of corruption, of arbitrary rule, but then what follows may be eventually equally one-sided.

In the book you discuss the importance of America having an image in the world, an identity, that contributes to its ability to influence other nations and other peoples. To what extent do you see this as part of that, and to what extent has that been undermined by the war in Iraq and other things that we've been doing since the end of the Cold War?

I do think that we have unfortunately delegitimized ourselves, therefore making it easier for some parts of the world driven by historical narratives to be instinctively hostile to us. We have ignored that, and we have acted as if we were endowed with some special mission. George W. Bush even said, "Our nation is chosen by God and commissioned by history to be a model to the world." But there's a further problem, and so America's not to be blamed for everything. This century, I think, is already giving signs that it's going to be fundamentally different from the previous century. What was the decisive quality of

*If we are intelligent about it, we are still in position
to be the most influential force in the world.*

the twentieth century in terms of global power? It was the struggle for domination and hegemony among major powers, on three grand occasions that shaped the century—World War I, World War II and the Cold War. We emerged supreme, and then I think we fumbled it.

But it is not entirely our fault. We probably could not have become what we hoped to be, a model for the world, because the world has become much more diversified, much more complicated with the global political awakening making the world volatile, and then on top of that there are new global dangers that we face. We have to start understanding as a nation that we have to act differently. We have to rebuild coalitions. This is why I have written about a rejuvenated and bigger West, drawing in Russia and Turkey. This is why I wrote about America being involved in the Far East—but off the mainland, not involved in any wars on the mainland but balancing from outside, acting a little bit like Great Britain did toward Europe in the nineteenth century. If we are intelligent about it, we are still in position to be the most influential force in the world, but we have to be intelligent. And to be intelligent, we have to have leaders who understand this, who have a sense of the fundamental historical change that is making this century different from the preceding one. But more important, perhaps, or at least as important, we have to have a public that has some rudimentary understanding of foreign affairs.

What really makes me worried is that our public doesn't understand the world.

It's not even informed about the world. Your magazine is important. But look at its circulation.

Very small.

Yeah. And most people don't read anything about the world because the newspapers don't give it to them, except three or four major newspapers. We have a public that's ignorant and susceptible to demagoguery. And that handicaps leadership, even if it is intelligent. Of course, it becomes worse if the leadership is not very intelligent and itself operates with simplistic slogans.

Dr. Brzezinski, do you think that this problem has increased in recent years? Were we, as a nation, more aware of the world in a previous era?

I'll tell you why I think the answer is yes. We are less aware for a very simple reason: because the world is much more complex. Americans weren't better informed about global history before, and they are still abysmally informed about global history. Americans weren't very informed about global geography. They're still basically ignorant, even though that is scandalous. But they knew that Hitler was a global danger. They knew that communism was a menace. They knew that the Soviet Union was threatening us physically—talking about burying us and having nuclear weapons with which to do it. In that sense, the sentiments of the public captured some of the basic essence of reality. Today, that reality is much more complex, much more difficult to



understand. President Obama started well, in my judgment, in conveying those themes to the public. Then he didn't act on it systematically.

I think today we have a real problem, one, of public education, and two, a real problem in that we need sustained presidential dialogue with the country about world affairs, explaining some of the points that I'm making. I think Obama started really great. I had conversations with him and so forth. I was really impressed by the fact that he senses this new reality. And he gave a number of really good speeches—Cairo, Istanbul, Brandenburg. But then he stopped. Of course he had domestic problems, a financial crisis. He has many reasons for exoneration, so to speak. But the fact is there's a real problem. If you look at the public discourse about world affairs today and you compare it to what you publish in *The National Interest* or

other magazines like yours, the gap is phenomenal.

I want to talk a little bit about the threat of the debt overhang. You identified that as one of the top threatening liabilities, as you say. Aren't these problems becoming insoluble now? And what would it take for the country to get control over our debt problem, which is hanging over us like a huge sword of Damocles?

Well, first of all, I'm not a trained economist, and I don't pretend to be one. But I think what it would take is some shared national consensus about how we define a decent and responsible life in the modern complex world. I don't think we have that. We have slogans about being successful. We have slogans about "job creators."

We have slogans about everybody having the right to reach the sky in the quest for material self-satisfaction. We have a definition of the good life, which involves the accumulation of material goods plus entertainment.

These are clusters of issues that are interrelated, and it will require a real jolt for us to start thinking seriously about how we can re-create a healthy society here that is still the compelling image for the world that it once was. Then, the American dream was widely shared. Today, it isn't.

Do you think it's going to take an even greater crisis to create the consensus that could fuel a president's ability to cut through these problems?

I fear that you're putting it just right. I hope it's wrong, but I share the concern.

You repeatedly emphasize, in your new book and elsewhere, the importance of a

solution to the Israeli-Palestinian deadlock as a prerequisite to much of what needs to be accomplished in America's diplomacy in that region. To what extent do you see the two-state solution as being perhaps moribund, and isn't Israel's aggressive settlement development eliminating the land needed for a contiguous Palestinian state?

I think that is certainly a problem; it is an impediment to the two-state solution. But I think a two-state solution is more likely to be an enduring solution to the difficulty both sides have faced over the last decades than the eventual alternative, which is a one-state approach, in which there are still such differences, such conflicting narratives, such bitter memories, that it's hard to imagine how it could work as a democratic state. It would be one state in which somebody would be on top of the other, and whoever's on the bottom would try to gain the top in order to repress those who are on the top. So I don't think that's a viable solution.

What I fear is, however, that it may be becoming too late for the two-state solution because, in order for the two-state solution to be enduring, it has to be a genuine compromise between the two. That's extremely difficult to achieve in circumstances in which one party is much stronger than the other and therefore has no particular incentive to be making concessions. Meanwhile, the other party is so much weaker that it is afraid to make concessions. Simultaneously, there's no one on the outside that is seriously committed to pushing the peace process forward for this or that reason, mostly because of the domestic difficulties that it entails for the American president. Yet we are the only party that could move the peace process forward.

I think we're stuck, and I feel sorry for the people involved. I feel sorry for Israel. I'm a child of World War II, and I know what the

Jewish people went through. I feel sorry for the Palestinians. It's a bad situation, and I think the growing turmoil in the Middle East is increasingly making it more and more difficult to get a compromise adopted because one or the other side either feels aggrieved or outraged or endangered.

In the cover story of our previous issue, prominent Israeli journalist Akiva Eldar talks about the demographic changes in Israel that are making it increasingly difficult to go for a two-state solution or a liberal sensibility. To what extent do you think that's closing off prospects for peace?

That may be, but I'm not really an expert on the social dynamics of either group. I tend to look at it more as an international problem with consequences for the United States, first of all, but, secondly in the longer run, with dire consequences for Israel as well. When I was commissioned by the president—whom I was serving in the seventies at the time of the Camp David accords—to go and try to convince the royalty in Saudi Arabia and Jordan to embrace a compromise, I was struck that some of them casually referred to the fact that the crusaders were in Jerusalem for ninety years, and now there's absolutely nothing left of that. So their sense of time may be different. If we're driven out of the Middle East, which I think is beginning to look increasingly possible, what is the future of Israel?

I acknowledge that this is a question that might be asked on a cable channel, but how do you assess the percentage chance that the United States will attack Iran to delay or stop its nuclear-weapons program, and what about the chance that Israel would do so?

I think the chance that Israel will do it is greater. I doubt that we would do it just like that, because I think no matter how deep our concerns over that issue are, the

Suppose we do get into a war with Iran. How do we end it? How long will it last? Who else is going to be in it with us to help us? How will it play domestically over the longer haul?

fact is it's easy to start a war, and we know that it's very hard to end it. Suppose we do get into a war with Iran. How do we end it? How long will it last? Who else is going to be in it with us to help us? How will it play domestically over the longer haul? But the Israelis may be guided by different logic, and certainly [Israeli prime minister Benjamin] Netanyahu and [Defense Minister Ehud] Barak do convey the impression, if not of eagerness, then at least of impatient determination to strike.

If there were to be such an attack, spin out what you think would happen in terms of stability of the region and the world at large.

Well, I have said this publicly. I think, first of all, the Iranians will not really retaliate very effectively against Israel. They'll try, but it's going to be fragmentary, marginally painful but not decisive. The Iranians will be absolutely convinced that this was done in connivance with us. They'll retaliate against us, and what are their options? They may not be able to close the Strait of Hormuz, but they'll certainly try. We'll keep it open, but the cost of energy will skyrocket anyway, inevitably. For one thing, insurance rates will go up, and there may be some other damages. That will be bad for the global economy.

But much worse, we will drive the Europeans into the hands of the Russians, who will be rubbing their hands. The Russians are very worried that the price of energy, which oscillates between \$90 and \$120 right now, is not sufficiently high to meet their budgetary expectations.

But if the price of a barrel goes up \$200, they'll be sitting pretty. The Europeans will be totally dependent. The Chinese will be hurt; so will the Japanese. That will not help the global economy either. Secondly, they can certainly attack some of our military facilities nearby, and they can destabilize Iraq in no time flat by stimulating a Shia-Sunni collision. Next, they can certainly make life uncomfortable for us in western Afghanistan, which had been very stable. That means that our disengagement from Afghanistan will be very costly or difficult and so forth. But then there are all sorts of other possibilities involving terrorism or whatever, which will simply mean that the region and the United States are going to be intertwined in warlike instability that may last for a long time.

So the broader inflammation of the whole Middle East region could result?

That's right. And you certainly have to face the fact that you're not being confronted with a situation in which you have no choice. We have a choice. We have a choice of avoiding that and of convincing the Israelis not to do it. It's not like Pearl Harbor, where we were attacked and had to respond. Last but not least, I don't exclude the possibility of negotiations succeeding, provided they are real negotiations.

Which they haven't been so far?

Which they haven't been so far. They have to be based on the principle that Iran is entitled as a Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) signatory to have a nuclear-

energy program, and they have a right to enrich but at a very low level. I think something along those lines is workable, but if the idea is that the agreement has to involve some sort of a humiliating arrangement for Iran that puts it in a cage quite apart from the arrangements for every other NPT signatory, then they probably won't accept.

Last but not least, I think we certainly have the means and even a moral obligation to do for the people in the Middle East, and particularly for the Israelis, what we have been prepared over the years to do for the Europeans, and then for the Japanese and the Koreans. Namely, we should give them a really binding, reliable commitment that they are fully covered by the American nuclear deterrent, by stating publicly that "any threat to Israel, or worse, direct action against anybody in the Middle East would be viewed as an action directed at the United States, with all of the consequences that might entail." We succeeded in protecting the Europeans and deterring the Soviets. We have protected successfully the

Japanese and the Koreans. We certainly can do it for the Middle East.

Last question. Could you give our president, Barack Obama, an overall grade in terms of his foreign policy?

Well, I've been asked that, so I'm not sure you even want to do this because I've been asked and cited in the press about it. I said A-minus, B-plus.

And could you give me three things that contribute to that?

Well, I think he has tried to put the U.S.-Chinese relationship on a stable basis in which the necessity of partnership is tempered by the need to be vigilant but balanced, and that's okay. I think he has been patient, maybe a little too patient but wisely patient, in dealing with the Russians. I think with the Europeans, they know that we are still seriously interested in Europe. I think the Middle East represents the biggest liability, but that is not entirely his fault.

Thank you very much. □

The Elusive Obama Doctrine

By Leslie H. Gelb

Leaving aside political and ideological malcontents as well as defenders of the faith, it seems to me that three points can be made fairly regarding President Barack Obama's foreign-policy and national-security record.

First, he has captured the potent political center, a considerable feat for any Democrat. He's done so mainly by staying out of big, costly trouble. He further helped himself by co-opting some of the popular hard-nosed rhetoric and actions of traditional realists not generally associated with Democrats. Right-wing extremists did their part by practically conceding the middle ground with their unrelenting hawkishness. All of this permitted Obama to outmaneuver the Republicans and hold the center. In doing so, he has given Democrats their first real shot at being America's leading party on foreign policy since Franklin Roosevelt and the earliest days of Harry Truman.

This has been nothing short of a political coup that could reverse long-standing Republican electoral advantages on national security.

Second, Obama managed a complex range of tactical challenges quite well, improving significantly on the international

position he inherited from George W. Bush and generally bolstering America's reputation. Specifically, he managed America's exit from Iraq well and developed a new, focused and effective military strategy to counter terrorists. Inevitably, experts will quarrel over whether Obama could have done more of this or less of that. But on the whole, he guided America capably through the kinds of problems that often had turned sour in administrations past. Even where Obama took wrong turns—and there were a number of these—he mostly sidestepped costly mistakes, with the exception of Afghanistan. He was aided in avoiding such big errors—quite an accomplishment—by possessing a clear sense of the limitations of American power.

Third, while Obama saw what American power could not do, he failed to appreciate what American power could do, especially when encased in good strategy. Thus, his principal shortcoming was failing to formulate strategy and understand its interplay with power. He should be faulted here, even though most who fault him usually fail to produce their own viable strategies—those magical brews of picturing pitfalls and opportunities, hammering out attainable objectives and focusing the use of power. To this day, Obama's Afghanistan strategy seems little more than a disjointed list of tactics. More sorrowfully on the strategic front, he has yet to put economic resurgence and U.S. economic power at the core of the national-security debate,

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where they must be, for an effective national-security policy in the twenty-first century. To be sure, he has spoken of this need on occasion, but in his hands it has seemed more a rhetorical stepchild than a key ingredient of international power and successful strategy. Without strategy and without economic renewal to power it, Obama neither has achieved lasting strategic breakthroughs nor laid the groundwork for them later on.

Those who have easy solutions for foreign-policy challenges don't know very much about foreign policy. I've tried to be mindful of the great difficulties and of reasonably varied policy perspectives—and of the fact that, in the course of events, I've changed my own mind on matters small and large. I am mindful, too, that strange occurrences often attend the months preceding presidential elections.

confidence in him. Holding center field allowed Obama to move both left and right to block attacks or gain support. At times, though, such political gain came at the cost of contradictory actions that confused audiences both domestic and foreign. As for unhappy liberals, Obama often has flicked them away almost as easily as Republicans have.

In taking over the middle, Obama had help from a centrist-oriented Bill Clinton, who certainly was an elusive target for Republicans in the 1996 elections. However, Clinton's immunity often derived from his tiptoeing around international issues rather than boldly seizing the center. Obama seized that center. It must be said that, during the Clinton and Obama years, Republicans contributed to their own decline with unadulterated hawkish rhetoric. The 9/11 events briefly boosted



Obama's position at the political center in U.S. foreign policy has enabled him to deflect classic Republican charges of liberal weakness that always kept Democrats on the defensive. He and his team also adopted much of the realist language of "interests" and "power," which further enhanced public

Bush and Republican hawkishness, but that faded soon enough.

Obama earned the people's trust. He and his new Democrats averted the usual hellholes because they understood the limits of American power far better than Bush had, particularly when it came to the

shortcomings of military force. Yes, the United States had military superiority after the Cold War. Bush and the neocons saw this clearly. But they went on to draw the wrong conclusion—namely, that the way to exercise that superiority was to threaten force and wage war. Obama and his minions grasped the reality that American superiority can prevail in conventional wars against nonsuperpowers (driving Iraq out of Kuwait), in operations to decapitate regimes in their capital cities (Saddam Hussein in Baghdad; the Taliban in Kabul) and in commando-like operations. But unlike the Bush contingent, the Obamanites saw that conventional military superiority cannot pacify countries or resolve civil wars and vast internal conflicts. With the notable exception of Afghanistan, the new Democrats respected this reality.

Once in office, Obama aided himself politically by quickly ditching the liberal foreign-policy agenda of his campaign. By the end of his first year, he had quietly abandoned promises on global warming and Guantánamo. The former proved much too expensive in the short run, and the latter had become a symbol of liberal naïveté. He hushed conservative critics with a more skeptical tone on Palestinian-Israeli talks and a tougher stance on Iran and North Korea. He guarded himself further by stiffening his position on economic and humanitarian issues with China and stressing his pro-human-rights posture on Russia.

Obama then deflected the Republicans' remaining bullets with his amplified and winning war against terrorists. He topped the antiterror charts when, in the face of considerable risk, he ordered the killing of Osama bin Laden in May 2011. He punctuated this by eliminating Anwar al-Awlaki, another monster, in September 2011. Instead of sending in the troops to fight open-ended land wars, he fought the

terrorists with special-operations teams and drones. Whatever you think of his administration's tendency to leak news of its victories or the ethics of having a "kill list," in his four years, Obama has taken the fight to our enemies and dealt them a staggering blow.

Only buckshot remained in the Republican political arsenal. The GOP was reduced to complaining about Obama's abandoning Bush's democracy-promotion agenda, delaying the elimination of Egypt's and Libya's dictators, not taking "action" to remove Syrian president Bashar al-Assad and generally forsaking the Arab Spring. Obama barely had to respond, given the prevailing political sentiment. Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton must have been jealous.

But Obama surely knows that history is closing in and will be seeking real accomplishments. He has to be aware that at some point even the sleepy press will ask: "Where's the beef?"

This lack of beef brings us to the major hole in Obama's foreign policy—the paucity of genuine strategic thinking. While the president's political leeway was constricted on most domestic issues, he had a relatively free hand on foreign policy, especially after he demonstrated he could handle issues reasonably well. To be sure, he stayed attentive and responsive to conservative attacks on his actions abroad. For the most part, however, he made foreign policy his turf and ran a highly centralized one-man show. The cost of this overconcentration was that he usurped even the details of policy from his principal cabinet officers and thus left himself little time to conceive and craft a long-range strategy. Fashioning strategy takes both time and experience, neither of which Obama possessed. Further, there was a deeper impediment still—his personal predilections and personality. He was not built for strategizing. Strategy calls for making bets and taking risks

Obama's position at the political center in U.S. foreign policy has enabled him to deflect classic Republican charges of liberal weakness that always kept Democrats on the defensive.

that the strategist must stick to over time, come what may. Strategy requires reducing flexibility, cutting off options to follow a certain course and not getting overwhelmed by details. These traits, too, ran counter to Obama's disposition to shift nimbly and keep options open. Strategy requires sticking to your guns, with some discomfort, in the face of pressures to trim sails.

Strategy is also about figuring out precisely how to use the power you have. Even with the decline in America's economy and the shifting sands of international affairs, one remaining constant is that nations the world over still recognize Washington as the indispensable leader. America never had the power to order others around—not after World War II nor at the Cold War's end. But now more than at any point since America's global reign began, other countries have the power to go their own way and say no to Washington. America may be the only nation that can lead, but with less relative power, it needs good strategy more than ever.

Such strategic considerations are at the heart of the exercise of power. Obama does not have an overarching strategy, nor did Bill Clinton or George W. Bush. George H. W. Bush did: end the Cold War without a hot war by helping Soviet leaders dismantle their empire. President Nixon and Henry Kissinger did as well: bury the ill effects of the Vietnam War by skywriting America's unique diplomatic power, make peace between Egypt and Israel, open up relations with Communist China, and use that as leverage against Moscow and ties to

Moscow against Beijing. Best of them all, President Truman created two handfuls of international institutions for the exercise of America's economic power—the IMF, the World Bank, the UN, the Marshall Plan, NATO and more. In the face of Soviet military superiority in Europe and Chinese superiority in Asia, that power was key for Truman, as it was for Dwight Eisenhower. Through these institutions, and thanks to sustained U.S. economic growth and superior military technology, Washington implemented the brilliant policies of containment and deterrence.

The difficulty with presidents who don't have strategies is convincing them that they actually don't have them and that they do need them. George W. Bush seemed to believe that military assertiveness constituted a strategy. Bill Clinton subordinated international strategy to domestic politics. Obama appears to think that common sense and flexibility constitute a strategy. The result is that leaders around the world often puzzle over what Obama is seeking and how. It's not that these leaders have their own strategy, but there is a much better chance that they'll go along with Obama if they believe he has a plausible one.

To understand this gap, it's helpful to survey the evolution of Obama's approach to world affairs. When he took the oath of office, Washington's relations with the world were, to put it kindly, in a state of disrepair. Initially, Obama tried to be forthcoming and understanding to all. He offered talks with Iran and North Korea, and he made conciliatory gestures

toward China and Russia. He opened a welcoming hand to Arabs and Muslims in a June 2009 speech in Cairo, which he underscored by not traveling a few extra miles to Israel. Europeans expressed



pleasure at his un-Bushian willingness to consult them, appreciate their points of view and recommit America to an early exit from Iraq. But with little to build upon and a declining U.S. economy, these initiatives stalled, and high hopes abroad began to dim. What follows is a rapid run-through of my observations on some of the major issues.

Nowhere was Obama's understanding of the limitations of American power better executed than in Iraq. Bush signed a pact for the full withdrawal of U.S. forces by the end of 2011, and it was clear to all—save the neocons—that the Iraqis would not budge on that. Obama took out the troops. Republicans tried to attack but got nowhere. Most Americans realized that staying would expose U.S. soldiers further without having much effect on Iraq's various troubles. However the public may have felt about the toll in American lives and money, it now seemed relieved. And the negative consequences in the Gulf area have been minute. The real strategic blunder came

when Bush destroyed Iraq, leaving Iran as the only major regional power.

In Afghanistan, Obama made the opposite call, yielding to the pressure to escalate. He quickly became bogged down due to the casualties and costs, Afghan corruption and inefficiency, Pakistani duplicity in providing safe havens to the Taliban and so on. Only as his reelection campaign approached did he commit to a limited war-fighting strategy and eventual withdrawal. But questions linger over how many troops will remain after combat forces are withdrawn in 2014 and for how long. Perhaps Obama simply is trying to cover up retreat in an election year. Perhaps he

still believes in some of his old danger-and-victory rhetoric about Afghanistan. Or perhaps he still doesn't quite know what to do.

Obama's policies on the nuclear bad guys—Iran and North Korea (and don't forget Pakistan)—have been mixed. After early days of conciliation, Obama's policy on Iran has been mostly hard-line, a clarity blessed by U.S. and Israeli politics. And it's been half right. On the plus side, he's gotten most major nations to impose a formidable list of economic sanctions and stepped up U.S. military presence in the region. But pressure alone, no matter how formidable, hasn't been and won't be sufficient to settle matters with Iran. Sanctions won't work unless teamed with a reasonable proposal. If the U.S. goal is to eliminate Iran's nuclear program altogether, the risk of war will be high. If the goal is to restrict that program to energy and make it very difficult for Tehran to develop and hide weapons-grade material, diplomacy has a chance.

So far, Tehran wants almost all sanctions lifted without giving clear indications of

its bottom line. The American-led side insists on a step-by-step approach and won't concede Iran's right to produce uranium enriched to 20 percent, a short jump to weapons-grade quality. Neither side will budge, and nothing will happen before November. The same holds for the already nuclear-capable North Korea. Obama tried talking, but like his predecessors, he flopped. For all Pyongyang's threats, however, its leadership seems to respect deterrence—buttressed by Beijing's aversion to another Korean war.

To me, more worrisome than North Korea or Iran is our sometime ally Pakistan. Pakistan already has damaged antiproliferation efforts by divulging nuclear secrets to ignoble the world over. With its unstable domestic politics and possession of over a hundred nuclear weapons (and growing), it has to rank well ahead of Iran and North Korea in likelihood to use nuclear weapons or give them to terrorists.

Obama's policies toward China, Russia and India have had their inevitable ups and downs, without crises. From here on, presidents will be judged in large measure by how well they manage affairs with China, the other superpower. At the outset, Obama faced the improbable circumstance of Chinese leaders liking his predecessor, who didn't arouse the usual Chinese suspicions about scheming Americans. Obama has not had an easy time commanding their respect. To them, he's been sometimes too hard, sometimes too soft, sometimes both. They certainly didn't like the Obama team's policy and resource pivot from Europe and the Middle East to Asia, China's turf. To China, it smacked of a new containment policy and of Washington's refusal to allow Beijing its day in the sun.

Obama has a genuine desire to work out differences with China, provided he can

satisfy three key constituencies: 1) China's neighbors, who want an unobtrusive U.S. bubble of protection from Beijing; 2) humanitarians, who believe that strategic concerns should be subordinated to democratization and human rights; and 3) conservatives, who fear growing Chinese military might. All represent legitimate U.S. concerns.

Obama has tried to calm Beijing somewhat by reframing the pivot as more of a "rebalancing." Thus, even as Obama transfers U.S. military resources to Asia, he correctly is attempting to shift the main theater of competition from security to economics. He boldly and rightly expanded plans for the Trans-Pacific Partnership, going beyond free trade to the aggressive protection of intellectual-property rights and other matters. At the same time, however, he has tried to comfort China's neighbors over key issues such as the South China Sea. These neighbors want it all ways—U.S. protection but not so much as to anger Beijing and risk Chinese trade and investment. In other words, they want Washington to take the heat, not them.

Relations with China are nothing like those with the old Soviet Union. There was no economic dimension to Cold War politics. In U.S.-Chinese relations today, economics is central. Each is a major trader and investor with the other, and China holds more than a trillion dollars of U.S. debt. While common economic interests certainly do not guarantee peace, they sure help. The main point is this: events in Asia and elsewhere will go China's way unless America's economy revives—a key point that Obama hasn't sufficiently stressed to Americans.

From a low point under Bush, U.S. relations with Moscow had nowhere to go but up. Obama hit the "reset" button to start a new relationship. Sometimes, this produced good feelings; other times,

In no theater of the world has Obama's lack of a strategic vision had starker consequences than in Afghanistan.

there were increased tensions. Particularly troublesome to Moscow have been U.S. interventions, actual and potential, in other countries. Russia worries about U.S. interference in Ukraine and Georgia as well as in places like Syria. Yet Moscow has cooperated with Washington on Afghanistan logistics, nukes in Iran and North Korea, and antiterrorism issues generally.

The reset button has had its offs and ons, and the relationship hasn't been elevated to the strategic partnership Obama wanted. But it's still worth trying, especially with Vladimir Putin reensconced as president. To make it work, U.S. leaders must prepare to be seen side by side atop the mountain with Russian leaders. That's how they see themselves, and Washington should treat them that way. It's a small price to pay for Russia's diplomatic cooperation. American leaders can't ignore human-rights and democracy concerns, but for now they will need to temper the rhetoric to get Moscow's power aligned with America's on difficult world issues.

The would-be strategic partnership with India has yet to bloom, and if it ever does it's not clear what form it will take. Like many of its neighbors to the east, India wants China to be distracted with America as it flexes its muscles. At the same time, New Delhi is deciding when and how much to embrace Washington. And it is India that will do the deciding. So far, Washington's devotion to forging this strategic partnership (against China, unspoken) has been mostly unrequited. Washington has given India a free ride

on inspecting military-run nuclear facilities. In return, New Delhi has been quite stingy. In a huge deal last year, India snubbed U.S. jet fighters and chose to buy Russian and French ones instead. India is still figuring itself out, and both New Delhi and Washington are calibrating how far they can go without alienating the Chinese.

Obama's policy of humanitarian intervention and democracy promotion has been inconsistent. Such is the trouble for every president who must balance values and hard interests.

The most dramatic problems have been Libya and Syria. Obama rushed into Libya to help America's allies crush a dictator. It was a tricky decision. Washington couldn't ignore the pleas of friends who had fought alongside Americans in the two big contemporary wars. Yet the eager interveners hadn't the foggiest idea whether they were helping future Islamic extremists or potential democrats. It is a welcome sign that Libyans bucked the regional trend of electing Islamists in their July elections but nothing to warrant a proper exhale. For now, the Obama team is happy it eliminated an Arab dictator to prove America's democratic wares.

Not so, so far, in Syria. Unlike in Libya, Obama is wary of the potential sinkhole and rightly so—even as the neocons, as always, beat their war drums. And unlike in Libya, where the Arab League encouraged intervention, Obama has been spared its pressure to use force against the Assad regime. Nobody wants to take the military

lead because of the blame that may come later. The hope is that Moscow, a supporter of Assad, may pull the plug on its ally and save everyone else from having to go in.

There is a big strategic question mark over Syria. Will it miraculously become calm and democratic? Will it become a radical Sunni state tied to Al Qaeda? Will Iran lose the future Syria as an ally, thus driving Tehran from its main Mideast outpost? Those at Syria's borders are bracing for the worst.

The day may come when Washington can help Arabs toward a freer life. But that day still is not near, as the Arab Spring screams both hope and danger.

For Egypt, there is so much to say and so little that can be done. It embodies all America's dreams and nightmares about societies progressing from dictatorship to democracy, with little or no grounding in democratic traditions and institutions. The fear, of course, is that dictators relatively friendly to Washington will be replaced by new dictators harsher to their own people and unreceptive to Washington. Hosni Mubarak was a corrupt dictator indeed, and it's just babble to argue that America could have kept him in power and/or moved him toward democracy. He seemed dug in forever. Yet when Tahrir's moment came, the dictator disappeared in the blink of an eye.

Obama now must choose between a corrupt and nondemocratic Egyptian military, possibly amenable to American interests, and the people's choice: a Muslim Brotherhood that might be moderate now but extreme once in control. If the Muslim

Brotherhood strips off its Clark Kent suit to become Islamist Superman, there will be hell to pay for Egyptians, Israelis and Americans.

The choice now would be no better had Obama immediately dumped Mubarak and sided with the protestors. The latter had little power and no political organization, demonstrated by their poor performance in elections. Indeed, Libya aside, liberals throughout the Arab lands are unprepared to compete with Islamists for power. With no obvious and viable ally, Obama has little choice but to keep lines out to most parties, as is his wont. He has been mostly cautious about the unknown tides of the Arab Spring, and for that he deserves commendation. But



there is a future to plan for, and it is not too soon for a U.S.-led economic-aid project to strengthen the cadres of moderate reform in the Arab world.

Obama does not merit high marks for managing Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. He did virtually nothing to prod Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas to prepare his people for compromise, and he allowed Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu to denigrate the negotiation process. At a

joint press conference, Netanyahu lectured Obama on the evils of a peace accord built around the 1967 borders, and the U.S. president just sat there. The modified '67 borders, endorsed by several of Netanyahu's predecessors, have been America's position on peace for a half century. With November approaching, an American clarification of this issue has to wait until 2013. But at that point, Washington must be ready for straight talk with Israel and the Palestinians, backed up by the blessings of Arab states and an Arab economic-development plan for Palestine.

Latin America offers an opportunity largely ignored by Obama, and Africa represents a growing threat about which he can do little. Brazil is the world's sixth-biggest economy, and the Mexican economy is booming. Even with America's own difficulties and other international priorities, the Southern Hemisphere has commanded shockingly little time from the White House. The administration put muscle into passing trade agreements with Panama and Colombia only because it had the GOP votes in Congress. At the Cartagena summit in 2012, Obama was slammed for his failure to roll up his sleeves on either the Cuban embargo or drugs. The most interest Americans showed in the region came when Secret Service officers were found to be cavorting with prostitutes.

In Africa, some countries have strengthened their democracies, though many are now gravely threatened by corruption, internal butchers or Islamic extremists. The United States and others feign interest, but absent direct implications for other continents, outside lights rarely will shine on Africa for some time to come.

Even as fashion now runs to Asia, Europe remains America's principal economic, diplomatic and security partner. Asia will never replace it—though Obama doesn't seem to see it that way.

Our European friends have fallen on miserable economic times, and Washington can offer little help. But the degree to which Europeans have gone their own way is worrisome. Eastern European leaders are unhappy about Obama's apparent lack of consideration for their feelings about the Russian bear. And Obama did not handle issues regarding that region's missile-defense system in a way that inspired confidence.

When the Obama administration announced what sounded like a strategic shift in emphasis toward Asia, it demonstrated a lack of sensitivity to all Europeans in a time of great need. Explanations and qualifications flowed from Washington, but the damage was done. Not surprisingly, early European acclamations of Obama—fueled by hopes that he was more in tune with world affairs than Bush—have mostly dissipated.

In no theater of the world has Obama's lack of a strategic vision had starker consequences than in Afghanistan. The White House has altered its objectives there so frequently, it's hard to follow what America is fighting for now. First, it was to defeat Al Qaeda in retribution for 9/11. Then, it became to defeat the Taliban as well because the Taliban might let terrorists back into the country. Later, it was somehow to prevail in Afghanistan to bolster moderates in Pakistan and safeguard Pakistani nukes. This last objective was nothing short of psychedelic. It was never clear how any outcome in the wilds of Afghanistan, no matter how positive, could save a messed up, corrupt, multiethnic country of 190 million where the military and the Islamists are the only real political forces. Without realistic goals to give his actions ballast, Obama increased the U.S. military presence more than threefold from the approximately thirty thousand troops he inherited. He gave them a counterinsurgency and nation-

Obama often speaks of the importance of America's economic strength. Yet he has not put this point at the core of his national-security agenda, and that's why he has fallen short.

building mandate that stretched credulity. Finally, now, he will withdraw all combat troops by 2014 and drop his broad counterinsurgency strategy in favor of a sensible, targeted counterterrorist approach. For all that, he still hasn't decided the size of the residual force after 2014. It could be as high as thirty thousand and hang around indefinitely.

Administration officials say that their objective is to remove "almost" all U.S. forces in "coming years" while making Afghanistan more secure. And they aim to achieve these goals by taking three steps: exploring a deal with the Taliban, improving the performance of Kabul and Afghan security forces, and enticing Afghanistan's neighbors to accept greater responsibility. But what the administration has here is a list—not a strategy.

A strategy starts with the essential judgment that the United States simply does not have vital interests in any major sustained presence in Afghanistan, but Afghanistan's neighbors do—and it is to them, therefore, that Washington's strategy must be directed. It is they who will have to worry about what happens after U.S. forces depart, they who will have to deal with the drugs, the refugees and the Islamic extremists that will flow across their borders—not the United States. As for U.S. concerns about Afghanistan as a global headquarters for terrorists, that time has passed. Today, terrorists operate worldwide, certainly more in the Middle East than in Afghanistan.

Task number one, then, is to convince Afghanistan's neighbors that the United

States is pulling almost all of its forces out, and soon, and that America no longer will bear the primary burden. These countries must be convinced that while Washington can live with an anarchic Afghanistan—or worse—they cannot. Otherwise, the neighbors will be happy just to sit back and watch. Afghan parties, including the Taliban, must understand that they will have to deal with these neighbors in America's absence, and the neighbors must be made to see that they must shoulder the burdens or suffer the consequences. None of this is to say that Washington should simply walk away and hope these countries see the light. The United States still will have to play a leading role in getting this new coalition organized.

In Afghanistan and elsewhere, Washington has to persuade key countries that U.S. power is being used to solve common problems. America's future power must be based on mutual indispensability: the United States is the indispensable leader because it alone can galvanize coalitions to solve major international problems (most nations know this); other nations are indispensable partners in getting the job done. Others must see clearly that U.S. actions serve their interests as well as America's and that their interests cannot be advanced save by American leadership.

This principle of mutual indispensability, with Washington in the lead, must be the intellectual heart of strategy—but what will keep it pumping is economics. Good strategy is a necessary but insufficient condition for success in the twenty-first

century. Money, more money, innovation in management and technology, competitive and skilled workers, and an economy that can trade and invest with the best are also essential. The U.S. economy is the basis of America's military and diplomatic power and, of course, America's foreign economic power. Economics is now the principal currency of international affairs, the new precious coin of the realm. Of course, in certain matters, only force and traditional diplomacy are appropriate. But in most international transactions today, it's economic goodies given or withheld that turn heads.

Obama often speaks of the importance of America's economic strength. Yet he has not put this point at the core of his national-

security agenda, and that's why he has fallen short. It's not enough to say, "Our nation must do this." He has to show how and inspire fear of failure—show how declining economic vitality destroys American power and undermines U.S. interests. He hasn't established this sense of urgency.

Eisenhower knew the magic here. When the Soviets threatened, he tied it to the U.S. economy. Moscow increased military spending? Ike said our country needed to launch a massive highway-building program so U.S. forces could crisscross the nation more readily. Moscow launched Sputnik? He insisted Congress vastly increase spending on math and science education "to catch up."

The greatest danger facing America today is economic stagnation and decline as we lose trade and jobs to more competitive and innovative countries. Obama must find the words to reverse the downward slope—to restore research, manufacturing skills and physical infrastructure. He's got to make Americans understand that without such rejuvenation, we cannot sustain America's lead in technological or military superiority.

Obama uttered these very thoughts. At West Point in December 2009, he said, "The nation that I'm most interested in building is our own." But he has only just begun to yoke together the American economy and American security. This should be the stuff of a national crusade, with flags flying and a political strategy to rally Americans. It's the kind of task great leaders are built for. □

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Mitt Romney's Neocon Puzzle

By James Kitfield

Americans will enter voting booths in November fixated on a sputtering domestic economy, but they will exit having elected the single most influential player on the world stage. That reflects a paradox of American power: a generally inward-looking electorate selects a leader with only scant attention to his foreign policies or international experience, and yet that person's actions undoubtedly will shape the course of global events. And into the center of that paradox walks the enigma that is Mitt Romney.

Given his limited foreign-policy experience and counterpuncher's strategy of defining himself primarily as what his opponent is not, it's difficult to know just what Romney's worldview is. His image as a moderate former Republican governor from the Northeast with a successful background in international business suggests a likely comfort level with the liberal-internationalist or moderate realist traditions of the Republican Party.

Yet as a candidate courting his party's conservative base, Romney has issued foreign-policy pronouncements with a harder line. He says his administration would align closely with Israel, view

Russia as the United States' primary geostrategic foe and label China as a currency manipulator. The population of terrorist suspects at the Guantánamo Bay military prison might double, and "enhanced interrogation techniques" such as waterboarding could return to the counterterrorism toolbox. A Romney administration purportedly would increase defense spending and bolster rather than shrink the size of the U.S. military. There would be no diplomacy with Iran, which would be enjoined to abandon its nuclear-weapons ambitions or else. U.S. military forces would remain in Afghanistan until the Taliban is defeated decisively.

How Romney would balance such an aggressive foreign-affairs and national-security agenda with his pledge to cut taxes across the board and address a towering debt crisis remains an open question.

In truth, the prism of a presidential-election campaign offers a notoriously unreliable view of America's role in the world. Through this lens, the lands beyond our shores appear in broad strokes that lack detail and color. There is only black and white, friend and foe, and the president of the United States appears to have the power to magically realign the international landscape. Such a distorted viewfinder is not only imperfect for navigating the shoals of geopolitics but also a poor predictor of any president's ultimate path.

And yet, if the aperture is widened to include historical context and personal

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biography, a rigorous campaign may at least suggest the lodestar that a president will follow in charting an unpredictable course. The choice of a candidate provides insights as to which foreign-policy school of thought is ascendant within the party. The background of the candidate and his key foreign-policy and national-security advisers provides further pieces of the puzzle.

In emerging as the Republican nominee for president, Mitt Romney vanquished primary opponents representing venerable strains of GOP thinking. Representative Ron Paul, the libertarian from Texas, was the strongest voice for a more isolationist foreign policy. Former senator Rick Santorum of Pennsylvania gave the most authentic voice to the populist nationalism of the Tea Party movement. Former House Speaker Newt Gingrich most closely aligned with the neoconservatives who were ascendant in George W. Bush's first term with their staunch support for the Israeli Right and disdain for talking with distasteful adversaries. Gingrich blasted the Obama administration for being "wrong on Iran, wrong on the Muslim Brotherhood [and] wrong on Hezbollah." Former governor Jon Huntsman of Utah, former ambassador to China, stood in for the realist or liberal-internationalist wing of the party that dominated the George H. W. Bush administration.

Romney must reconcile these competing camps and weave their various policies and rhetorical positions into a coherent foreign-policy narrative. His task is complicated because the old Republican orthodoxy of staunch anticommunism and a strong defense was upended at the Cold War's end, and George W. Bush's Iraq invasion still generates controversy and dissention within the party. Beyond that, there are the added challenges of the country's deep partisan divide and political dysfunction, as well as a shifting global landscape.

Georgetown University's Charles Kupchan notes that "the old Cold War consensus has disappeared," which has put the Republican Party in "a period of great turmoil in terms of its foreign policy." Kupchan, author of *No One's World: The West, the Rising Rest, and the Coming Global Turn*, adds that the country finds itself searching for a proper role "in a world that is changing more fundamentally than at any time since the 1800s." Thus, the Republican Party is being pulled not only between liberal internationalists and neoconservatives but also by rank-and-file Republicans who identify with the Tea Party and favor a more restrained American role in the world. "After a decade of war, the Great Recession and the growth of a towering deficit, that view resonates with a large number of weary Republican voters," Kupchan said in an interview. "Meanwhile, we as a country are becoming as polarized on matters of foreign policy as we are on domestic issues, and that hasn't happened since before World War II."

To understand the foreign-policy narrative Mitt Romney is attempting to articulate, it's important to grasp the threads of foreign-policy thought that he and the campaign are drawing on. In his 2001 book *Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How It Changed the World*, historian Walter Russell Mead traced those threads back to their historical antecedents to show that today's arguments have a venerable history.

Republican realists and liberal internationalists, most notably represented by former stalwarts Henry Kissinger, James Baker, Brent Scowcroft and Colin Powell, harken back to Alexander Hamilton, champion of a strong and internationally engaged federal government. Neoisolationists and libertarians such as Patrick Buchanan and Ron Paul, wary of international entanglements, trace their philosophy to Thomas Jefferson's belief

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in small government, states' rights and the avoidance of "entangling alliances." Neoconservatives share the idealism of President Woodrow Wilson's values-based foreign policy and his belief that America has a special calling to fight on behalf of liberty and democracy, though they evince little of Wilson's deference to international institutions. The Tea Party movement follows in the tradition of Andrew Jackson, the populist champion of "American exceptionalism" who believed in limited government and personified a nationalistic "don't tread on me" pugnacity.

While the Republican worldview is an amalgam of these philosophies, at different periods in the nation's history events have conspired to advance some of them over others, at times dramatically reshaping the party's dominant narrative.

After the horrific carnage of World War I, for instance, Senator Henry Cabot Lodge was so furious at President Woodrow Wilson that he led the fight to block America's entry into the League of Nations, a precursor of the United Nations. The next year, Republican presidential nominee Warren G. Harding was elected on the rallying cry of a "return to normalcy," which meant domestic issues and homeland defense over Wilson's democratic evangelism. By the 1930s, with Franklin D. Roosevelt in the White House and the GOP in the opposition, "normalcy" for Republicans meant support for the Neutrality Act of 1935, designed to keep the United States out of war in Europe.

The 1952 presidential election of Republican Dwight D. Eisenhower, with

the Cold War in full swing, elevated the realists and internationalists, setting the Republican Party back on the path of American engagement and global leadership. A bipartisan Cold War consensus had emerged in support of an outsized American role in countering communism around the world. Nearly all of the post-World War II building blocks designed to undergird the "American Century" passed with bipartisan congressional support—creation of the United Nations and NATO; establishment of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund; and passage of the Marshall Plan for the rebuilding of Europe.

President Richard Nixon's administration was another high-water line for the realists, revealed in his ideologically flexible outreach to Communist China. Nixon's top foreign-policy hand, Henry Kissinger, first national-security adviser and then secretary of state, was an über-realist who believed in a carefully maintained balance of power among global powers. That view held that it was in the United States' interest to gain legitimacy by leading through the architecture of multilateral institutions, alliances and treaties that the nation so painstakingly constructed after World War II. Given the obvious advantages that accrued to the United States under that system, the realists naturally embraced a status quo worldview that prized stability.

But Democrats, traumatized by the Vietnam War and energized by the antiwar movement, entered into their own isolationist phase during the 1970s, characterized by presidential candidate

George McGovern's "Come Home, America" platform in 1972 and President Jimmy Carter's defense cutbacks and threats to pull U.S. troops out of South Korea. But after the humiliation of the Iranian hostage crisis and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the pendulum of politics began to swing in a new direction that would rewrite the Republican narrative.

After a decade of trauma—defeat in Vietnam, Watergate, the Arab oil embargo, hyperinflation, Soviet expansionism and the Iranian hostage crisis—Ronald Reagan's 1980 election heralded another inflection point for Republican foreign policy. Reagan's administration included a number of senior officials comfortable in the realist wing of the party, including Secretary of State George Shultz and Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger.

But Reagan's party also picked up political refugees from the Henry "Scoop" Jackson wing of the Democratic Party disillusioned with their party's antiwar stance and flirtation with isolationism. Though moderate or liberal on domestic issues, they were fervently anticommunist and prodefense. These included former Jackson staffer Richard Perle, who became an influential assistant secretary of defense, as well as Jeane Kirkpatrick, Reagan's ambassador to the United Nations.

For these neoconservatives, their seminal professional experience was Reagan's decision to discard détente with the Soviet Union in favor of a more confrontational approach. His foreign-policy ideology could be seen in the largest peacetime defense buildup in American history, support for anticommunist proxies in Central America and Africa, his description of the Soviet Union as an "evil empire" and his spirited demand in Berlin that Mikhail Gorbachev "tear down this wall." This neoconservative outlook generally stood for the values-based

proposition that U.S. military power should be unsurpassed and largely unconstrained in confronting and defeating (rather than accommodating) evil empires and nations, the better to advance the march of democracy. Neoconservatives also have a famously close affinity for Israel as a scrappy democracy amid autocracies.

In adopting a more confrontational stance toward the Soviet Union and engaging it in an arms buildup that bankrupted Moscow into submission, Reagan was the proverbial "right leader at the right time." A strong case can be and has been made that he deserves much credit for winning the Cold War. Even by his own second term, however, Reagan had moderated his foreign policy to the extent of proposing a world without nuclear weapons to Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev in Reykjavik, Iceland, in 1986 (a suggestion that appalled true neoconservatives such as Perle). Reagan's proxy war also came back to haunt him in the form of the Iran-contra affair, the worst scandal of his Oval Office years.

By the time Vice President George H. W. Bush was elected president in 1988, more moderate internationalists and realists emerged once again in the embodiment of James Baker, Brent Scowcroft and Colin Powell, chairman of the Joint Chiefs who had served as Reagan's national-security adviser. Bush 41 himself had a résumé right out of the liberal-internationalist playbook—northeastern patrician, Ivy Leaguer, successful in business, former envoy to China, head of the CIA and vice president.

The Bush team engineered a peaceful end to the Cold War and a soft landing for a disintegrating Soviet empire; the successful reunification of Germany; and a victorious Persian Gulf War to oust Iraqi forces from Kuwait. It was an impressive foreign-policy trifecta, and the Bush team used

the momentum to pursue a “new world order” in which the twentieth-century scourge of state-on-state aggression would be consigned to history and Israel would be pressured to reach a two-state solution to its conflict with the Palestinians to stabilize the Middle East.

But back home, amid recession, a weary public was looking for a “peace dividend” and listening to an upstart Democrat from the baby boom generation who argued that “it’s the economy, stupid.” Because the Cold War and opposition to communist tyranny had energized Republicans so intensely, the GOP was set adrift by the disappearance of an overarching Soviet threat. The 1992 defeat of George H. W. Bush by Democrat Bill Clinton, a former southern governor with little international experience, certainly heightened that sense of confusion. Throughout the 1990s, Democrats searching for their own foreign-policy narrative in a transformed world would have the benefit of one of their own in the White House, riding herd over a fractious caucus and controlling the most powerful levers in foreign affairs. Clinton’s narrative held that America’s role in the world was still that of the “indispensable nation”

leading like-minded countries in collective actions against common threats. He led NATO into the Balkans, proposed landmark arms-control agreements and tried to reach a peaceful settlement to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict at Camp David.

Clinton’s election and Newt Gingrich’s counterwave “Republican revolution” of 1994 represented a generational passing of the torch. The World War II

generation, bedrock of the Cold War consensus, began passing from the scene. In its place rose the baby boom politicians who never had reconciled deep partisan ruptures over the 1960s counterculture revolution and Vietnam. Deep foreign-policy disagreements soon seeped into the hyperpartisan catfight of Washington politics.

The 1994 GOP revolution also heralded a seismic shift in the domestic political landscape. The party had waned in those areas of the country that represented the liberal-internationalist tradition—the Northeast, West Coast and upper Midwest. The post-1994 party reflected the views of the Deep South and Mountain West,



fertile ground for Jacksonian “don’t tread on me” nationalism as well as unilateral and isolationist impulses.

Not surprisingly, this younger generation of Republican politicians was committed to shrinking the size of government, even if that meant a smaller role for the United States overseas. Gingrich’s poll-tested “Contract with America” hardly mentioned foreign policy or national

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security, other than supporting a national missile-defense system advocated by Reagan.

For a time in the 1990s, the Republican Party flirted with isolationism, the theme of former Republican presidential candidate Patrick Buchanan's book *A Republic, Not an Empire*. Echoing isolationists from the 1930s, it argued that the United States need not have been drawn into World War II. Though that made the book controversial, Buchanan's essential argument resonated strongly with many of the new southern Republican leaders who rode Gingrich's revolution to Washington or to the chairmanships of key congressional committees. Arrogant U.S. foreign-policy elites had overcommitted America to wars in regions where it had no vital interests, Buchanan argued, and betrayed U.S. sovereignty by tying its fortunes to agencies of "an embryonic world government" such as the UN, WTO and IMF.

These Republicans thus criticized Clinton's nation-building interventions in Bosnia and Haiti as international social work. After aligning with powerful committee chairmen such as Jesse Helms, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, the Republican revolutionaries pushed for withholding dues from the UN, cutting State Department funding and reducing foreign aid. Republicans also disavowed NATO's air war over Kosovo as "Clinton's war," and in 1999 the Republican Senate defeated the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.

The dominant narrative offered by the Republican revolutionaries about America's

rightful role in the world probably hewed closest to Andrew Jackson's populist nationalism. Philosophically, they were suspicious of the federal government and of multilateral engagement that could impinge on U.S. sovereignty, whether expressed in international treaties or in undue deference to the UN.

But this minimalist outlook was opposed by the neoconservatives. In 1999, Senate Republicans voted to oppose NATO airstrikes in Kosovo, even while the Republican House was impeaching the president. The editors of the *Weekly Standard*, an influential neoconservative journal, came to Clinton's defense. "As a result of that vote, and of the neo-isolationist arguments that leading Republicans made to support their position, Republican foreign policy is now mired in pathetic incoherence," the editors wrote. "Is this the party of Reagan or the party of [Patrick] Buchanan?"

After the 2000 election, George W. Bush had to confront that question. In building his foreign-policy and national-security teams, Bush drew from each of the party's competing foreign-policy camps. Most prominently standing in for the hard-line nationalists were Vice President Dick Cheney, a Wyoming native whose mild demeanor belied a bone-deep conservatism, and John Bolton, a favorite of Jesse Helms who served under Bush as a top arms-control official at the State Department and later as ambassador to the United Nations. (He was so openly disdainful of both arms control and the world body that the Senate refused to confirm him as ambassador, and

he was seated under a recess appointment.) The internationalists were represented at the State Department through Secretary of State Colin Powell, Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage and State Department policy head Richard Haass.

But the Bush administration also was stocked with leading neoconservative lights, most notably Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, considered an intellectual high priest among neoconservatives; Pentagon number-three Douglas Feith, a former protégé of Richard Perle; National Security Council official Zalmay Khalilzad and Cheney chief of staff Lewis “Scooter” Libby, both former Wolfowitz protégés; and Perle, a member of the Defense Policy Board.

No one knows how Bush might have used the dynamic tension between those camps to forge a new Republican narrative. After the national trauma of 9/11, his foreign policy quickly emerged as an alliance of the hard-line nationalists and neoconservatives with the rapid marginalization of Powell and the internationalists. Bush himself revealed this in his January 2002 State of the Union address, in which he declared that the war on terrorism would be global and go far beyond targeting Al Qaeda in Afghanistan. Evoking an image of America anointed by God to confront a spreading evil around the world, preemptively and unilaterally if need be, Bush also put nations seeking weapons of mass destruction (an “axis of evil” that included North Korea, Iraq and Iran) directly in the U.S. crosshairs.

While Bush’s speech played well in the U.S. heartland, it struck much of the world as messianic and menacing. The American superpower, fresh from “victory” in Afghanistan, now was brandishing its sword at rejectionist nations, with almost no consultation with allies or coalition partners. The Bush neoconservatives

believed that American ideals and the U.S. military would not just contain or deter but decisively defeat Islamic extremism, the spread of weapons of mass destruction and the radical states that nourished those scourges. From that vision flowed other elements of the Bush doctrine: a focus on coercion and regime change, preventive war and unilateral action masked by ad hoc “coalitions of the willing.”

As former national-security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski told me at the time, “After victory in the Cold War, a number of ‘grand visions’ competed conceptually for preeminence in the United States, and one of them was the neoconservative vision. President Bush adopted their worldview.”

This worldview yielded a costly and unpopular preventive war in Iraq, the spread of anti-Americanism worldwide and a pronounced decline of trust in the quality of U.S. leadership. For perhaps the first time in the modern era, even close U.S. allies came to distrust American motives. The eventual result was that top neoconservatives and hard-liners who stoked the ideological fires and steered foreign policy in the first Bush term, winning the president to their cause in the process, were shown the door during his second term (including Paul Wolfowitz, Douglas Feith, Richard Perle, Scooter Libby and Donald Rumsfeld).

The second Bush term was driven by the more cautious and moderate vision of Republican realists and liberal internationalists, most notably Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Secretary of Defense Robert Gates. They attempted to mend ties with bruised Western allies, engaged in negotiations even with “evil regimes” in North Korea and Iran, and reinserted the United States into the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a mediator. This won the derision of neoconservatives. “What we’ve seen is a real wavering on the

principles that were articulated throughout the first term, when Bush seemed to be a truly revolutionary figure,” Danielle Pletka of the American Enterprise Institute, a Washington think tank and intellectual home to many neoconservatives, told me at the time.

Now Mitt Romney must reconcile the tensions between these competing foreign-policy camps. That will require, first, the rendering of a verdict on the Bush years. The neoconservatives who dominated Bush’s first term, unrepentant about the Iraq War, continue to argue for greater American assertiveness against adversaries such as Iran and military support for democratic revolutions in places such as Libya and Syria. Tea Party hard-liners remain suspicious of entangling alliances, arms-control treaties and institutions of global governance such as the United Nations, while the evangelicals among them have a visceral connection to the Israeli Right.

“The ghost of the Cold War consensus that supported U.S. leadership of a global, commercial order has passed,” says Walter Russell Mead, “and that has created disarray in U.S. foreign policy in general and a civil war in the Republican Party in particular.” The GOP’s populist energy now comes from people who want the United States to stop being the world’s policeman and social worker, focusing instead on fixing what’s broken at home. Mead sees the party factions competing to enlist the Jacksonian tea partiers as foot soldiers in their particular causes. He adds:

My reading of the popular psychology is that the neoconservatives will win that competition by providing the foreign-policy strategy and political language that attracts very threat-sensitive Jacksonian populists. If I’m right, the Republican foreign policy that emerges from this election will favor global engagement, as-

sertive interactions in the Middle East and a large military budget.

In other words, the tea partiers will back the neoconservative worldview that dominated the first Bush term. What is perhaps most notable about that shift, however, is the degree to which more moderate Republican realists and liberal internationalists feel increasingly marginalized in a party that continues to move markedly to the right.

Brent Scowcroft, a lifelong Republican who served in the Gerald Ford and Bush 41 presidencies, notes that there always have been strident people in American politics, but in the past there were a greater number willing to aim for cooperation and compromise. Now his party has embraced the Newt Gingrich approach of “rote opposition and ‘just say no,’” says Scowcroft, who calls this approach “grossly dysfunctional.” He adds, “That makes it very hard for any president to lead internationally.”

Romney’s task of articulating a Republican foreign-policy narrative is complicated also by Obama’s deftness in occupying the middle ground of liberal internationalism, most obviously evidenced by his decision to keep Robert Gates on as defense secretary. Thus, some of his foreign-policy initiatives in the realms of nonproliferation and Middle East peacemaking have been supported by moderate Republicans, including Scowcroft, George Shultz, Henry Kissinger, Colin Powell, Richard Lugar, Robert Gates and Chuck Hagel.

To draw clear distinctions with the Obama record, Romney has attacked the president from the Far Right while embracing Ronald Reagan’s “peace through strength” rhetoric. That explains both Romney’s endorsement of major increases in defense spending and the size of the military even as the nation ends two ground

wars and his criticism of Obama as weak and conciliatory toward adversaries.

In Romney's narrative, Obama's outreach to the Islamic world and talk about past U.S. missteps—supporting autocrats in Muslim countries or adopting counterterrorism policies that ran “contrary to our ideals”—amounts to apologizing for America's greatness. “Never before in American history has its president gone before so many foreign audiences to apologize for so many American misdeeds,” Romney wrote in his 2010 book, *No Apology: The Case for American Greatness*. “It is his way of signaling to foreign countries and foreign leaders that their dislike for America is something he understands and that is, at least in part, understandable.”

Romney has focused his most intense criticism at Obama's pressure on Israel to end settlement expansion in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem as a way to bring Palestinians back to the negotiating table. Successive Democratic and Republican administrations going back decades have opposed settlements, but Romney argues that Obama's approach amounts to “[throwing] Israel under the bus.” The clear message, driven home by Romney's visit to Israel this summer in his sole overseas trip of the campaign, is that Romney would back Israel unconditionally and adopt the “hands-off” approach to the Middle East peace process that George W. Bush took in his first term.

Regarding great-power relations, Romney also has taken a hard line, criticizing the Obama administration's “reset” in relations with Moscow and tolerance of China's unfair trade practices. “Russia,

this is, without question, our number one geopolitical foe. They fight every cause for the world's worst actors,” Romney told CNN. And Romney has threatened to label Beijing a “currency manipulator” on his



first day in office if the communist regime continues to refuse to float its currency against the dollar. “If you are not willing to stand up to China, you will get run over by China, and that's what's happened for twenty years,” Romney said.

Romney's surrogates also criticize Obama's attempts to build international consensus for action at the United Nations as multilateralism run amok, too often tying America's hands. They accuse the administration of “leading from behind” in the NATO operation to oust Libya's Muammar el-Qaddafi, belittle its willingness to negotiate with adversaries such as Syria and Iran, and deride its attempts to close the Guantánamo Bay prison as being soft on terrorism.

“Like Ronald Reagan, Governor Romney believes that America and the world are better off when the United States leads from a position of unchallenged strength, and that our values should animate our foreign policy,” former ambassador Richard Williamson, a foreign-policy adviser to



Romney, said in an interview. “Contrast that to President Obama’s preference for ‘leading from behind,’ for engagement for engagement’s sake, and his undue deference to multilateralism that has compromised U.S. policies towards Syria, Iran and North Korea.”

Romney’s critique has a common theme: Obama’s outreach to global constituencies, and embrace of a multilateral worldview, represent a turning away from “American exceptionalism,” or the notion that the United States embodies a unique set of values, principles and attributes that make it a beacon of democracy and the natural global leader. “I believe we are an exceptional country with a unique destiny and role in the world,” Romney said at the Citadel last year. “Not exceptional, as the President has derisively said, in the way that the British think Great Britain is exceptional or the Greeks think Greece is exceptional. In Barack Obama’s profoundly mistaken view, there is nothing unique about the United States.” He adds, “If you do not want America to be the strongest nation on Earth, I am not your President. You have that President today.”

Of course, one danger of such a hard-line foreign-policy narrative is that it takes lessons from the Reagan era out of time and

context. Reagan burdened the country with high levels of debt, for instance, to overwhelm the monolithic threat of the Soviet Union. That gamble paid off with the Soviet collapse. Today, by contrast, both the chairman of the Joint Chiefs and secretary of defense argue persuasively that the United States’ crippling debt is the number one national-security threat to the nation.

Yet when Obama proposed creating a bipartisan deficit-reduction commission whose hard medicine would be guaranteed an up-or-down vote in Congress, a number of Republicans who had previously supported the idea changed positions to thwart the president, a clear indication that a post-Cold War consensus for addressing the nation’s most pressing problems remains elusive.

There also is a danger that the Romney narrative may remind voters less of Ronald Reagan than of George W. Bush, and it could lead to a repeat of Bush’s controversial first-term mistakes. Chief among them, in the view of some, was the failure to recognize some of the important implications of the current age of globalization, such as the erosion of national borders, empowerment of nonstate actors and political awakening of ordinary citizens around the world. These developments have created problems such as terrorism, the threat of proliferation and destabilizing revolutions that can be dealt with only through multilateral cooperation. As Scowcroft puts it, “The decision by the [Bush 43] administration to go in the opposite direction, and try and deal with those problems as a unilateral nation-state using traditional military power, is what brought America to the point of crisis.”

One interpretation of the evolving narrative of American power is that after periods of transformative upheaval brought about by crisis or confrontation, the system ultimately self-corrects to a more sustainable foreign policy bearing hallmarks of the liberal-internationalist worldview. Something similar happened after the revolutionary first terms of Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush, when the foreign-policy pendulum eventually swung back to more realist sensibilities during their second terms. In that view, the obvious foreign-policy continuity between the second Reagan term and the George H. W. Bush administration and between the second George W. Bush term and the Obama administration may represent a sort of sweet spot between the dynamic political tensions that shape America's role in the world.

Trying to explain American foreign policy by the various "schools" of foreign-policy thought is ultimately too simplistic, because modern American presidents have pursued a pretty consistent set of general principles you might call "pragmatic idealism," which is heavily guided both by American ideals but also by situational balances of power,

said Robert Kagan, the neoconservative intellectual and author whose book, *The World America Made*, has been lauded by both Romney and Obama. He goes on:

We will have predictable arguments between different foreign-policy camps that end predictably, but there is far more continuity to U.S. foreign policy than the candidates and experts like to acknowledge. That's why despite Obama's running as the polar opposite of President Bush, Obama's foreign policy looks more like the Bush administration's than almost anyone expected.

A more ominous interpretation of the current debate about American power would view the steady disappearance of traditional realists and liberal internationalists within the Republican Party as enduring. The realist/internationalist wing of the party may be fading with the passing of the Cold War generation of Republicans who championed it and as a result of the party's shift toward the South and Mountain West.

"In terms of the division between the neoconservative and realist wings of the Republican Party, I would argue that all of the intellectual energy is on the neoconservative side," Elliot Abrams, a deputy national-security adviser in the Bush 43 administration, told me in a comment echoed by other prominent Republicans. "It's hard to think of anyone below the age of forty who is pushing those ideas anymore. Where is the next generation of Republican realists?"

If the Republican Party moves so far to the right that liberal internationalists have no home other than with the Democrats, their brand of international engagement and moderation risks becoming just another political football tossed about in the partisan scrum of Washington politics. In that case, U.S. foreign policy will continue to vacillate wildly whenever power changes hands between the parties, the congressional opposition will keep stubbornly obstructing the president's foreign-policy initiatives out of a sense of duty and ideology, and the perceived erosion in the quality of U.S. global leadership will persist. Meanwhile, the ongoing quest for a bipartisan, post-Cold War consensus on America's rightful role in the world will remain quixotic. That's not a prescription for American exceptionalism but rather a narrative of continued American decline. □

Egypt's Entrenched Military

By Daniel Kurtzer and Mary Svenstrup

Fifty years ago, drawn to the perceived dynamism of fresh, young military leaders, scholars and policy analysts became enamored of the potential role of the military in political, economic and social modernization. The “man on horseback,” as S. E. Finer described it, was seen as best positioned to effect the transition from developing to modern societies. The military, it was believed, could draw on the institutional cohesion and its monopoly of coercive power to marshal the resources and will necessary to push societies forward. Egypt was studied as a prime example.

Things did not quite turn out as the academics expected. After overthrowing the monarchy and seizing power in 1952, the so-called Free Officers in Egypt constricted the political space and monopolized power, driving Islamists underground and marginalizing old-time liberal political elements. Their sweeping modernization programs nearly bankrupted Egypt. Ultimately, the monopoly of power achieved by Egypt's revolutionists, led by Gamal Abdel Nasser, primarily was used to maintain the military's dominant position

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and ensure that its interests were protected and advanced.

To be sure, Nasser had grand—indeed, grandiose—dreams to revamp Egyptian society. In the name of agricultural reform, he broke up large landholdings and parceled out land to Egypt's fellahin, or peasants. Though a socially progressive move, this initiative undercut agricultural economies of scale and helped transform Egypt into a major importer of wheat and other basic foodstuffs. In the name of reversing the evils of capitalism, the government became the initiator and owner of large-scale manufacturing enterprises, which ensured mass employment but also drained the national budget as huge losses ensued. Nationalized financial entities experienced a similar fate. In the name of promoting pan-Arab secular nationalism, Nasser threatened conservative Arab neighbors, ultimately involving Egypt in a messy civil war in Yemen that severely weakened Egypt's military capabilities in the years before the 1967 war with Israel. By the late 1970s, a decade after Nasser's death and more than twenty-five years into the Egyptian revolution, the best that could be said about the military-dominated Egypt was that national pride had been restored and all Egyptians suffered equally.

In many respects, the next forty years under Anwar Sadat and Hosni Mubarak represented an effort to correct some of

the missteps that occurred after the 1952 revolution. Sadat scaled down the rhetoric against Arab monarchies; switched Cold War allegiances from the Soviet Union to the United States; made war and then peace with Israel; tried to open the economy to private-sector activity; and experimented with a government-led multiparty system. Despite all these initiatives designed to correct the course of the Egyptian revolution, Sadat's crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood and other opposition elements ultimately led to his assassination at the hands of Islamist radicals within the military.

Mubarak solidified the peace treaty with Israel, but he did so at the cost of ending Egypt's leadership role in the long-standing Arab confrontation with Israel. Mubarak also moved Egypt decisively into the arms of the United States. He used the \$1.3 billion in annual U.S. military assistance to rebuild the Egyptian armed forces, tying Egypt to American arms, doctrine and training. He used the \$800 million of annual U.S. economic assistance to reconstruct the country's failed infrastructure. Indeed, when Mubarak became president in 1981, water, wastewater, electricity and telecommunications capabilities were in crisis. Within twenty years, all of this critical infrastructure had been rebuilt and modernized. And Mubarak also oversaw a dramatic opening of the economy, shepherding the system through a tough but successful IMF-directed macroeconomic reform program in the 1990s and then appointing a reform cabinet ten years ago with a mandate to expand the private sector.

Despite this impressive record of change and adaptation, Mubarak failed to undo the three most egregious mistakes of the Nasserist past. First, continuing the military's long-standing antipathy toward and distrust of the Muslim Brotherhood,

Mubarak kept in place emergency laws that defined the authoritarian character of the political system. While a semblance of free speech was tolerated—provided such speech did not touch the presidential family—politics were stifled. Political parties and the parliament were a joke, and civil society became an arm of the state rather than an outlet for expression and volunteerism. By the mid-2000s, significant political ferment was evident, catalyzed by rigged elections, heavy-handed police crackdowns and, perhaps most strikingly, the possibility of the hereditary succession of Mubarak's son Gamal to the presidency.

Second, Mubarak failed to address social problems generated by unequally distributed economic growth. Privatizations turned the well connected into massively wealthy individuals whose conspicuous consumption knew no limits. Luxury cars filled the streets of Cairo, and Egypt's Red Sea and Mediterranean coastlines were overbuilt with luxury, gated compounds of massive houses and pools. Meanwhile, a large portion of Egyptians still suffered from hunger, poverty and unemployment. If a mantra of the Nasser years was "at least we all suffered equally," Mubarak turned the gap between rich and poor into a very wide chasm.

Third, Mubarak allowed, and probably encouraged, the military to take on the character of a parastatal business conglomerate that enriched the officer corps while, paradoxically, leading to a significant decline in military professionalism. In addition to running a large number of military industries, the military produced civilian consumer goods and established agriculture and infrastructure businesses. Remarkably, the extent of the military's presence in the economy is unknown—its businesses are reported to be worth anywhere from 10 to 30 percent of Egypt's GDP—because the

military is exempt from public reporting and oversight.

The 2011 Tahrir uprising initially constituted a rebellion against the first two of Mubarak's failings—that is, the persistence of authoritarian rule and the growing economic inequalities. Authoritarianism had taken a toll even on the storied Egyptian patience, and masses of people proved ready to stay in the streets in the face of a possible regime crackdown. But the targets were Mubarak, his hated interior minister, Habib el-Adly, and senior aides. The military was not singled out. The Tahrir crowds also seethed at the perceived corruption of Mubarak personally and the business community. Many businessmen fled immediately, following the money they had sent offshore over the years. Those too slow to realize the extent of the animosity against them were jailed, tried and convicted, usually in the space of just a few weeks. The perceived corrupt ministers and businessmen were the targets—again, not the military.

Only in recent months has the revolution turned its focus to the military itself, in large part because of the clumsiness, heavy-handedness and tone deafness of the senior military officers who constituted themselves as the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), effectively the rulers of Egypt since Mubarak's ouster. At Tahrir, the military astutely positioned itself as the champion of the revolution—refusing to move against the demonstrators and forcing Mubarak first to appoint a vice president, then to forego another term and finally to leave office. But after more than a year of exercising direct political power, the military has revealed its self-centered interests—preserving its corporate role as the praetorian guard of the political system and ensuring that its economic prerogatives remain unchallenged.

As the Egyptian military sees it, the SCAF has exerted considerable effort to adapt itself to a volatile and uncertain period of political instability while maintaining three self-defining critical elements: its embodiment of the 1952 revolution and the essential character of the state and its institutions; its exclusive role in determining national-security threats and the responses of the state; and its economic equities and interests, including exclusive control over the military budget. As a new civilian political leadership assumes power, led by President Mohamed Morsi and underpinned by an Islamist-majority parliament, the central question is whether Islamists and the military will engage in a winner-take-all battle for control of Egypt. That may prove to be the only pathway to a more transparent and inclusive democracy.

Until the 2011 Tahrir uprising, the extent of the Egyptian military's praetorian role had diminished gradually since the founding of the modern republic in 1952. Initially, the military, as the champion of the new regime, played a dominant role in the daily governance of the country. But as the military gradually professionalized and expanded its role into the civilian economy, its direct role in the political space diminished. This is not to say it was not powerful; it remained one of the preeminent institutions in Egypt, along with the office of the president. But the military's influence shifted horizontally with its economic activities and high conscription rates, as opposed to the top-down control exercised by the executive branch.

All of Egypt's past presidents—Naguib, Nasser, Sadat and Mubarak—were former military officers, and they relied on this military legacy to bolster their legitimacy. At the same time, the extent of the military's role in daily governance

All of Egypt's past presidents—Naguib, Nasser, Sadat and Mubarak—were former military officers, and they relied on this military legacy to bolster their legitimacy.

was defined vis-à-vis the sitting president, the only position in Egypt to which that military was truly accountable. Therefore, the different circumstances and leadership styles of the Nasser, Sadat and Mubarak presidencies directly influenced the historical progression of the Egyptian military toward a semiprofessionalized force with unique profit-seeking economic motives.

The leaders of the 1952 revolution, Nasser's Free Officers, were all military men, and their struggle against the British interlopers and the increasingly unpopular King Farouk created an image of the military as the core of the Egyptian nationalist identity. The military also often was perceived—by the public and by itself—as the only group strong enough to unify the country against external opposition and save the nation from a collapsing government.

These conditions under which the Free Officers came to power gave them nearly absolute authority. Thus, they faced little resistance when they banned all political parties and established the Liberation Rally to channel all political activity to support Nasser's regime. Not even the large Muslim Brotherhood network posed a challenge to the Free Officers' authority. Of course, the Brotherhood did not have the organizational capacity or political acumen in the 1950s that it had achieved by 2011. But even if it had been better equipped to participate in formal governance, the Brotherhood could not have challenged the popularity and prestige of the military. Thus, during the Nasser era, the military

faced no real opposition, and it exercised and accumulated power. The real struggle for political supremacy was within the military itself.

As he fended off challenges from the Brotherhood and old-time liberal politicians, Nasser struggled to consolidate power against his adviser and supposed friend, Field Marshal Abdel Hakim Amer, the popular leader of the military and Nasser's only potential governmental rival. Nasser was aided in this rivalry by military defeats and setbacks, including Egypt's military humiliation in the 1956 Suez War and the debilitating deployment of Egyptian forces in Yemen in the 1960s. Despite these setbacks, Amer remained popular until the 1967 war against Israel, which proved to be his undoing. Amer resigned in disgrace, then was arrested and eventually committed suicide in prison.

Although Nasser relied on the military to crush the formation of any civilian opposition groups, he could not tolerate a military leader holding more power than he. Amer's downfall enhanced Nasser's power and marked the initial transition from a military engaged heavily in politics to a more professional military. Nasser finalized this transition when he purged the military leadership following the 1967 war. After this, all of the military leaders from the 1952 revolution, for whom the Egyptian people felt extreme fondness and loyalty, had been removed from power. This allowed Nasser to shift the spotlight fully onto his executive office.

The Sadat era brought about further military disengagement from politics and

a new focus on military professionalism and its own corporate economic interests. Sadat strategically reinforced the military's subordination to the presidential office by removing Nasser loyalists in the military leadership and the civilian Arab Socialist Union during the 1971 "corrective revolution." This resulted in a cadre of top generals and civil servants who owed their positions to Sadat, ensuring he would face little challenge from the military. Sadat's focus on regaining the Sinai Peninsula from Israel led the military further in the direction of professionalization. The military's successful crossing of the Suez Canal and its ability to hold ground against Israel's counterattack restored the

banks. Thus, profits from the military's economic activities were returned to its own coffers, making it impossible for Egyptians or civilian government officials to have meaningful input on budget priorities or oversight of expenditures.

Mubarak continued both to professionalize the military and to expand its economic strength and independence. The tradeoff was the military's complete subordination to the president. This tradeoff allowed the military to preserve three key corporate interests during this period.

First, the military sought to preserve the Egyptian people's view that it is the core institution in the country's national identity. Indeed, the military plays an



military's credibility, boosted its morale and reinforced its national-defense role.

Sadat gradually removed the military from daily politics but allowed—perhaps even encouraged—the military to increase its privileged status in Egyptian society. Imad Harb, a Middle East specialist based in the UAE, notes that the 1979 "Law 32" gave the military financial and institutional independence from the government's budget and oversight activities and allowed it to open private accounts in commercial

important socialization role through the annual conscription of about 12 percent of young Egyptian males. Additionally, the military is a major source of employment for the country. According to the State Department's "World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfers" report, in 2005 the military employed about 440,000 Egyptians, over 2 percent of the male working-age population.

Second, although Egypt did not face a salient external threat as it did in the

1970s, the military leaders sought control over national-defense matters, including the definition of threats and the ability to declare war. This principally means maintaining control of the Ministry of Defense, leaving the Interior Ministry (and internal security) under control of the presidency. In Mubarak's time, this division of powers worked well, but it raises serious questions in the postrevolution political configuration.

Third, the military wanted to protect its economic interests and its ability to operate its companies beyond political or public scrutiny. The military now owns and operates defense and arms industries, civilian industries, agriculture and national infrastructure. Former trade minister Rachid Mohamed Rachid estimated that the military's empire comprises less than 10 percent of the Egyptian economy. This estimate may be on the low side. Amr Hamzawy, a former research director for the Carnegie Middle East Center recently elected to the new Egyptian parliament, pegged the military's economic activity at up to 30 percent of Egypt's total economy, or about \$60 billion. The military will do everything in its power to maintain its business holdings, including its ability to keep its activities off-budget and secret as stipulated in Law 32. As Robert Springborg, a scholar on Egypt's military at the Naval Postgraduate School, has noted: "Protecting its businesses from scrutiny and accountability is a red line the military will draw. And that means there can be no meaningful civilian oversight."

Under Mubarak, the military did not seek to engage directly in the daily governance of the country. Its synergistic relationship with the office of the president permitted this behind-the-scenes approach: the military remained loyal to the executive branch, and the president protected the military's privileged position. This dynamic removed

the military from political accountability, allowing it to continue its activities while also maintaining its positive image in the minds of Egyptians.

In January 2011, Egyptians took to the streets. After less than three weeks of protests, Mubarak stepped down, ending nearly thirty years in office. Fearing a political vacuum, the military declared itself the interim ruler of the country in the form of the SCAF. For the first time since the 1952 revolution, the military governed Egypt directly.

Drawing on the positive image the military earned in the eyes of the Tahrir revolutionaries, the SCAF fancied itself as the only national actor with the legitimacy, ability and standing to protect the country. Despite close ties to Mubarak, the SCAF's decisive move to force his ouster further built the military's credibility as an institution willing to act in the national interest.

Once in the political spotlight, however, the SCAF found its activities scrutinized closely and measured against an undefined scale of progress toward civilian rule and democracy. In large measure, the SCAF failed these tests, repeatedly giving priority to preserving its own interests over any rapid democratic transition. Despite initial favor with the Egyptian people, the SCAF's successive blunders and missteps highlighted its self-interested political and economic motives, weakened its popularity and called into question the sincerity of its role as the defender of the Egyptian state.

The SCAF seemed to regard all political movements as self-centered and myopic, with the initial exception of the Muslim Brotherhood. After decades of exclusion from the formal political process, the Brotherhood turned its attention to an electoral agenda, establishing the Freedom and Justice Party. At the onset of the revolution, the Brotherhood recognized the

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military's popularity and legitimacy in the eyes of the people and thus was initially supportive of the SCAF's decisions. In February 2011, the SCAF introduced nine amendments to the constitution, which included shortening the presidential term, creating a two-term limit, expanding the pool of potential presidential candidates and restricting the application of emergency law. Despite protests from youth and activists, the Brotherhood supported these amendments, which were passed in a popular referendum with 77 percent approval in March 2011.

Over time, however, the core interests of the military and the Brotherhood diverged: the SCAF sought to ensure its economic interests and its position above the law and politics, while the Brotherhood sought power to rule Egypt and thereby legitimize its Islamist agenda. This conflict was first evident in the Brotherhood's response to the SCAF's constitutional declaration, or the so-called Selmi document—a sixty-three-article decree that outlined “supraconstitutional” principles, including giving the SCAF veto power over the constitution and preventing future presidents, legislators and the public from inspecting the details of the military budget. This document also gave the SCAF power to nominate eighty members to the constitutional drafting assembly, thereby denying the Muslim Brotherhood an expected majority. The Selmi document was submitted by Deputy Prime Minister Ali al-Selmi to about five hundred politicians in November 2011. It was quickly condemned by most political groups,

including the Brotherhood, and it reignited protests in Tahrir Square, where tens of thousands of mostly Islamist protestors rallied in the largest demonstration since the revolution. The SCAF appeared to withdraw the document, although its core principles reemerged in June 2012, during the constitutional crisis created by a court's ruling that invalidated the parliamentary elections. The document, both in 2011 and 2012, revealed the SCAF's true political ambitions.

The SCAF and the Brotherhood also differed constantly over the timing of key steps in the transition process. For example, Islamic and liberal parties disagreed on whether to draft the new constitution before or after parliamentary elections. Liberal political parties pushed to draft the constitution prior to the elections to mitigate fears that sharia would become the basis of legislation in a Brotherhood-dominated parliament. Conversely, the Brotherhood expected to win the elections and thus wanted to be in a position to control the constitution-drafting process. The SCAF used this debate as an opportunity to push once again its supraconstitutional principles, which would go into effect immediately and set the benchmark for any future constitution. Instead of creating a meaningful compromise, this proposal angered the Brotherhood because it showed the SCAF's intention to influence the constitution regardless of who eventually was selected to write it. According to recent reports, the SCAF did this in order to preserve its corporate interests and to ensure the secular

identity of the Egyptian state in the context of a Brotherhood-dominated government. Indeed, one Egyptian jurist went so far as to say that the military and the Supreme Constitutional Court colluded in an effort to protect the constitutional process from being hijacked by the Islamists. Anwar el-Sadat, a nephew of the former president and a member of the disbanded parliament, summarized this sentiment when he said that the generals “want to make sure before they leave that the Constitution is not monopolized by any group or direction. They would like to make sure [Egypt] is a civil state.”

The most serious crisis of the postrevolution transition occurred in June 2012, when the Supreme Constitutional Court, appointed by Mubarak and generally perceived to be acting in concert with the military, dissolved the popularly elected parliament. Jurists noted that the SCAF structured parliamentary elections in such a way that would allow it, working alongside the judiciary, to negate the results at any time by applying previous legal precedents. Many speculated that this move was another attempt to reestablish a military-backed, autocratic government and a means for the military to fix the election in favor of Ahmed Shafik, a former air force commander who ran on a law-and-order platform. Shadi Hamid, research director of the Brookings Doha Center in Qatar, summed up fears over the court’s decision: “From a democratic perspective, this is the worst possible outcome imaginable. This is an all-out power grab by the military.”

The SCAF further fueled speculation about its intentions to consolidate power when it reinstated the principles set forth in the Selmi document just before the presidential election. This declaration reimposed martial law, removed military decisions from public or government accountability, and gave the

military formal oversight of the political system. Critically for the presidential election, the president was removed as head of the SCAF and presidential powers were significantly limited. The SCAF also announced the creation of a national-security council that, while nominally under the chairmanship of the president, would have a majority of military-appointed members.

After a period of intense behind-the-scenes maneuvers and negotiations between the SCAF and the Brotherhood, the Supreme Elections Committee in late June announced Mohamed Morsi, the Brotherhood’s candidate, as the winner of the presidential election. Morsi promised to represent all Egyptians and to appoint a unity cabinet. The military promised to return to the barracks. Yet the future of military-Brotherhood ties and the military’s ambitions remain uncertain.

The prospect of serious change in Egypt—meaning the building of a democratic culture and democratic institutions—depends to an outsized degree on the future attitudes and actions of the Egyptian military. In most respects, it has been comfortable with the regime and the nature of the political system over the past sixty years, since the 1952 revolution. While there were moments of tension between the political and military elites during that time, none of these minicrises threatened to redefine the very nature of politics. Nasser and Abdel Hakim Amer duelled over who would be preeminent in decision making. Sadat and the leaders of the “centers of power” revolt in 1971 wrestled for political power. Mubarak dismissed Defense Minister Abdel Halim Abu Ghazala in 1989 not only on charges of corruption but also because Abu Ghazala appeared to be a competitor for power. Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi

and the military brass pushed Mubarak aside in 2011 largely in order to preserve the regime, not to uproot it. Thus, relations between the military and the political leadership have not always been smooth, but the two coexisted as partners in arms. The challenge ahead is whether the military can abide the kinds of systemic changes that a Muslim Brotherhood-led government and parliament would implement in the truly revolutionary, regime-changing phase of the Egyptian uprising that began in Tahrir Square.

At least four barometers will be instrumental in assessing the military's acceptance of political change. Most important will be the nature of the system of politics and the controlling regime that emerges in the months ahead, both with regard to the military's autonomous position in society and the preservation of a secular regime. As this article is being written, there is great uncertainty whether new elections for parliament will be necessary, under what conditions a new constitution will be drafted, and whether street violence and pressure will affect the transition to civilian rule. Each of these issues will pose tactical choices for the military and will influence the future direction of politics and the nature of the Egyptian state. In a large, strategic sense, the military will evaluate its course of action on these and related issues according to a simple metric: Will the proposed course of action fundamentally alter the system in a manner that erodes the military's special place and role in society?

The military's interest in the nature of the regime should not be confused with its insistence on actually governing. Steven Cook of the Council on Foreign Relations got it right some years ago when he argued that the military wants to rule but not govern. This remains the case today, notwithstanding the temporary detour

that the SCAF took in actually governing. (Indeed, that experience likely reinforced the military's distaste for politics.) Although the SCAF may not want to govern, it does want to maintain power—particularly with regard to drafting the constitution—in order to establish an institutional framework that preserves the secular nature of the state, irrespective of who is elected to the parliament and the presidency.

A comfortable regime for the military would look a great deal like the system of the past decades with, perhaps, a greater degree of democratic messiness. Parliament will be vocal; the new president will try to preside but under the watchful and skeptical eye of the military; the judiciary will flex the muscles it long has wanted to in order to ensure its independence; and civil society will remain restive. All of this probably would fall within the comfort zone of the military, especially if the focus of political activity is domestic—the economy, social issues and the like.

A related issue for the military will be the degree to which its corporate interests and self-defined position as the embodiment of the 1952 revolution remain unaffected. For a military that has not had to fight since 1973—not counting the expeditionary nature of Egypt's role in the 1991 Gulf War—the Egyptian officer corps has maintained its *esprit de corps* largely on the basis of its foundational role in the modern history of the country. When the youthful Tahrir protestors recognized this at the outset of the 2011 uprising, it was a brilliant tactical nod to the most important player of all. Eighteen months later, the youth and the military know that such recognition is no longer so easily assured, but for the military, it is no less important.

In practical terms, the military will define this issue on the basis of how much

independence it retains in the budget process and in defining national-security policy for the country. The military will not permit civilian control over its budget, and it will balk at almost any effort by civilians to exercise oversight. Since this is a benchmark for democratic evolution, there is sure to be a titanic clash over this issue in the period ahead.

Regarding national-security policy, the recently revived national-security council will be staffed largely by military appointees. While the new president is likely to be given some leeway in some aspects of foreign policy—just as Mubarak often allowed the foreign ministry to play a nearly independent role at times—the military will draw the line on issues that impinge directly on national security. In practical terms, this means an outsized role for the military on issues related to Israel, Libya, Sudan, Iran, intelligence cooperation and U.S. relations. The bottom line for the military will be its insistence on a veto over any decision to deploy troops or declare war.

In addition to relative autonomy over its economic empire and national security, a second barometer of military attitudes will be the actual policies undertaken by the new Egyptian government. The military establishment has made clear it will not countenance a return to a state of war with Israel. The Egyptian-Israeli treaty and relationship, for all their problems and unpopularity on the Egyptian street, have been the cornerstones of Egypt's strategic outlook for the past three decades, and this is not likely to change in the foreseeable future. The military will not balk at a cooling off of relations or a tougher Egyptian diplomatic stance toward Israel, especially on the Palestinian and nuclear issues. But the military will draw a deep line in the sand when it comes to possible unilateral moves to change or abrogate the treaty.

The third measure of the military's attitude will be the nature of domestic legislation adopted by the parliament and supported by the executive. The Egyptian military always has been suspicious of the attitudes and activities of civil society, and the military has taken steps over the years to root out cells of Islamists as well as leftists in the media and trade unions yearning for a return to Nasser's policies. This will become harder in the period ahead, but the military's commitment to countering extremists is unlikely to flag. In this respect, the direction of national



legislation, whether toward more Islamic piety or vis-à-vis economic and social policy, will be watched carefully by the military.

The final barometer will be the attitudes of Egypt's partners and foes. The military's relationship with the United States is particularly important, not only because of American assistance but also because of their collaboration on training, doctrine

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and arms sales. Since the 1970s, the Egyptian military has been in transition from Soviet arms, doctrine and training. This process is far from complete, and the military may be too committed to U.S. arms to change yet again. To be sure, arms from other suppliers have been and can continue to be assimilated into the inventory, but there is simply too much American equipment on hand for the military brass to consider a change in primary patrons.

Does this mean the United States can retain leverage over Egypt on the basis of the Egyptian military's desire to maintain

military relations? The answer is less than certain. A total, precipitous termination of U.S. assistance would be cataclysmic for both sides. Short of that, bilateral dialogue remains healthy, but as the NGO crisis in early 2012 demonstrated, intragovernment maneuvering in this period of transition can take precedence over preserving every aspect of the relationship with the United States. Thus, the United States will acquire some leverage as a result of continued economic and military assistance, but this leverage will have less current value than many in the United States would like to believe.

The most important determinant of Egypt's postrevolution political identity will result from the relationship between the military and newly elected civilian leaders, particularly President Morsi. Aid money and foreign support may be helpful to address humanitarian issues and economic inequalities but will do little to stabilize or manage the political climate. Thus, the next steps in the transition, particularly drafting the new constitution, will present several opportunities for Morsi—like Nasser, Sadat and Mubarak before him—to try to outmaneuver the military and reestablish the dominance of the office of the president. This internal power struggle will ultimately be the most critical factor in shaping Egypt's democratic path. □

All the Ayatollah's Men

By Ray Takeyh

More than thirty years after Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini came to power—and two decades after his passing—the Islamic Republic remains an outlier in international relations. Other non-Western, revolutionary regimes eventually eschewed a rigidly ideological foreign policy and accepted the fundamental legitimacy of the international system. But Iran's leaders have remained committed to Khomeini's worldview. The resilience of Iran's Islamist ideology in the country's foreign policy is striking. China's present-day foreign policy isn't structured according to Mao's thought, nor is Ho Chi Minh the guiding light behind Vietnam's efforts to integrate into the Asian community. But Iran's leadership clings to policies derived largely from Khomeini's ideological vision even when such policies are detrimental to the country's other stated national interests and even when a sizable portion of the ruling elite rejects them.

Many Western observers of Iran don't understand that its foreign policy has been fashioned largely to sustain an ideological identity. Thus, we can't understand Iran's foreign relations and its evident hostility by just assessing its international environment or the changing Mideast power balance. These things matter. But Iran's revolutionary elite also seeks to buttress the regime's ideological identity by embracing a

confrontational posture.

The question then becomes why the Iranian leadership continues to maintain this ideological template so long after its revolutionary emergence. After all, other revolutionary regimes, after initially using foreign policy for ideological purposes, later moved away from that approach. Why has China become more pragmatic but not Iran? The answer is that the Islamic Republic is different from its revolutionary counterparts in that the ideology of its state is its religion. It may be a politicized and radicalized variation of Shia Islam, but religion is the official dogma. Thus, a dedicated core of supporters inevitably remained loyal to this religious ideology long after Khomeini himself disappeared from the scene. Revolutionary regimes usually change when their ardent supporters grow disillusioned and abandon the faith. It is, after all, much easier to be an ex-Marxist than an ex-Shiite. In one instance, renouncing one's faith is political defection; in the other, apostasy. Although the Islamic Republic has become widely unpopular, for a small but fervent segment of the population it is still an important experiment in realizing God's will on earth.

To understand this, it helps to review some pertinent Iranian history, beginning with the thought and actions of Ayatollah Khomeini. Khomeini offered a unique challenge to the concept of the nation-state and the prevailing norms of the international system. The essence of his

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message was that the vitality of his Islamist vision at home was contingent on its relentless export. Moreover, because God's vision was not to be confined to a single nation, Iran's foreign policy would be an extension of its domestic revolutionary turmoil. For the grand ayatollah, the global order was divided between two competing entities—states whose priorities were defined by Western conventions; and Iran, whose ostensible purpose was to redeem a divine mandate. Of course, no country



can persist on ideology alone. Iran had to operate its economy, deal with regional exigencies and meet the demands of its growing population. But its international relations would be characterized by revolutionary impulses continually struggling against the pull of pragmatism.

Khomeini's internationalism had to have an antagonist, a foil against which to define itself. And a caricatured concept of the West became the central pillar of his Islamist imagination. The Western powers were rapacious imperialists determined to exploit Iran's wealth for their own aggrandizement.

Islamist themes soon followed, portraying the West as also seeking to subjugate Muslims and impose its cultural template in the name of modernity. Disunity among Muslims, the autocracies populating the region, the failure of the clerical class to assume the mantle of opposition and the young people's attraction to alien ideologies were seen as byproducts of a Western plot to sustain its dominance over Islam's realm. Four episodes from the 1980s underscore how foreign policy was used to buttress the ideological transformation at home: the 1979–1981 hostage crisis, the war with Iraq, the events surrounding the Salman Rushdie fatwa and a Khomeini-ordered massacre of political prisoners.

It is often forgotten that those in charge during the initial stages of the 1979 revolution were not Khomeini's clerical militants. During a power struggle between the clerics and the provisional government's moderates, the provisional government did not seek to break ties with the United States. Although Tehran would not be a pawn in the U.S.-Soviet conflict, it wished to maintain normal diplomatic and economic relations with Washington.

Thus, Khomeini and his clerical allies increasingly saw the provisional government as an impediment to their larger objectives. The task of redrafting the constitution along radical lines and electing a clerically dominated parliament required displacing the provisional government. In the end, this combination of concerns pressed the radicals to provoke a crisis that would galvanize the populace behind the cause of the Islamic Republic and its ideological mandates.

On November 4, 1979, a group of Iranian students breached the walls of the U.S. embassy and captured sixty-six Americans. They remained hostage for 444 days. The embassy takeover provided Khomeini with his opportunity to inflame popular sentiment and claim that external

enemies, aided by domestic accomplices, were plotting against the revolution. To a frenzied populace, it seemed plausible that the United States, which had used its embassy to restore the Pahlavi dynasty to power in 1953, was now up to similar mischief. The Iranian public rushed to the defense of the revolution, and Mehdi Bazargan's provisional-government premiership soon faded.

On December 2, 1979, a draft constitution favored by Khomeini, which granted essential power to the unelected branches of government, was submitted to the public. Khomeini warned that its rejection at such a critical juncture would demonstrate signs of disunity and provoke an attack by the United States. The regime's propaganda machine insisted that only secular intellectuals tied to U.S. imperialism were averse to the governing document. It worked: fully 99 percent of the population voted for the constitution.

Out of this emerged two other factors—namely, the clerics' quest to usher in a militant foreign policy and their desire to strike a psychological blow against the United States. The provisional government's approach to international relations was strict nonalignment with a willingness to pursue normal relations with the United States. This formulation was rejected by the newly empowered militants, who provoked the hostage crisis to foster a different international orientation. Under this orientation, Iran's foreign policy would become not merely an exemption from the superpower conflict but an assertion of radical Islamism as a foreign-policy foundation. Through a symbolic attack on the U.S. embassy, the new revolutionaries not only consolidated their domestic power through their antagonism toward the United States but also demonstrated their contempt for prevailing international norms. Iran now would inveigh against

the United States, assist belligerent actors throughout the Middle East and plot against the state of Israel.

Iran's war with Iraq was the next big event in this saga of the Iranian elite's resolve to meld domestic and foreign policy. The triumph of Iran's revolution, with its denial of the legitimacy of the prevailing order and its calls for the reformulation of the state structure along religious precepts, portended conflict. Revolutions are frequently followed by war, as newly empowered elites often look abroad for the redemption of their cause. In Iran, the new elite mixed aggressive propaganda, subversion and terrorism to advance its cause in Iraq, where minority Sunnis dominated the majority Shia population. Perhaps nowhere was Iran's message of Shia empowerment received with greater acclaim than among Iraqi Shites. This provocative behavior contributed to Saddam Hussein's decision to invade Iran in 1980, which ignited one of the region's most devastating conflicts.

The Iranian clerical state didn't measure progress in the Iran-Iraq war in territory lost or gained, boundary demarcations or reparation offers. Rather, it saw the war as an opportunity to merge its religious pedigree with its nationalist claims. The war was viewed as a struggle against an assault on Islam and the Prophet's legacy by profane forces of disbelief. The clerical estate genuinely identified itself with the Prophet's mission and saw Saddam's secular reign as yet another manifestation of inauthenticity and corruption. Iran had not been attacked because of its provocations or lingering territorial disputes but because it embodied Islam and sought to achieve the Prophet's injunctions. Thus, it was the moral obligation of the citizenry to defend Iran as if it were safeguarding religion itself.

By June 1982, Iran essentially had evicted Iraq from its territory, and the question

emerged whether to continue the war by going into Iraq. Given the war's economic costs and human toll, the decision to attack Iraq remains one of the most contentious in Iran's modern history. Khomeini resolutely dismissed various offers of cease-fire and generous reparations. Instead, Iran embraced a disastrous extension of the conflict based on a combination of ideological conviction, the misperception that the war would be quick and a fear that Saddam would not remain contained.

The rationales underlying Iran's decision to prolong the war still are debated widely. The conventional view discounts the notion that prolonging the war was seen as a means of consolidating the revolution at home. But Khomeini soon celebrated the decision as the "third revolution," whose purpose was not just to repel the invaders but also to cleanse Iran of all secular tendencies. In order to exploit the war politically, the state had to present the conflict in distinctly religious terms. A revolutionary order seeking to usher in a new era could not wage a limited war designed to achieve carefully calibrated objectives. The war had to be a crusade—indeed, a rebellion against the forces of iniquity and impiety. Through collective sacrifice and spiritual attainment, the theocratic regime would fend off the invaders, change Iran and project power throughout the region.

The war finally ended for the same reason it was prolonged: the need to sustain the revolution at home. By 1988, Iran was exhausted and weary from having waged an eight-year war without any measurable international support. Iraqi counterattacks and the war of cities, whereby Iraq threatened Iranian urban centers with chemical weapons, undermined the arguments for war. The difficulties of the war were compounded by a smaller pool of volunteers, which undercut Iran's strategy of utilizing manpower to overcome Iraq's

technological superiority. The inability of Iran to muster sufficient volunteers meant it had to embark on a more rigorous conscription effort that further estranged the population. Continuation of the war threatened the revolution and perhaps even the regime.

The war left a significant imprint on Iran's international orientation. The quest for self-sufficiency and self-reliance is a hallmark of the Islamic Republic's foreign policy, as the guardians of the revolution recognized that the survival of their regime depended entirely on their own efforts. International organizations, global opinion and prevailing conventions did not protect Iran from Iraq's chemical-weapons assaults. Saddam's aggression, his targeting of civilians, persistent interference with Persian Gulf commerce and use of weapons of mass destruction were all condoned by the great powers. The idea that Iran should forgo its national prerogatives for the sake of treaty obligations or Western sensibilities didn't resonate with the aggrieved clerics. Thus, the war went a long way toward imposing the clerical template on Iran's ruling system.

As Khomeini approached the end of his life, he grew apprehensive about the vitality of his revolution. Suddenly there was a risk that the vanguard Islamic Republic would become a tempered and cautious state. At this point, he undertook two specific acts to ensure that his disciples would sustain his revolutionary radicalism and resist moderation. In 1988, shortly after the cease-fire with Iraq, he ordered one of his last acts of bloodletting—the execution of thousands of political prisoners then languishing in Iran's jails. The mass executions, carried out in less than a month, were designed to test Khomeini's supporters and make certain that they were sufficiently committed to his revolution. Those who showed hesitancy would be seen as halfhearted and dismissed

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from power. And this indeed did happen to Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri, who objected. Khomeini was confident that the government he would leave behind had the courage to inflict massive and arbitrary terror to maintain power. However, he still worried about possible backsliding on the issue of relations with the West.

Thus did Khomeini manufacture another external crisis to stoke the revolutionary fires. The publication of Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*, which depicted the Prophet Muhammad in an unflattering light, offered a perfect opportunity. In February 1989, Khomeini issued his famous fatwa, designed to radicalize the masses in support of the regime's ideology. While the international community saw his egregious act as an indication of his intolerance and militancy, Khomeini considered domestic political calculations to be paramount. Iran was once more ostracized, a development entirely acceptable to Khomeini.

With the end of the prolonged war with Iraq and Khomeini's death, Iran's focus shifted from external perils to its own domestic quandaries, and the 1990s became one of the most important periods of transition for the Islamic Republic. It was a period of intense factionalism. On the one hand, the new president, Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, and his allies sensed that for the Islamic Republic to survive, it had to craft a new national compact and reestablish its legitimacy. Iran had to restructure its economy and provide for the practical needs of its people. It also had to adjust to new international realities fostered by the

collapse of the Soviet Union and the 1991 Gulf War. To realize his vision of economic renovation and foreign-policy adjustment, Rafsanjani sought to mend fences with the neighboring Gulf states and reach out to the European community and Russia. But the United States remained too unpopular in Iran for any such outreach.

Standing against Rafsanjani and his cohort was a conservative faction that gradually would be led by the new supreme leader, Ali Khamenei. This faction appreciated that, in the aftermath of the war and due to economic demands, a relaxation of tensions was necessary. But its international outlook continued to be influenced by the need to sustain Iran's Islamic culture. This became all the more pressing as many Iranians began to move beyond the revolutionary legacy and seek a new future. Given this popular challenge, the conservatives became even more invested in rejecting normalization with the West for fear that such a move could provoke a cultural subversion that would further erode the foundations of the state. The dual themes of the "Great Satan" and the "clash of civilizations" laced their pronouncements and defined their political identity. The West remained a sinister source of cultural pollution whose influence and temptations had to be resisted even more strenuously after Khomeini's passing and the emergence in Iran of popular interest in Western ways and vogues. The fact that Iran's youth no longer paid attention to its ponderous theological musings was immaterial to a political class that perceived its legitimacy as deriving



from God’s will. Foreign policy was seen paradoxically as a way of isolating Iran from the international integration that this class feared. Iran would now move in opposing directions, confounding both its critics and supporters.

This contradictory nature of Iran’s foreign policy was most evident in the Persian Gulf. Iran behaved moderately and judiciously during the American campaign to evict Iraq from Kuwait. In the aftermath of the war, Iran began discussing a regional-security arrangement whereby the stability of the Persian Gulf would be ensured by indigenous actors in a cooperative framework. Instead of seeking to instigate Shia uprisings and exhorting the masses to embrace Iran’s revolutionary template, Rafsanjani called for greater economic and security cooperation. To be sure, this served Iran’s interests, as it naturally would emerge as the leading power in such a Gulf order. Still, this new policy accepted the legitimacy of the monarchical regimes that Khomeini long had maligned.

In a manner that bewildered the international community, Iran started speaking with multiple voices. Rafsanjani called for better relations, but hard-liners denounced what they considered his betrayal of the revolution. Moreover, Iran continued to pursue subversive activities

and terrorism, including the 1996 bombing of Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia, which housed American military personnel. Nineteen U.S. servicemen were killed in the attack. While one arm of the state emphasized diplomacy and cooperation, the other engaged in incendiary propaganda and acts of terror. In the end, Rafsanjani couldn’t convince the Gulf community that Iran had turned a new page, and relations

with the sheikhdoms remained tense.

A similar pattern was seen in Rafsanjani’s desire to improve relations with Europe. Iran’s need for foreign technologies and investments, as well as its desire to escape its isolation, propelled it toward this new outlook. The European states initially embraced the new Iranian president and responded to his call for reconciliation. The Europeans labeled this diplomatic exchange a “critical dialogue,” which suggested that Iran could be persuaded to modify its behavior through diplomatic discussions and economic incentives. But the death sentence on the British author Salman Rushdie and the assassination of Iranian dissidents on European soil soon militated against better relations.

Rafsanjani sought to tone down the Rushdie affair by suggesting that, although Khomeini’s decree could not be countermanded, Iran would not necessarily carry out the order. These statements were soon contradicted by Iranian politicians who insisted that the fatwa was irreversible. In the meantime, powerful religious foundations maintained bounties on Rushdie’s head. Britain actually expelled a number of Iranian diplomats on the suspicion that they were plotting Rushdie’s murder. Whatever the validity of those allegations, Iran’s inability to separate

itself from Khomeini's decree obstructed its attempt to mend fences with Europe.

And terror remained an instrument of Iran's policy in Europe, as reflected in Iran's assassination of Kurdish dissidents in the Berlin restaurant of Mykonos. The German judiciary blamed Iran for the attack, particularly its Ministry of Intelligence and Security. As a result, the European states all withdrew their envoys from Iran. Ultimately, Iran's failure to craft a different relationship with the accommodating Europeans reflected its inability to balance competing mandates.

The one policy area where Rafsanjani's pragmatism prevailed unmolested concerned the Russian Federation. Like many Third World countries struggling for autonomy within the international order, Iran found the collapse of the Soviet Union initially disturbing. That turned to alarm for the clerical elite with the massive deployment of U.S. forces to the Persian Gulf and the expressed American commitment to contain "outlaw" regimes. As a price for strategic support and arms trade, the Islamic Republic made its own adjustments to the emergence of Central Asia. In a rare display of judiciousness, Iran largely tempered its ideology, stressing the importance of trade and stability rather than propagation of its Islamist message. The full scope of Iranian pragmatism became evident during the Chechnya conflict. At a time when Russian soldiers were massacring Muslim rebels indiscriminately, Iran merely declared the issue to be an internal Russian matter.

Several factors propelled Iran toward such realism. First, many within the clerical elite perceived that Central Asia was not really susceptible to Iran's Islamist message. But Iran's aversion to isolation also played a part. The fact that Iran could not craft better relations with the United States and was largely isolated from both

Europe and the Gulf sheikhdoms made ties with Moscow an imperative. For the conservatives, one way of fending off American pressure and European displeasure was cultivating close economic and security ties with Russia. Thus, the Russian Federation became the beneficiary of Iran's failure to craft a more coherent policy toward other global actors.

It seems clear that during this period, Iran moved cautiously beyond the rigid, revolutionary parameters of the 1980s. Pragmatism and calibration of national interest became important considerations in Iran's foreign-policy decision making. Yet ideology never was eclipsed completely by pragmatic calculations. For many conservatives, their charge remained redemption of Khomeini's Islamist vision at home. They therefore desired Iran's estrangement from the West while avoiding any crisis that would threaten the regime. It was a difficult balancing act in which terrorism served a useful purpose by provoking Western sanctions and opprobrium but not much more. Thus did the conservatives use a threat atmosphere to sustain their power and preserve the essential identity of their state.

The most momentous change in Iran's foreign policy came with the 1997 election of the reformist president Mohammad Khatami, whose ambitions were nothing less than extraordinary. His aim was not merely to make the theocracy more accountable to its citizenry but also to end the Islamic Republic's pariah status and integrate it into the global society. Thus, he embraced much of the reformist agenda. And, given his popular mandate and determination, he presented a certain authority to the supreme leader and the conservatives. While the reformist forces wanted reconciliation with Saudi Arabia, normalized relations with the European Union and even an

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outreach to the United States, Khamenei accepted only the first two of these measures. He understood that Iran's national interest required a different relationship with its neighbors and its European commercial partners. Moreover, the conservatives, initially shell-shocked by Khatami's unexpected triumph, eventually yielded warily to his early measures.

Khatami's "good neighbor" diplomacy rehabilitated Iran's ties with the Gulf regimes. Numerous trade, diplomatic and security agreements were signed between the Islamic Republic and the Gulf sheikhdoms. Iran ceased its support for opposition forces operating in those countries. Thus, Khatami managed—at least momentarily—to transcend Khomeini's divisive legacy and replace ideological antagonisms with policies rooted in pragmatism and self-interest.

Khatami's cautious domestic liberalization similarly expedited détente with the European states. He ended the long-standing practice of assassinating Iranian dissidents in Europe. Also, the issue of the Rushdie fatwa was finally settled. After decades of living underground, the beleaguered author was allowed to pursue a more normal life and resume his literary pursuits. European envoys returned to Iran, and Iran's president was welcomed in European capitals.

Khatami even attempted to adjust Iran's stridency toward Israel. The Iranian government now said it would assent to an agreement if it were acceptable to the Palestinians. The clerical state's calls for the eradication of Israel and its periodic

conferences pledging to reclaim Jerusalem through holy war were at odds with the reformist perspective, not to mention the sentiments of the Arab states. The critical question was: Who was the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people? Was it Hamas, as the hard-liners insisted, or the Palestinian Authority, as the reformers maintained? The reformers pressed the state to recognize that Iran's stance was popular only with radical Islamists, rejectionists and terrorists. In his inaugural address, Khatami stressed that Iran was prepared to advance an agreement predicated on UN resolutions. Given the fact that those resolutions had conceded a two-state solution, Iran's reformist leader subtly stipulated the authority of the land-for-peace formula. It was during Khatami's tenure that the Islamic Republic accepted the results of the 2002 Arab summit, with its recognition that in exchange for return to pre-1967 lines the Arab states would recognize Israel. Critics certainly could scoff at this concession on the ground that it did not eliminate Iran's support for Hezbollah or Hamas, but it was an important breakthrough for a country known for its unrelenting hostility toward the Jewish state. Indeed, the reformists' rhetoric and stance would not survive the rise of their more hawkish successors.

Khatami's approach to America was more gingerly and carefully crafted. Conscious of the conservatives' deep-seated reservations, Khatami sought to ease mutual suspicion through a gradual exchange of scholars, activists and athletes. He hoped U.S. economic concessions might provide

him with sufficient leverage to influence the conservatives at home, particularly the wary supreme leader. But Khatami underestimated the extent of the hard-liners' hostility to any thaw in U.S.-Iranian relations, as well as the rigidity of America's unimaginative containment policy. In essence, Khatami fell victim to both Iranian hard-liners and post-9/11 politics in the United States.

Soon, a conservative counterstrategy began to crystallize. The conservatives employed their governmental leverage to negate parliamentary legislation designed to liberalize Iran's polity. The judiciary imprisoned prominent reformers and closed down their newspapers. Vigilante and terror groups harassed student gatherings and assassinated prominent intellectuals. And foreign policy once again came into play. Conservatives dismissed the reform movement's ability to deliver on its promises as a means of undermining international confidence in Khatami's government. Terrorism reemerged as a means of advancing the conservative agenda and subverting reformist plans. And then Iran's conservatives received a helping hand from an unexpected corner—George W. Bush.

Khatami and the reformers viewed 9/11 as an ideal opportunity to mend fences with America. Khatami quickly realized the advantage in cooperating with the United States on the intersecting objectives of the two countries following 9/11. A religious intellectual who saw Islam and democracy as compatible, Khatami viewed the Taliban as a particular affront to his sensibilities. He also believed the demise of the radical Sunni group would enhance Iran's security while providing an avenue for reconciliation with the United States.

Then, in his January 2002 State of the Union address, Bush uttered his famous line castigating Iran as part of an "axis of

evil" (along with North Korea and Iraq). Bush rebuked Iran as a major sponsor of terrorism and condemned its unelected leaders for oppressing their citizens. The president declared that in the post-9/11 environment, the United States would "not permit the world's most dangerous regimes to threaten us with the world's most destructive weapons." Though perhaps designed to prepare the American public for the administration's plan to invade Iraq, the inclusion of Iran dealt a fearsome blow to Tehran's reformers. Thus did Khatami's interlude in leadership prove to be short-lived, despite his impressive accomplishments. The conservatives, fearful that the reform movement could end up undermining the pillars of the Islamist state, soon rebounded.

The 2005 Iranian presidential election signified a change, as the elders of the revolution receded from the scene and a new international orientation gradually surfaced. The 1990s often are seen as a time when clerical reformers sought to reconcile democracy with religion, and a younger generation increasingly resisted a political culture that celebrated martyrdom and spiritual devotion. But another important development also was emerging—the rise of a generation of pious young men who had served on the front lines of the Iran-Iraq war. President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad personified this new leadership. Often called the "New Right," it brought to the scene a combustible mix of Islamist ideology, strident nationalism and a deep suspicion of the West. As uncompromising nationalists, they were sensitive to Iran's prerogatives and sovereign rights. As committed Islamists, they saw the Middle East as a battleground between forces of secularism and Islamic authenticity. As emerging national leaders, they perceived Western conspiracies where none existed.

The rise of Iran's New Right coincided with important changes elsewhere in the Middle East. As the Iraq and Afghan wars drained America's power and confidence, and as Islamist parties claimed leadership in Lebanon and the Palestinian territories, Iran emerged as an important regional player. Recently, the Arab Awakening unleashed a surge of Islamist parties that may not become clients of Iran but are likely to evince greater sympathy for the Islamic Republic than the likes of Hosni Mubarak. Meanwhile, Tehran finds it can assert its regional influence through its determination to sustain its nuclear program, its quest to emerge as a power broker in Iraq and its holding aloft the banner of resistance against Israel. The old balance between ideology and pragmatism is yielding to one defined by power politics and religious fervor. In the early twenty-first century, Iran has a government that consciously seeks guidance from the revolutionary outlook of the long-dead Ayatollah Khomeini.

Although many in Iran's younger generation of conservatives may have been in their twenties when Khomeini died, his shadow looms large over their deliberations. They often romanticize the 1980s as a pristine decade of ideological solidarity and national cohesion. They see it as an era when the entire nation was united behind the cause of the Islamic Republic and determined to assert its independence against Western hostility. Khomeini and his disciples were dedicated public servants free of corruption and crass competition for power, traits that would not characterize their successors. Self-reliance and self-sufficiency were the cherished values of a nation seeking to mold a new Middle East. Thus, the common refrain of the New Right became essentially: "Back to the future."

In light of all this, the 2009 election posed a stark choice for Iran. It could opt

for a return to reformist policies and an effort to become part of the community of nations by accepting the norms of the international community, or it could embark on the New Right path of self-assertion and defiance. The public chose the former path, but the governing elite chose the latter. The result is that the gap between state and society has never been wider. A broad mass of the Iranian public doesn't share the ideological fervor of the ruling elite.

In the meantime, the hard-line outlook of the Iranian government has contributed to a situation that is both destabilizing and dangerous—the emergence of the nuclear issue. These days, all of Iran's relationships are defined and distorted by that dispute. Iran is at odds with its Gulf neighbors not because it is seeking to export its revolution but rather because of its nuclear aspirations. For the first time in three decades of animosity and antagonism, there is a real possibility of a military clash between Iran and Israel. Washington and Tehran seem locked in a confrontation they cannot escape. The European states have abandoned constructive dialogue in favor of sanctions and hostility due to the nuclear dispute. Even the Russian Federation seems increasingly uncomfortable in its relations with Iran as its conflict with the international community deepens. Only time can answer the question of how this issue will be sorted out—whether there will be a negotiated compromise; whether one side will ultimately back down; or whether a catastrophic clash will ensue that will further destabilize an unsteady region.

But we do know that Iran isn't likely to go the way of other revolutionary states and relinquish its ideological patrimony for more mundane considerations. Khomeini was too powerful an innovator in the institutions he created and the elite he molded to see the passing of his vision

in any routine way. That's why Iran has sustained its animus toward the United States and Israel long after such hostility proved self-defeating. That's why the theocratic regime remains a state divided against itself, struggling to define coherent objectives, with revolutionary pretensions pitted against national interests. The Islamic Republic might alter its course, limit its horizons and make unsavory compromises along the way. Yet it will not completely temper its raging fires. In the end, Khomeini couldn't impose the totality of his vision on Iran, much less the Islamic world. But he was not the kind of figure to become another faded revolutionary commemorated on occasion and disregarded most of the time.

In many ways, China's experience encapsulates the paradigm of the life cycle of a non-Western revolutionary state. Initially, the new regime rejects the existing state system and norms of international behavior, especially respect for sovereignty. Foreign-policy decision making is dominated by ideological considerations, even if there are concessions made to pragmatic concerns. But, over time, a clear trajectory emerges. As new leaders come to power, the ideology is modified and later abandoned in favor of "normal" relations with other countries, usually to promote economic development and modernization.

Thus, Western policy makers continue to be puzzled over why Iran has not yet become a postrevolutionary country. What makes this case more peculiar is that by the late 1990s, Iran did appear to be following in the footsteps of states such as China and Vietnam, at least in terms of its foreign policy. Yet this evolution was

stymied by the 2005 election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Paradoxically, it is today's younger generation of Iranian leaders that has rejected the more pragmatic, nonrevolutionary approach of their elders—Rafsanjani and Khatami, for example—in favor of the legacy of Khomeini in foreign affairs. It is a legacy rooted in an austere



Islamist vision dedicated to overturning the regional order and finding ways to challenge the existing international system.

What's remarkable is that the Islamic Republic has managed to maintain its revolutionary identity in the face of substantial countervailing pressures, elite defections and mass disaffection throughout the country. The institutional juggernaut of the revolution has contributed to this success, as has the elite molded in Khomeini's austere image. But Iran's foreign policy also has played a crucial role in sustaining this domestic ideological identity. A narrow segment of the conservative clerical elite, commanding key institutions of the state, has fashioned a foreign policy designed to maintain the ideological character of the regime. And that remains a key ingredient in determining how the Islamic Republic thinks of itself and its role in the Middle East. □



The Revenge of Kaplan's Maps

By Robert W. Merry

Robert D. Kaplan, *The Revenge of Geography: What the Map Tells Us About Coming Conflicts and the Battle Against Fate* (New York: Random House, 2012), 432 pp., \$28.00.

Russian president Vladimir Putin has a problem. The land power he leads lies vulnerable to invasion. The unremitting grassy steppes of his nation, extending from Europe all the way to the Far East, with hardly a mountain range or seashore or major forest to hinder encroachment by army or horde, has fostered a national obsession with the need to control territory as a hedge against incursion. Putin shares this obsession, as indeed he must as leader of this inherently exposed country.

This fixation is hardly new. It was shared by the very first Russians, the Kievan Rus, beginning in the ninth century—until they were overrun in the mid-thirteenth century by Mongol hordes under Batu Khan, Genghis's grandson. It was shared by medieval Muscovy, domain of that

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pitiless imperialist Ivan the Terrible and his successor, Boris Godunov—until it too succumbed to invading Swedes, Poles, Lithuanians and Cossacks in the early seventeenth century. It was shared by the Romanov dynasty during its three-hundred-year reign marked by one of the greatest land conquests in world history—until it also crumbled amid an awesome territorial contraction after World War I. It was even shared by the succeeding Bolsheviks, who turned out to be the greatest imperialists of all—until they saw their empire disintegrate and Russia shrink to its smallest dimension since before the emergence of Catherine the Great in the mid-eighteenth century.

It is little wonder that Putin should obsess over his nation's territorial dominion. Yet many in the West argue he should resist such flights of national nostalgia, accept without protest the West's eastward expansion and concentrate on improving his governmental structures so they could become more like those of the West.

You don't get such sentiments from Robert D. Kaplan, the world-traveling reporter and intellectual whose fourteen books constitute a bedrock of penetrating exposition and analysis on the post-Cold War world. In this latest volume he strips away much of the cant that suffuses public discourse these days on global developments and gets to a fundamental reality: that geography remains today, as it has been throughout history, one of the most powerful drivers of world events.

"Geography," writes Kaplan, chief geopolitical analyst for Stratfor, "is the backdrop to human history itself. . . . A

state's position on the map is the first thing that defines it, more than its governing philosophy even." Indeed, Kaplan suggests that a state's geographic position often influences its governing philosophy. He quotes historian G. Patrick March as saying Russia's territorial vulnerability has spawned in that country a "greater tolerance for tyranny." Britain, on the other hand, writes Kaplan, "secure in its borders, with an oceanic orientation, could develop a democratic system ahead of its neighbors."

Kaplan has no illusions about the controversy his unsentimental realism will generate. "Maps," he writes, "are a rebuke to the very notions of the equality and unity of humankind, since they remind us of all the different environments of the earth that make men profoundly unequal and disunited in so many ways, leading to conflict, on which realism almost exclusively dwells."

Indeed, even before publication, his book stirred an angry response in *Publishers Weekly*, whose thumbnail reviews sometimes seem as if they are crafted to enforce humanist thinking. The anonymous reviewer called Kaplan's book an "overwrought map exercise" consisting mainly of "diverting but feckless snippets of history, cultural lore, and economics" as well as "a jumble of empty rotational metaphors." Kaplan's "pitiless 'realism,'" writes the reviewer, amounts to "an unconvincing reprise of an obsolete worldview."

Kaplan himself, with far more balance and perspective than his agitated critic, identifies the wellspring of such

vituperation. The end of the Cold War, he writes, blinded Western thinkers to many harsh realities of the world. He elaborates:

For suddenly we were in a world in which the dismantling of a man-made boundary in Germany had led to the assumption that all human divisions were surmountable; that democracy would conquer Africa and the Middle East as easily as it had Eastern Europe; that globalization—soon to become a buzzword—was nothing less than a moral direction of history and a system of international security, rather than what it actually was, merely an economic and cultural stage of development.

Thus, the very term "realism" became a pejorative as American universalism embraced the U.S. military as "the hidden hand that allowed universalist ideas to matter so much more than terrain and the historical experience of people living on it." The great historical lesson became "Munich"—the imperative that evil around the world must be nipped in the bud before it sprang up, Hitler-like, to threaten global stability and wreak havoc on innocents. This sensibility led first to America's involvement in the Balkans in the 1990s, then to its invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan.

But U.S. difficulties in Iraq and Afghanistan, writes Kaplan, spawned an intellectual counterforce, reflected in the reemergence of the "Vietnam" analogy—the idea that ethnic and sectarian hatreds around the world, far from mere obstacles in the nation's missionary calling, are warnings that American adventures abroad

*Geography remains today, as it has been throughout
history, one of the most powerful drivers of world events.*

can be a loser's game. Iraq, in Kaplan's view, "undermined a key element in the mind-set of some: that the projection of American power always had a moral result."

And so we have a powerful debate between the devotees of Munich and those of Vietnam. Kaplan presents his book as an effort to find a balance between the two. He writes, "Vietnam is about limits; Munich about overcoming them." Each analogy, he adds, can be dangerous on its own:

It is only when both are given equal measure that the right policy has the best chance to emerge. For wise policymakers, while aware of their nation's limitations, know that the art of statesmanship is about working as close to the edge as possible, without stepping over the brink.

For Kaplan, geography offers guidance for understanding the swirl of pressures, forces, passions and interests that direct the course of human events—and thus for understanding also the proximate location of that brink. To plumb those lessons, he offers an intellectual travelogue through the works of the great geopolitical thinkers of the last century, when such analysis was considered a worthy element of discourse, not to be dismissed reactively with the intolerance of today's *Publishers Weekly*.

Thus does Kaplan quote Nicholas J. Spykman, the great Dutch American strategist of the early World War II era, as noting that much changed for the United States between George Washington and Franklin Roosevelt, "but the Atlantic continues to separate Europe from the

United States and the ports of the St. Lawrence River are still blocked by winter ice." Alexander I and Joseph Stalin ruled Russia in far different eras, but both shared an "endless struggle for access to the sea." France's Georges Clemenceau and Andre Maginot, some two thousand years after Caesar's Gallic adventures, shared his "anxiety over the open German frontier."

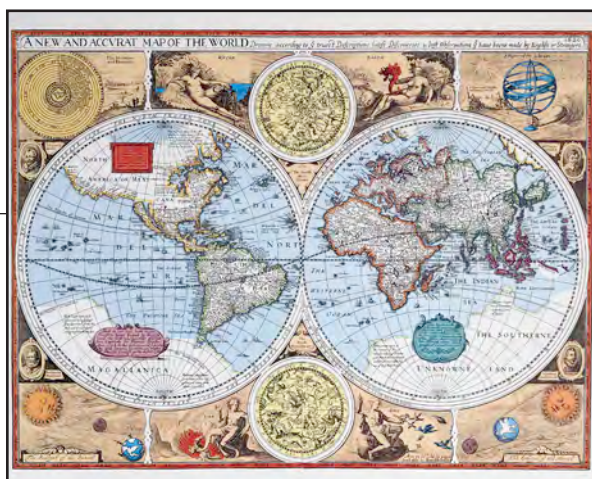
Kaplan adds that it wasn't merely two oceans that gave America the luxury of its idealism; "it was also that these two oceans gave America direct access to the two principal arteries of politics and commerce in the world: Europe across the Atlantic and East Asia across the Pacific." That goes a long way toward explaining America's rise upon the global scene. And it's not only Russia that sees danger in open, unprotected land borders, for Germany "faces both east and west with no mountain ranges to protect it, providing it with pathologies from militarism to nascent pacifism, so as to cope with its dangerous location." Though Britain's island identity gave it a certain protection from invasion, its location so near the Continent posed sufficient danger that it developed "a particular strategic concern over the span of the centuries with the politics of France and the Low Countries on the opposite shore of the English Channel and the North Sea."

Such examples abound in the book. Kaplan quotes British writer Freya Stark as noting that Egypt from its first stirrings lay "parallel and peaceful to the routes of human traffic," and was thus well positioned to develop a high degree of civilization. Mesopotamia, by contrast,

was always “right-angled and obnoxious to the predestined paths of man.” Unprotected by any natural barriers, it found itself forever subject to the woes of plunder. Indeed, Kaplan even speculates that Mesopotamia’s modern tendency toward tyranny could be “geographically determined.” Every Iraqi dictator going back to the 1950s, he writes, “had to be more repressive than the previous one in order to hold together a state with no natural borders composed of Kurds and Sunni and Shiite Arabs, seething with a well-articulated degree of ethnic and sectarian consciousness.”

Kaplan concedes that his emphasis on geography could pull him into the kind of determinist thinking that Isaiah Berlin rejected in his famous 1954 essay, “Historical Inevitability.” Kaplan opts for what French philosopher Raymond Aron called a “sober ethic rooted in the truth of ‘probabilistic determinism.’” Says Kaplan: “The key word is ‘probabilistic,’ that is, in now concentrating on geography we adhere to a partial or hesitant determinism which recognizes obvious differences between groups and terrain, but does not oversimplify, and leaves many possibilities open.” He cites the wisdom of America’s liberal interventionists who intuited geographic reality in supporting U.S. involvement in the Balkans but opposing it in Iraq:

Whereas the former Yugoslavia lay at the most advanced, western extremity of the former Ot-



oman Empire, adjacent to Central Europe, Mesopotamia lay at its most chaotic, eastern reaches. And because that fact has affected political development up through the present, intervention in Iraq would prove to be a stretch.

With that in mind, he plunges into his subject with enthusiasm and élan, first expounding on the great geopolitical realities of the globe and then seeking to apply them to particular regions and nations of our time. He politely warns: “The men I am about to introduce should make liberal humanists profoundly uneasy.”

A key introduction is to Halford Mackinder, father of modern geopolitics and author of an influential 1904 article entitled “The Geographical Pivot of History.” Using geography as a kind of surveyor’s transit level, he peered deep into the future, seeing what few at the time could even envision. He wrote:

When historians in the remote future come to look back on the group of centuries through which we are now passing, and see them foreshortened, as we to-day see the Egyptian dynasties, it may well be that they will describe the last 400 years as the Columbian epoch, and will say that it ended soon after the year 1900.

Before that Columbian epoch, he explained, Europe was “pent into a narrow region and threatened by external barbarism.” But then Europe burst forth across the seas and conquered other continents, facing “negligible resistances.” Thus did the West become the dominant force upon the globe. But by Mackinder’s day that age of expansion had come to an end, and the West faced a “closed political system,” only this time one of “world-wide scope.” With no more room for European expansion, European wars now would unfold on a global scale, wrote Mackinder, essentially predicting World Wars I and II as well as Europe’s decline as the world’s preeminent civilization.

And with that development the world once again would be subject to Mackinder’s “Eurasia pivot theory”—the view that the world’s key geographic location was Eurasia, whence for centuries most of the threats emerged not just to Europe but also to Russia, Turkey, Iran, India, China and the northern reaches of the Arab Middle East. He was talking about not just the Mongols but also the Turks. His question: Who would be the modern Mongols or Turkish invaders? His answer: the Russians. As he said:

As we consider this rapid review of the broader currents of history, does not a certain persistence of geographical relationship become evident? Is not the pivot region of the world’s politics that vast area of Euro-Asia which is inaccessible to ships, but in antiquity lay open to the horse-riding nomads, and is to-day about to be covered with a network of railways?

Kaplan adds that, just as the Mongols had threatened and often conquered the outlying regions of Eurasia—Finland, Poland, Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Persia, India and China—“so, too, now would Russia, sustained by the cohesiveness of its landmass, won by the recent development



of its railways.” Thus, Mackinder predicted not only Europe’s decline and the world wars but also the outlines of the Cold War. As Kaplan explains, “Forget the czars and in 1904 the commissars-yet-to-be, they are but trivia compared to the deeper, tectonic forces of geography and technology.”

Mackinder saw the core of Eurasia as the global “Heartland” (roughly the lands encompassed by the postwar Soviet

empire), with Eastern Europe as its pivot. And here's where Kaplan brings in the Dutch American Spykman—born in 1893 in Amsterdam; widely traveled foreign correspondent; then a professor at Yale, where in 1935 he founded the Institute of International Studies. To Mackinder's Heartland concept Spykman added the idea of the surrounding "Rimland"—Europe, the Middle East, India and China. Control of the Heartland positioned any power to take all or parts of the Rimland. Control of both the Heartland and Rimland positioned a power to go after what Mackinder called the "World-Island" of Eurasia and Africa. Control of the World-Island positioned a power to dominate the globe.

This may sound outlandish, but consider the drama of the twentieth century, which unfolded after Mackinder had fashioned his geopolitical paradigm and, in fashioning it, presaged the outlines of that drama. Germany conquered Poland, from which it promptly sought to conquer the Soviet Heartland. Had Hitler succeeded, he would have positioned himself to take huge elements of Spykman's Rimland beyond all of continental Europe, which he already had conquered. Certainly the Middle East would have come under his domain and probably India. But the remaining forces of the West—Britain and the United States—mustered all their power to prevent this, understanding as they did that German conquest of the Heartland and Rimland would have given Hitler the ball game.

In defeating Germany with Soviet help, Britain and America ceded to Stalin full control of the Heartland, from which he

promptly threatened Europe. It was a near thing, but Stalin failed in his ambition of European conquest, whereupon he sought to destabilize Western positions elsewhere in the Rimland. The West's "containment" policy, writes Kaplan, was a defense of the Rimland as the great Heartland power probed and tested in Europe, South Asia, the Middle East and Southeast Asia. Says Kaplan: "The defense of Western Europe, Israel, moderate Arab states, the shah's Iran and the wars in Afghanistan and Vietnam all carried the notion of preventing a communist empire from extending control from the Heartland to the Rimland." As Henry Kissinger put it in 1957, "Limited war represents the only means for preventing the Soviet bloc, at an acceptable cost, from overrunning the peripheral areas of Eurasia."

It isn't surprising that America's most stalwart Cold War hawks—columnist Joseph Alsop, for example, or the conservative geopolitical analyst James Burnham—viewed that great confrontation in Mackinderian terms and tended toward pessimism about the West's fate. In a 1947 speech at Harvard, Alsop bemoaned the West's "sickness of the soul—a loss of certainty—a failure of assurance." He added, "We may in the end be defeated. . . . But it is better to be defeated after a hard struggle than simply to give in and die anyway."

His pessimism was misplaced, but his understanding of the struggle was spot on. And with the West's epic Cold War victory, the Heartland no longer posed a threat because Russia no longer dominated it sufficiently to do so. But, while the lines on the map may change, the contours don't,

and thus Kaplan bundles up the Mackinder thesis, which proved so potent in predicting events of the twentieth century, and applies it to the twenty-first century.

In predicting in 1904 that Russia would threaten Europe in the twentieth century, Mackinder advocated the emergence of buffer states between the two powers that could serve as a kind of geographic protection (he was, first and foremost, an advocate of balance of power). And such a buffer zone did in fact emerge after the collapse of the latest Russian empire. This could help stabilize that ancient fault line between the Russian Heartland and the European Rimland; it might even foster the emergence of a Central European entity—Mittleuropa—with Germany at its core. Still, geopolitics offers no guarantees. Kaplan writes:

But what if, according to Mackinder, Europe's destiny is still subordinate to Asiatic history, in the form of a resurgent Russia? Then there might be a threat. For what drove the Soviet Union to carve out an empire in Eastern Europe . . . still holds today: a legacy of depredations against Russia by Lithuanians, Poles, Swedes, Frenchmen, and Germans, leading to the need for a cordon sanitaire of compliant regimes in the space between historic Russia and Central Europe.

Meanwhile, the very richness of Europe's geography—the multiplicity of seas, harbors, peninsulas, rivers and mountains, which have spawned in turn a multiplicity of language groups and nation-states—will foster ongoing disunity, despite all the

pan-European structures instituted to pull the Continent together. As Kaplan writes, "Europe, the map suggests, has a significant future in the headlines."

As for Russia, Kaplan sees clearly that Putin's "low-dose authoritarianism" is a rejection of the "cold turkey experiment with Western democracy and market capitalism" that proved so devastating in the 1990s, following the communist collapse. In that sense, it resembles Lenin's rejection of Western ways after the Russian Revolution. But while Russia's relief map spreads across Asia, its population map favors Europe. As Kaplan points out, "The ancien régime, with its heavily German czardom, its French-speaking nobles, and bourgeois parliament in the European capital of St. Petersburg, was oriented westward, even if the peasantry was not so."

A western orientation is crucial for Putin if he wishes to restore his nation to an earlier glory and protect his nation from the kinds of incursions it has suffered since the Mongol arrival in the thirteenth century. The key is Ukraine. As former national-security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski has pointed out, without Ukraine, Russia can still be an empire, but a "predominantly Asian" one, focused on the Caucasus and Central Asia. Kaplan elaborates: "But with Ukraine back under Russian domination, Russia adds 46 million people to its own western-oriented demography, and suddenly challenges Europe, even as it is integrated into it." This drama, spawned by geography and the imperatives of nationalism, will play out in coming decades just as it has through past centuries.

Kaplan bundles up the Mackinder thesis, which proved so potent in predicting events of the twentieth century, and applies it to the twenty-first.

In the meantime, the world must grapple with a resurgent China, a geographically compact and densely populated expanse of real estate that faces the same steppe-land danger as Russia but from the opposite direction. Its geographic imperative throughout history has been to dominate the dry uplands “bordering it on three sides, from Manchuria counterclockwise around to Tibet”—the area through which it has faced a centuries-long threat from the hordes of the steppe. Thus today’s China must subdue the Tibetans, Uighur Turks and Inner Mongolians before it can contemplate any expansive foreign policy.

At present China has those crucial regions under control, which is why it is pursuing maritime ambitions. “Merely by going to sea in the manner that it is,” writes Kaplan, “China demonstrates its favorable position on the land in the heart of Asia.” Yet unlike Russia, China is seeking to extend its territorial influence “much more through commerce than coercion.”

Does this mean the United States can avoid military conflicts with China as the Asian power seeks to expand its naval influence in regions that America now dominates? Kaplan seems ambivalent about this. At one point he writes, “The possibility of a war between the United States and China is extremely remote.” But he also suggests that, if China’s economy keeps growing as it has, it “could constitute more embryonic power than any adversary the United States faced during the twentieth century.” He adds that the concept of “off-shore balancing”—marshaling other regional nations into networks of alliances

designed to check Chinese power—“may not be completely sufficient.”

Averting war, suggests Kaplan, may require the United States to adjust its naval ambitions in East Asia and accept Chinese dominance over what it defiantly calls the “First Island Chain,” which encompasses Japan, the Ryukyu Islands, parts of the Korean Peninsula, Taiwan, the Philippines, Indonesia and Australia. This may be a tall order for the United States, but it may become inevitable as America sees its navy decline to 250 ships from the current 280 (and 556 in 1988, at the end of the Reagan presidency). Kaplan cites a RAND Corporation study indicating the United States will be unable to defend Taiwan against China by 2020, and loss of Taiwan—that “unsinkable aircraft carrier,” in the words of General Douglas MacArthur—would probably cede to China full dominance over that First Island Chain.

But America can maintain a powerful Pacific presence beyond that island chain and also could bolster its position in the Indian Ocean, which is rapidly emerging as the “vascular center of the world economy, with oil and natural gas transported across its width from the Middle East to the burgeoning middle classes of East Asia.” Meanwhile, a greater China will emerge in Central and East Asia as well as in the western Pacific, with a big naval presence in the East and South China Seas as well as port-building projects and arms transfers on the Indian Ocean littoral. Says Kaplan: “Only substantial political and economic turmoil inside China could alter this trend.”

Kaplan's observations on Iran are particularly piquant. He sees the descendants of Persia as having a potent "locational advantage"—just to the south of Mackinder's Heartland, inside Spykman's Rimland, pivotal not just to shipping lanes from the Persian Gulf but also to pipelines from the Caspian region to the Mediterranean, Black Sea, China and the Indian Ocean. Thus, Iran straddles both major energy-producing areas of the Persian Gulf and the Caspian region.

The other advantage is one of identity, given that Iran corresponds almost completely with the Iranian plateau and has a cultural consciousness that stretches back into ancient times. "Iran was the ancient world's first superpower," says Kaplan, adding it always has leveraged its geographic position as the Middle East's "very own universal joint." Though smaller than India, China, Russia or Europe, Iran, "because it is in possession of the key geography of the Middle East—in terms of location, population, and energy resources—is, therefore, fundamental to global geopolitics."

Perhaps more interesting is Kaplan's respect for the culture and political sensibility seen in Iran over the centuries—and even today, notwithstanding that many in the West are whipping up a resolve for war with Iran, seen widely as mindlessly radical, to thwart it from building a nuclear-weapons capacity. He laments the rise of the ayatollahs and the violence it has done to "the voluptuous, sophisticated, and intellectually stimulating traditions" of Iran's history. But he adds:

The truth is . . . everything about the Iranian past and present is of a high quality, whether it is the dynamism of its empires . . . or the political thought and writings of its Shiite clergy; or the complex efficiency of the bureaucracy and security services in cracking down on dissidents.

He notes that even the country's revolutionary order constitutes "a richly developed governmental structure" with a diffusion of power centers and an ongoing aversion to the kind of "one-man thugocracy" seen until recently in neighboring Iraq.

But Iran is held back from exercising the kind of influence that, given its pivotal location and the power of its cultural tradition, would normally be its legacy—and has been in many eras of the past. Its problem is the "persistence of its suffocating clerical rule," which has "dulled the linguistic and cosmopolitan appeal that throughout history has accounted for a Greater Iran in a cultural sense." He adds, on the other hand, that a democratic or quasi-democratic Iran, "precisely because of the geographical power of the Iranian state, has the possibility to energize hundreds of millions of fellow Muslims in both the Arab world and Central Asia." Such an Iran seems inevitable in the eyes of Kaplan, who writes that the tyranny of the current regime "both limits its power and signals its downfall."

As for the United States, Kaplan brings to bear his realist sensibility in noting that its geographic location renders it all but impregnable except from one direction—its border with Mexico. "Here is the one



area where America's national and imperial boundaries are in some tension: where the coherence of America as a geographically cohesive unit can be questioned."

The historical borderland between the two countries not only is broad and indistinct but also separates two nations that, as Stanford's David Kennedy has noted, have the widest income gap of any two contiguous countries in the world. Kaplan shows respect for the late Samuel P. Huntington of Harvard, who warned about the threat to America's cultural essence from the massive immigration flows from Mexico and other Latin American countries. But ultimately Kaplan rejects Huntington's outlook and adopts a stance that declares the border meaningless in the face of this demographic wave. He suggests Americans should simply relax and accept it.

To those agitated about the porous border and the influx of illegals, Kaplan offers the vision of a new nation:

America, I believe, will actually emerge in the course of the twenty-first century as a Polynesian-cum-mestizo civilization, oriented from north-to-south, from Canada to Mexico, rather than as an east-to-west, racially lighter-skinned island in the temperate zone stretching from the Atlantic to the Pacific. This multiracial

assemblage will be one of sprawling suburban city-states, each in a visual sense progressively similar to the other, whether Cascadia in the Pacific Northwest or Omaha-Lincoln in Nebraska, each nurturing its own economic relationships with cities and trading networks throughout the world, as technology continues to collapse distances.

Here we come to the book's underlying weakness—its de-emphasis on the role of culture, intertwined with geography, in driving history. Perhaps the border challenge will, as Kaplan avers, be resolved through the eradication of the border itself and a slow, peaceful intermingling of peoples until a new mestizo race quietly emerges to supplant the old. That process certainly is in progress. But it seems just naive—and contrary to much of the history outlined in Kaplan's book—to suggest such a profound transformation will occur without attendant disruption, friction and violence. George Friedman, Kaplan's new boss at Stratfor, more realistically spins out a scenario that envisions potent internal tensions in America over the border, secessionist movements in the country's Southwest, mounting frictions between the United States and Mexico, and growing prospects of war. Friedman writes in *The*

The role of culture should not be de-emphasized unduly lest the historian miss the full richness in the story of mankind.

Next 100 Years that in this scenario, the “U.S. border with Mexico will now run through Mexico itself; its real, social border will be hundreds of miles north of the legal border.” Thus, he adds, the major question facing the United States will revert to the one it had to address at its founding: “What should be the capital of North America—Washington or Mexico City?” If that indeed becomes the question, the answer won’t emerge peacefully.

Kaplan brushes aside the cultural interpretations of such thinkers as Oswald Spengler, Arnold Toynbee and Huntington in his enthusiasm for the role of climate and geography in shaping civilizations. He quotes University of Chicago historian William H. McNeill as noting that the Aryans developed a less warlike culture in India’s Gangetic plain than they did in Mediterranean Europe because the subcontinent’s forests and monsoonal cycle encouraged meditation and religious knowledge. No doubt there was such a correlation. But cultural sensibilities emerge from far stronger influences than climate or geography, and many were shared alike by Indian and Mediterranean Aryans.

Kaplan quotes a Stratfor document as noting that the U.S. Atlantic coast possesses more major ports than the rest of the Western Hemisphere combined and thus “the Americans are not important because of who they are, but because of where they live.” This is fatuous on its face. It suggests the Anglo-Saxon and Spanish experiences in the New World would have been reversed had the Spaniards colonized the northern lands and left the southern regions to the

English. This ignores the utterly different approaches to colonization adopted by the two peoples, reflected in their different sensibilities and approaches, all wrapped up in culture. The Anglo-Saxons were more successful because they came to build; the Spaniards came to conquer. The geography of Mexico didn’t turn them into conquistadors; rather it lured them because of who they were.

Or consider the different birthrates that fostered the Anglo-Saxon dominance over the Spanish as English Americans spread out over lands that Mexico couldn’t dominate for lack of sufficient population. Was this a product of geography or culture? If the former, how does a geographical determinist explain the reversal in birthrate differentials that has occurred in recent decades? Geography remained the same, while cultural attitudes and mores changed.

No, the role of culture—and particularly the stages of cultural development explored by Spengler and Toynbee—should not be de-emphasized unduly lest the historian miss the full richness in the story of mankind. Still, there’s plenty of richness to be found simply in the stark and powerful role that geography has played in shaping the political outlooks, and particularly the foreign-policy initiatives, of nations and peoples through world history. And no recent thinker has explored that role with the kind of depth, range, acuity and vibrancy that Kaplan brings to this consequential topic. This is one of those rare books that can change forever how one reads, probes and seeks to understand history. □



The Epic Madness of World War II

By *Evan Thomas*

Antony Beevor, *The Second World War* (New York: Little, Brown and Co., 2012), 880 pp., \$35.00.

War is inherently dramatic, but military histories can be dull. Often written from the generals' viewpoint, many traditional accounts of famous battles and campaigns mire the reader in a blur of unrecognizable geography and confusing unit identifications (the Third Regiment of the Second Division of the Fourth Army, etc.). These tomes are somehow arid and lifeless as well as dull; they make death and suffering abstract.

In his 1976 book *The Face of Battle*, the great modern military historian John Keegan established a new standard. Keegan, who died recently at seventy-eight, set out to tell what battle is really like from the perspective of the combatants, from the lowliest foot soldier to the field commanders. Among other eye-openers, he documented that armies and navies often permitted—or encouraged—their

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men to drink a tot or two of alcohol before going into battle to bolster courage or at least numb fear. Keegan's in-the-trenches approach enormously influenced the telling of military history. Drawing from diaries and letters as well as official after-action reports, he showed that it was possible to be scholarly and analytical but also vivid and personal when writing about the conduct of war. Military historians now routinely describe the visceral sensations of combat, once considered unseemly—the terrible sights and smells, the human sensations of men engaged in mortal struggle, and the horrible toll imposed on the women and children caught in the middle.

An interesting question is whether these you-are-there books make war more or less seductive. In 2007, at an Aspen Ideas Festival, I watched with fascination as the novelist and writer Tobias Wolff struggled to explain why war continues to be appealing despite its ugliness, especially to young men uncertain about their manhood. In a memoir, *In Pharaoh's Army*, Wolff had written about his own decidedly unheroic experience as an army officer in Vietnam in the mid-1960s. Wolff tried to bring out the pettiness, meanness and tedium of his time as a combat soldier, occasionally in danger but more often engaged in morally dubious activities such as trading TV sets for war souvenirs. But readers still found romance and bravery in his tale. "What is the weird attraction of war?" Wolff asked the audience in Aspen. He answered his own question: war has an "aesthetic quality," however grotesque, as well as undeniable narrative power. Wolff noted that whole generations

of novelists have written antiwar books that overtly seek to tell young men, “Don’t do this!” but end up subtly encouraging them to test themselves.

I thought of both Keegan and Wolff—and the lure of war, at once sordid and heroic, dull and pornographic—when I read Antony Beevor’s *The Second World War*. At over eight hundred pages, Beevor’s book is a doorstop. It is the third full-length treatment of World War II by a prominent historian in the past year. Max Hastings’s *Inferno: The World at War, 1939–1945* is terrific, sweeping and engaging. So is *The Storm of War: A New History of the Second World War*, by Andrew Roberts. Do we really need yet another encyclopedic tour of well-trod battlefields? Beevor once studied under Keegan at Sandhurst, the royal military academy, and he served five peacetime years as an officer in the British Army’s Eleventh Hussars. His previous works include compelling World War II battle narratives such as *Stalingrad: The Fateful Siege: 1942–1943*; *Berlin: The Downfall 1945*; and *D-Day: The Battle for Normandy*. His avowed motivation for writing this new, vast treatise about such a familiar subject is modest and self-deprecating: “I always felt a bit of a fraud when consulted as a general expert on the Second World War because I was acutely conscious of large gaps in my knowledge, especially of unfamiliar aspects. This book is partly an act of reparation.”

Beevor sells himself short. Perhaps he is being coy or practicing proper British understatement. (He is a public-school boy, educated at Winchester and married

into a famous British family.) In his acknowledgment, he goes on to grandly but blandly say that his book is an “attempt to understand how the whole complex jigsaw fits together, with the direct and indirect effects of actions and decisions taking place in very different theatres of war.” This all sounds very worthy and high concept, like those soporific volumes by military historians of old.

Actually, Beevor plunges us right into the heart of darkness. Taking his lesson from his former teacher Keegan, he makes the war intensely personal, even as it rages across several continents over a span of almost a decade. (Beevor dates the beginning of the conflict to the Second Sino-Japanese War’s outbreak in 1937, not to the more customary starting gun, Hitler’s invasion of Poland in 1939.) He opens his story with a revealing anecdote about a young soldier who surrendered to American paratroopers during the Allied invasion of Normandy in 1944. The soldier, at first mistaken for Japanese, was Korean. He was conscripted into Nippon’s Kwantung Army in Manchuria in 1938, then captured by the Russians and sent to a labor camp. Then, he was drafted into the Red Army in 1942. After being taken prisoner by the German army in 1943, he was sent to man the Atlantic Wall in 1944. He died in Illinois in 1992. Yes, it truly was a world war. It was also, Beevor writes, the “greatest man-made disaster in history.” Beevor’s contribution is to show convincingly how World War II, which Americans have come to regard as “the Good War,” was an epically *stupid* war, not to mention degrading and

Beevor shows convincingly how World War II, which Americans have come to regard as “the Good War,” was an epically stupid war, not to mention degrading and dehumanizing beyond belief.

dehumanizing beyond belief. The cruelties and beastliness he recounts in clear, vivid, well-documented prose left me exhausted and sad. And, I have to admit, thrilled.

The most mesmerizing, fantastically awful confrontation was in the East—the Godzilla versus King Kong death match of Hitler’s Nazi Germany and Stalin’s Soviet Union. Woe to the Pole or Ukrainian caught between these two monsters. Why the German people followed a psychotic criminal with a death wish—a shaman who promised a thousand-year Reich but had no heir and was sure he would die young—remains a mystery, even in Beevor’s insightful and unsentimental retelling.

Hitler was hardly subtle about his madness. His policy, stated on the first page of *Mein Kampf*—a copy of which every German couple had to purchase upon marriage—was to drive the Jews and Slavs from Eastern Europe and Russia west of the Urals to create *lebensraum*, living space for the Aryan master race. “The Jews must get out of Germany, yes out of the whole of Europe,” Hitler told his propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels on November 30, 1937. “That will take some time yet, but will and must happen.”

Germans didn’t really take his apocalyptic ambitions seriously, at least for the first few years of the Third Reich, according to Beevor. Enjoying the fruits of an economy heated by rearmament, they chose to believe the Führer’s avowals that he did not seek war. By and large, Germans accepted and even embraced Hitler’s paranoid fascism. The Gestapo, writes Beevor, “was

surprisingly idle. Most of its arrests were purely in response to denunciations of people by their fellow Germans.”

In his megalomania, Hitler saw himself as a quasi deity. He was not religious; in a petty show of self-sacrifice, he gave up Christmas as well as watching movies for the duration of the war. But he believed providence was on his side, especially after escaping, by twelve minutes, a bomb intended to kill him in 1939. (The reaction in London, wrote a commentator, was “summed up in a calm British ‘Bad luck’, as though someone had missed a pheasant.”)

Still, he was in a hurry; Beevor notes that “in the spring of 1939, he explained his impatience to the Romanian foreign minister: ‘I am now fifty,’ he said. ‘I would rather have the war now than when I am fifty-five or sixty.’” In the struggle for world domination, he knew that ultimately he would confront the United States. He wanted to conquer Europe and Russia first, before America was ready to send a force across the Atlantic. He believed he had until 1943 or 1944; he regarded the Americans as a strong “Nordic” race undermined by a Jewish cabal. Yet, he foolishly declared war on the United States on December 11, 1941, four days after Pearl Harbor (FDR had declared war on Japan but not Germany). “A great power doesn’t let itself have war declared on it—it declares war itself,” proclaimed Hitler’s foreign minister, Joachim von Ribbentrop, probably echoing Hitler’s own words. “From that moment, Germany became incapable of winning the Second World War outright,” writes Beevor.



Probably, Hitler already had assured the Reich's demise with an even greater blunder. In June 1941, he recklessly broke the taboo against a two-front war and ignored the injunction of Germany's great statesman Otto von Bismarck to never invade Russia. Defeating "Jewish Bolshevism" would be easy, predicted Hitler. "We have only to kick in the door and the whole rotten edifice will come crashing down," he told his commanders. Some were not so sure; they were rereading General Armand de Caulaincourt's account of Napoleon's march on Moscow and dreadful retreat. But they stayed mum.

Hitler's blind self-regard was exceeded only by Stalin's. The Kremlin dictator cynically allied with his avowed archenemy. He even accommodated Hitler's anti-Semitism. On May 3, 1939, troops of the NKVD, the Kremlin's secret police, surrounded the commissariat of foreign affairs. "Purge the ministry of Jews," Stalin ordered. "Clean out the 'synagogue.'" Then he remained in complete denial as Hitler prepared to turn on Russia by massing an army of 140 divisions along its border. The Russian dictator believed the Germans' protestations that they were just relocating troops beyond the range of British bombers. Warnings of more sinister motivations were dismissed by Sta-

lin as *angliiskaya provokatsia*, provocations planted by English spies. Truth tellers were shot for spreading "disinformation." Stalin's appeasement of Hitler was so complete that in June 1941, trains bearing food and fuel from Russia to Germany passed trains carrying German troops to invade Russia.

The Red Army was ill prepared for the German onslaught. Stalin had purged most of its best generals. Huddled in the Kremlin as the Wehrmacht stormed eastward in the summer of 1941, Stalin seemed to despair. "Lenin founded our state," he was known to say, "and we've fucked it up."

He was saved by the vastness of the motherland and the stubbornness of its people. German army officers were depressed by Russia's endless flatness and the willingness of her soldiers to fight back. German intelligence reckoned on two hundred enemy divisions and encountered 360. Obsolete Russian warplanes rammed the German planes head-on. The Russians found that women made good snipers; they resisted cold better and had steadier hands. (The female snipers often had to do double duty as "campaign wives" for their commanders.)

Not all Russians volunteered. The People's Levy, a mass conscription, was thrown into murderous attacks, literally acting, in the Russian phrase, as "meat

for cannon.” One survey of a thousand hospitalized soldiers found that almost half had shot themselves in the left hand or forearm to avoid frontline combat. Confessing to self-inflicted wounds, they were sent to “punishment companies” to walk through minefields.

The ghastliest sideshow on the eastern front was Leningrad, a city of 2.5 million, four hundred thousand of them children. Hitler intended to pave over the city and give the land to Finland. First, he would starve it out. During the 880-day siege of Leningrad, roughly a million civilians died of hunger and disease—more than the toll of all American and British soldiers killed in World War II.

Hitler’s generals faced a logistical quandary: How to feed the Wehrmacht’s three million men and six hundred thousand horses? The perversely social Darwinian answer was to save food by starving the Russians. Under the “Hunger Plan,” Russian POWs would not be fed but rather “turned out to pasture,” like cows. Two-thirds of the three million Russian POWs died on forced marches across a frozen and burned land. The Germans didn’t want their trains “infected” by a “foul-smelling” mass.

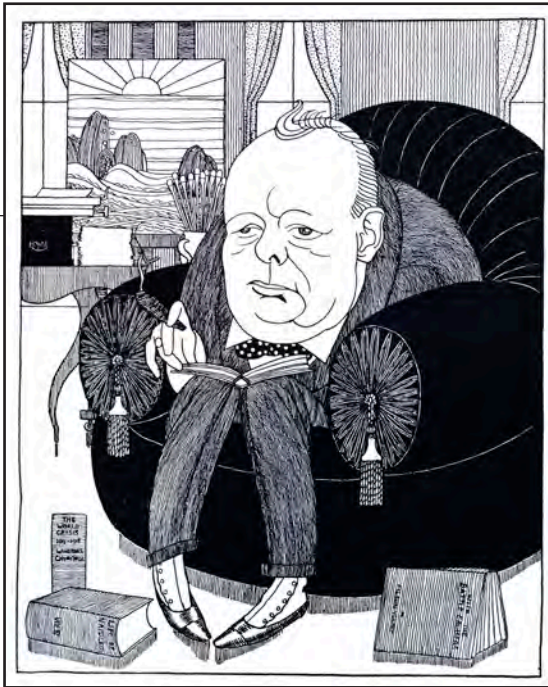
The German invasion was meant to be a war of extermination. Hitler wanted to get rid of thirty million Soviet citizens, leaving just enough to be slaves in a German “Garden of Eden.” In the meantime, Russian women were rounded up and placed into official brothels. This was awkward; by German law, sex with *untermenschen* (subhumans) was forbidden. Still, rules had to be bent to

maintain discipline over the troops and control venereal disease. The plight of the Ukrainians, abused first by Russians and then by Germans, is especially pitiable. Some Christian Orthodox Ukrainians, seeing the black crosses on German armored vehicles, prayed that the Germans had come to deliver them from godless Bolshevism.

The Germans arrived at the gates of Moscow along with the Russian winter. With temperatures falling to thirty degrees below centigrade, the number of soldiers lost to frostbite in the Wehrmacht—which lacked proper winter coats—exceeded the number wounded by Soviet fire. The Germans took to sawing off the legs of frozen comrades and melting the limbs before a fire, the better to pull off and reuse their boots.

Now it was Hitler’s turn to go into denial. He simply disbelieved reports of new Russian armies and ordered his troops to stand and die, which they did, holding ground so that German soldiers could perish in even greater numbers over the next two years in abattoirs like Stalingrad.

Back in the fatherland, Hitler’s toadies were grappling with more logistics. What to do about the “Jewish problem”? The Nazis had hoped to push the fifteen million Jews of Europe eastward, across the Urals, to forage or starve with the thirty-odd million uprooted Slavs. But with the Russian line holding at Moscow and the ghettos and concentration camps filling in Prussia and Poland, a disposal problem loomed.



Hitler had hinted strongly at the “final solution.” In 1939, on the sixth anniversary of his taking power, he predicted, “If international Jewry inside and outside Europe should succeed in plunging the nations once more into a world war, the result will be not the Bolshevization of the earth and therefore the victory of Jewry, but the annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe.” Beevor writes: “Breathtaking confusion of cause and effect lay at the heart of Hitler’s obsessive network of lies and self-deception.”

Yet Hitler himself shied from seeing the literal consequences of his demonic logic. Fearful of being held responsible for genocide, he was also squeamish about the details. “His desire to keep violence abstract was a significant psychological paradox in one who had done more than almost anyone else in history to promote it,” observes Beevor.

German efficiency does not describe Hitler’s Reich. A chaotic overlapping

bureaucracy of death competed to please the Führer and fulfill his “prophesy.”

At first, the killing was haphazard and piecemeal. Heinrich Himmler, Hitler’s chief executioner as commander of the dreaded ss, initially regarded genocide as the “Bolshevik method,” at once “un-German” and “impossible.” For a brief time, he thought of shipping the Jews someplace far away, like Madagascar. As the Wehrmacht drove eastward, *Einsatzgruppen* death squads, roughly three thousand

men of the ss, began shooting male Jews and driving women and children into the swamps. (The ss was an intellectual elite; most *Einsatzgruppen* commanders had doctorates from Germany’s great old universities.) These clever men figured out how to stack bodies in open graves to waste fewer bullets (this was known as “the sardine method”). Cruder ss thugs enjoyed burning the beards of rabbis. Soon the ss was killing Jewish women and children, too, so that no one would be left alive to seek revenge.

But slaughter by guns and explosives was messy and inefficient. Over the course of late 1941 and early 1942, the “Shoah by bullets” gave way to the “Shoah by gas”—industrialized murder.

The Germans had practiced with euthanasia on “degenerates,” “useless mouths” and “lives unworthy of life.” Beginning in July 1939, under a program set up by Hitler’s personal physician, parents began sending off lame or mentally

Stalin's appeasement of Hitler was so complete that in June 1941, trains bearing food and fuel from Russia to Germany passed trains carrying German troops to invade Russia.

disturbed children to be “better cared for” than at home. The children did not come back; “Died from ‘pneumonia’” was the explanation. Many were gassed. In Poland, the Nazis began experimenting with sealed trucks and exhaust fumes. At Auschwitz, an insecticide called Zyklon B was used for the first time in an improvised gas chamber.

Himmler himself came to observe. He was concerned for the “spiritual welfare” of the executioners who were getting stomachaches and nightmares from shooting Jews. Gas was tidier. Himmler also recommended sing-alongs for the guards. He did not neglect music for the doomed inmates. When he came to inspect Auschwitz in the summer of 1942, the camp orchestra of Jewish musicians played the triumphal march from Verdi's *Aida*. The Nazis had a sick sense of humor: supplies of Zyklon B were delivered in vans marked with the Red Cross.

Beevor notes that some have claimed that the production-line method of Auschwitz was “influenced by” Henry Ford, the American car magnate who had in turn borrowed the efficiencies of Chicago slaughterhouses. Ford was a virulent anti-Semite; Hitler hung his portrait on the wall of his office in Munich. But Beevor cautions that no real evidence has emerged that Ford production lines were in fact copied by the extermination camps.

Despite showing the oppressive and almost indiscriminate depravity of war, Beevor does not fall into the trap of moral equivalence. Churchill and FDR were right; World War II *was* a battle of light against

darkness, freedom against tyranny. That does not, however, mean that the Allies were free of moral opprobrium or that their commanders were not sometimes pigheaded butchers.

Beevor's fellow Britons come across as obtuse, sometimes charmingly so. British soldiers evacuated from Dunkirk, where their wounds filled with maggots, are speechless at the sight of cricketers dressed in white, playing away on green fields as the hospital trains chug by. Shot down in a dogfight over southern England, a Pole flying with the RAF parachutes into an exclusive tennis club. Someone signs him in as a guest, finds a spare set of flannels and hands him a racquet so he can join in the tournament.

Other Brits are more grimly bloody-minded than insouciantly dashing. The RAF's Sir Arthur Harris was determined to bomb Germany into submission. He believed he could break the morale of the German population by relentless night bombing, and he regarded anyone who doubted him as a fainthearted gentleman. Pilots and airmen who broke down under the strain (2,989 of them) were labeled LMF, “Lacking in Moral Fibre.” In the summer of 1943, “Bomber Harris” devised Operation Gomorrah to burn Hamburg. Incendiary bombs created a chimney or volcano of heat, sucking hurricane-force winds to spread the fire. At seventeen thousand feet, the aircrews could smell the burning flesh. Over three nights in February 1945, Harris's bombers, aided by American bombers, leveled Dresden. “The fact that this baroque jewel on the Elbe was

one of the great architectural and artistic treasures of Europe did not concern him for a moment,” writes Beevor. In addition to seeking to impress Stalin with Allied air power, “Harris was also keen to attack Dresden simply because it remained one of the few major cities which had not yet been flattened.”

Harris’s strategy failed. The German people remained stoic, and their leaders refused to give up, in part because they feared being hanged as war criminals. (“Hitler’s greatest fear was not execution, but of being captured and taken back to Moscow in a cage.”) Invasion and absolute victory were the only answer to Hitler’s *Götterdämmerung*. The endgame, as played by the Red Army in Beevor’s telling, is appalling.

“Russian soldiers were raping every German female from eight to eighty,” observed Soviet war correspondent Natalya Gesse, a friend of the Soviet nuclear scientist Andrei Sakharov. “It was an army of rapists. Not only because they were crazed with lust, this was also a form of vengeance.” Beevor writes: “Altogether on German territory some two million women and girls are thought to have been raped.” East Prussia saw the worst of it. When the Red Army arrived at a hunting lodge that had belonged to the Prussian royal family and been used by Reich Marshal Hermann Göring, a Russian soldier used black paint to write *khuy*, the Russian word for “prick,” across a nude of Aphrodite by Rubens. The Russians did liberate Auschwitz, where the Germans were trying to cover up the evidence but left 328,820 men’s

suits, 836,255 women’s coats and dresses, and several tons of human hair (good for making warm clothes for the German army).

I have dwelled on Beevor’s recounting of the European war, but he is equally devastating in his description of the war in the Pacific. The cruelties were no less gruesome. U.S. Air Force commander General Curtis LeMay was an even more efficient fire bomber than “Bomber Harris,” incinerating one hundred thousand residents in Tokyo in one night in March 1945. For sheer sadism and beastliness, the Japanese may take the prize. In New Guinea and Borneo, they ate their prisoners. “The practice of treating prisoners as ‘human cattle’ had not come about from a collapse of discipline,” writes Beevor. “It was usually directed by officers.” Because the subject was deemed too upsetting for the families of soldiers who died in the Pacific War, the Allies suppressed the evidence of cannibalism at the war-crime trials in Tokyo in 1946. (Another statistic that didn’t make the American papers: over ten days after the arrival of U.S. troops at Yokohama on August 30, 1945, there were 1,336 cases of rape reported in the city and surrounding region.)

In all the poor judgment, not to say madness, that went into World War II, the Japanese hold a special place. There is considerable evidence that many in the Japanese leadership knew they were going to lose if they attacked the United States. But fatalistic and obsessed with national honor, they dropped their bombs on Pearl Harbor anyway. □



Voice of the New Global Elite

By Aram Bakshian Jr.

Twenty-five years ago, if you had asked a typical senior American corporate type or public official what his or her weekly reading consisted of, the answer would usually have run something like this: “*Time*, *Newsweek* and maybe *U.S. News & World Report* . . . oh, yes, and the *Economist*.” Today, instead of being an afterthought, the *Economist* probably would head the list. It might even be the only publication mentioned. *U.S. News & World Report* ceased being a full-scale newsmagazine years ago. *Newsweek*, since 2010 the feeble foster child of Tina Brown’s flamboyant *Daily Beast* website, has lost much of its influence and most of its original staffers and subscribers. Even mighty *Time*, once the educated American middle class’s undisputed arbiter of all things political, economic, social and cultural, has suffered massive staff and circulation hemorrhaging and is in the throes of a seemingly endless search for a new identity. *Time* knows it isn’t what it used to be but

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still can’t make up its mind what it should become.

All of this would seem to be conclusive evidence that the era of the weekly newsmagazine is over, rendered obsolete by burgeoning electronic media and 24/7 cable-news coverage and commentary. But if the once-great redwoods of American weekly journalism are all dead, dying or seriously ill, a smaller, older English oak survives and flourishes, possibly because it has never tried to be anything other than itself: a literate, informed (and occasionally smug) publication aimed at a literate, informed (and occasionally smug) readership. First published in 1843, which makes it eighty years older than *Time* and ninety years older than *Newsweek*, the *Economist* remains true to the statement of purpose printed in its first issue, still proudly run each week at the foot of its contents page: a pledge of commitment to the “severe contest between intelligence, which presses forward, and an unworthy, timid ignorance obstructing our progress.”

The age of Victorian optimism is long gone, and the sun has forever set on the British Empire. But the *Economist* goes on, the exemplar of that old Victorian determination to get things done and do them right. Today, it is arguably more influential, more widely read and more prestigious than at any other time in its 169-year history and in a way that is unlike any other magazine. Why is this so? And how well does the quality of its content live up to the *Economist*’s lofty status?

Answering the first question is easier than answering the second. More than

any other serious news journal since the invention of the Gutenberg press in the fifteenth century, the *Economist* is the beneficiary of a unique, global linguistic confluence: the universal dominance of the English language. This triumph was made possible by an event unprecedented in world history: one language being shared by two successive global superpowers that, between them, have led the shaping of the modern world from the dawn of parliamentary politics and the Industrial Revolution all the way to the present day. Power has shifted from one country to the other, and may do so again, but the English language remains paramount. Starting in Great Britain, it began a triumphant march that would see it become the mother tongue of countries such as the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, all originally colonized and populated by people of Anglo-Saxon heritage. But it didn't end there. English also is the language of the educated elite in Asian, African, Pacific and West Indian countries once part of the vast British Empire. To cite one small piece of evidence, many of today's best-written (and best-selling) English-language novels are written by English-speaking Indians, Pakistanis, Caribbeans and Africans, all linguistic beneficiaries of a now-defunct British Empire and a still-expanding global market for English-language fiction.

Meanwhile, even as England—first overextended and then exhausted by two world wars—ceased to be a superpower, a new English-speaking colossus, the United States, filled the void, not just because of

its military and economic might but also because of its scientific and technological supremacy. Around the world, English (now with an American inflection) expanded ever further as the international language of science, commerce, academia, sea and air transport, diplomacy and, thanks to globalized media, even popular culture. At the same time, millions of foreign students, especially promising or privileged ones, have completed their educations at prestigious American and English universities after having learned English at home as a second language.

One result is a growing worldwide elite audience of English speakers and readers—about 1.5 million subscribers—for whom the *Economist* is the perfect fit, comprehensively covering as it does both the United States and the United Kingdom and offering more thorough coverage of the rest of the world than any rival English-language periodical. The *Economist* has become the premiere worldwide newsweekly for the new global elite.

Not everyone is happy about this, especially those who view the world from a more leftward angle. Thus the *Observer*, a soft-Left—and possibly envious—English weekly newspaper with little influence or impact outside the British Isles, grumbles that the *Economist's* writers “rarely see a political or economic problem that cannot be solved by the trusted three-card trick of privatisation, deregulation and liberalisation.” There is some truth to this. At heart, the *Economist* remains what it began as, an advocate of the classic nineteenth-century

English strain of liberalism that favored social reform, open markets and a representative form of government with a franchise that expanded in tandem with better, increasingly accessible education and resultant economic progress. There is nothing new here, but these qualities remain the key to progress in functioning democracies—and will have to evolve in lawless, corrupt police states in much of the Third World and many parts of the former Soviet Union if they are to become stable, free societies.

The problem in countries such as Russia is not that ailing state industries and underdeveloped state natural resources were truly, lawfully privatized. It is that they were grabbed up by Kremlin insiders, transforming a handful of crooks, fixers and members of the old *nomenklatura* into a corrupt and entrenched new oligarchy while leaving most ordinary Russians out in the cold. The same applies to “free elections” held before the emergence of a literate, informed electorate and freely competitive political institutions in backward countries without strong rule-of-law traditions. When the results turn ugly, the reason is not a failure of liberalization but the use of superficially “liberal” labels as cover for replacing an old set of oppressors with a new one through violence, intimidation, corruption, and the lack of a “liberal” foundation of individual rights and protections.

In such cases, while the economic and political remedies advocated by the *Economist* may seem passé to trendy left-wingers in the West, they remain the best—and possibly the only—cure for what ails

most of the nations and people of the Third World and much of the former Soviet Union (not to mention overextended, overregulated European welfare states tottering on the brink of bankruptcy).

Thus, by consistently championing basic values such as reform, social improvement, free trade and individual rights, the



Economist stands for values that are timeless, proven and certainly not outdated. Indeed, on many of today’s hot-button issues, the *Economist*’s brand of what might be called liberal libertarianism is—depending on your perspective—“politically correct” in the best or worst sense of the term. For example, it has emerged as a leading voice—critics might call it an alarmist

One of the signature virtues of the Economist is its ability to spot and put into perspective quiet but important developments ignored by most of the mass media.

one—in the global-warming debate. It also strongly advocates national gun control in the United States, favors abolition of capital punishment and has “come out” in favor of gay marriage.

While he must have found the *Economist’s* endorsement of gay marriage gratifying, Andrew Sullivan, a longtime gay-rights activist and former editor of the *New Republic*, had another ax to grind. Sullivan, who happens to be of working-class British origins, was more driven by class than gender considerations when, in the pages of the *New Republic*, he denounced the *Economist* staff for being dominated by graduates of Oxford University’s elite Magdalen College.

Sullivan’s class animosity already may have been out of date when he wrote about it. To cite one human statistic, at that time the late Peter David, a graduate of the University of London rather than even one of Oxford’s less prestigious colleges, already had been a member of the *Economist’s* staff for fifteen years and eventually would earn distinction for his nuanced analysis of Middle East complexities. He once wrote that “it is necessary to remember that what people call ‘the Arab world’ is a big and amorphous thing, and arguably not one thing at all,” a central fact that seems to have eluded ideologically driven Arabists and Israeli partisans alike. More recently, as the magazine’s Washington bureau chief and author of the “Lexington” column on American life and politics, David was just hitting his stride before his premature death in a motoring accident in Virginia this May. The son of Lithuanian Jews

who emigrated to England from South Africa, Peter David represented the kind of educated, informed intelligence that characterizes the *Economist* at its best and has nothing whatsoever to do with one’s ethnicity or old school tie.

Another kind of criticism comes from intellectually pretentious, slightly envious Yanks rather than class-embittered Brits. James Fallows, who once wrote speeches for President Jimmy Carter in the 1970s, complained in a 1991 *Washington Post* piece that the *Economist* “unwholesomely purveys smarty-pants English attitudes on our shores.” This is about as valid—or invalid—as accusing the American-owned and -led *International Herald Tribune* or the European edition of the *Wall Street Journal* of “unwholesomely” purveying “smarty-pants” American attitudes on the shores of Europe and the United Kingdom.

Admittedly, there are times when the *Economist* leans a little heavily on plummy English props and mannerisms. Michael Lewis, the popular American financial writer and author of *Liar’s Poker*, once attributed the magazine’s sometimes laboriously polished prose and tone to the fact that the *Economist* “is written by young people pretending to be old people,” adding that if American readers “got a look at the pimply complexions of their economic gurus, they would cancel their subscriptions.” This may be the reason almost all of the publication’s articles still lack bylines, much less accompanying photos of the writers. Besides, that hint of pseudo-Dickensian creakiness in its prose is part of the *Economist’s* charm

and its distinctive brand. It also helps to explain its success among educated English speakers around the world who still prize good writing that requires a modicum of sophistication and literary grounding on the part of its readers rather than being written down to the lowest common denominator. As for Fallows, someone should have reminded him that, for the most part, “smarty-pants” tend to be much better writers than *sans culottes*.

The American journalist who has come closest to pinning down the *Economist*'s winning formula is Michael Hirschorn, in a perceptive essay in the July/August 2009 issue of the *Atlantic*. He suggests that the secret of the *Economist*'s success

is not its brilliance, or its hauteur, or its typeface. The writing in *Time* and *Newsweek* may be every bit as smart, as assured, as the writing in *The Economist*. But neither one feels like the only magazine you *need* to read. You may like the new *Time* and *Newsweek*. But you must—or at least, brilliant marketing has convinced you that you must—subscribe to *The Economist*.

This may explain how an idiosyncratic publication—produced by an allegedly pimply writing staff of about seventy-five from a cramped space in London's St. James's quarter—has proved to be David to rival American Goliaths such as *Time* and *Newsweek*.

So much for the *Economist*'s success. What about the quality of its content? Is it worthy of the pedestal on which it now perches? One way to find out is to look at

how well the *Economist*'s running coverage and commentary stand up over time and after the fact. To do this I engaged in a twenty-two-week monitoring of the magazine, encompassing weekly issues from February 18 through July 14, 2012.

Although I have followed the *Economist* for most of my adult life, this meant immersing myself in each issue in a way I never had before. Twenty years ago, Microsoft's Bill Gates said that one reason he didn't have a TV set was that watching it wouldn't leave him enough time to read each issue of the *Economist* from cover to cover. For the first—and probably the last—time in my life, I found myself emulating Bill Gates. Trudging through the *Economist*, week after week, I found I was watching less and less television, especially television news and documentaries of the “serious” sort which, even at their best, cannot convey as much information as a really well-written article.

Looking back on it now, in the very first issue I monitored there were several items that held up very well—and that addressed serious subjects ignored or oversimplified by most American media. The lead editorial (or, if you're English, the leading leader) was entitled “Over-regulated America: The home of laissez-faire is being suffocated by excessive and badly written regulation.” It proved to be a compact, compelling condemnation of the ill-considered Dodd-Frank law Congress passed in 2010, concluding that it is

far too complex, and becoming more so. At 848 pages, it is 23 times longer than Glass-

Like the United States, the Economist has a number of glaring imperfections. But, also like the United States, it usually manages to sort things out and muddle through.

Steagall, the reform that followed the Wall Street crash of 1929. Worse, every other page demands that regulators fill in further detail. Some of these clarifications are hundreds of pages long. Just one bit, the “Volcker rule”, which aims to curb risky proprietary trading banks, includes 383 questions that break down into 1,420 subquestions.

This is likely one reason why “hardly anyone has actually read Dodd-Frank, besides the Chinese government and our correspondent in New York.”

Here, in a single page, the *Economist* addressed the overarching problem of runaway federal regulation and the legitimate concerns that can lead to bad legislation, providing strong supporting examples and powerful statistical data to back up its position. It wasn’t just interesting or convincing. It was useful; most readers would come away better informed on the subject than they had been before, even if they didn’t buy in to the *Economist’s* opinion on all points.

The second leader in the same issue, subtitled “The euro may survive brinkmanship over Greece, but the road to recovery will be long and hard,” was a prescient warning of the crisis to come within the euro zone due to stagnating economies and ruinous debt levels in Greece, Portugal, Italy and Spain. The *Economist* definitely saw this one coming.

Less pressing but equally prescient was a third leader dealing with India’s often meddlesome, hectoring attitude toward weaker neighbors such as Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and even Pakistan. At a time

when India’s diplomatic charm offensive was winning uncritical praise from Washington and most American media, the *Economist* took a more informed look at India’s increasingly imperious attitude toward its South Asian neighbors and the problems it could lead to.

Not so clear-sighted was the following week’s “Lexington” column on the Republican race for the presidential nomination. Although Peter David, author of the column, was a gifted journalist and had been based in Washington since 2009, this was his first full-time, on-the-ground experience of an American presidential campaign. Like most foreign journalists dropped into that surreal world for the first time, he seemed to be unduly influenced by the groupthink of the predominantly liberal Washington press corps. In his February 25 column, David unrolled a scenario that dramatically overestimated the influence of fringe elements in the Tea Party and the Christian Right while ignoring the essentially moderate-conservative alignment of rank-and-file Republican voters. So it came as no surprise that he bought into the widely held but mistaken view of liberal inside-the-Beltway pundits, declaring that:

It is now clear . . . that a large share of the party’s conservatives just do not like Mr Romney. This traps the party in a fratricidal exercise that could continue for months, if not all the way to the party convention in Tampa in August. Even if he loses next week in Michigan, Mr Santorum should pick up enough delegates to keep his hope alive. . . . There is new talk

of an “open” convention, where no candidate has a majority and the call goes out for a white knight, if one can be found. Mr Obama is a lucky man.

Is that so?

The *Economist*'s lead editorial the next week demonstrated a clearer, more farsighted understanding of a very different kind of presidential election. Headlined “The beginning of the end of Putin: Vladimir Putin will once again become Russia's president. Even so, his time is running out,” it foresaw the victory Putin's brass-knuckle tactics would win at the polls. But it also foresaw its hollowness:

Everybody in Russia knows that Vladimir Putin . . . will be elected president on March 4th. This is not because he is overwhelmingly popular, but because his support will be supplemented by a potent mixture of vote-rigging and the debarring of all plausible alternative candidates. The uncertainty will come after the election, not before.

The March 17 *Economist* sported a cartoon cover suggesting that the recovery had finally arrived. A featured briefing on the American economy agreed, concluding that “economic recovery doesn't have to wait for all of America's imbalances to be corrected. It only needs the process to advance far enough for the normal cyclical forces of employment, income and spending to take hold. . . . it now seems that, at last, they have.”

Call it irrational exuberance, premature miscalculation or whatever. The *Economist*

clearly jumped the gun on this one. In fairness, it was not alone in doing so. The conventional wisdom on Wall Street and among Washington movers and shakers at the time was that happy days were, indeed, here again. It is not very surprising that the conventional wisdom proved wrong yet again; it is, however, a little disappointing to find the *Economist* joining the errant chorus.

On a more positive note, by March 24 the *Economist* had finally sobered up about the race for the Republican presidential nomination. No more pipe dreams about a Tea Party rebellion derailing the Romney candidacy and leading to a brokered convention. Instead: “Mr Romney has won over half of the delegates awarded so far. That pace, if sustained, will be more than enough to secure him the nomination outright.” Better late than never.

One of the signature virtues of the *Economist* is its ability to spot and put into perspective quiet but important developments ignored by most of the mass media. A small but striking example of this was a brief, boxed item in “The Americas” section of the May 5 issue. Headlined “Gendercide in Canada? A study shows more boys than girls are being born to some ethnic groups,” this disturbing story reported on data that indicated growing numbers of Asian-born mothers in Canada are deliberately aborting female embryos purely on the basis of their sex, especially in the case of a second or third expected child. Thus, in Ontario, a study revealed that Indian-born mothers giving birth to a third child had “1,883 sons and 1,385

daughters, a hugely distorted ratio of 136 to 100” that could only be explained by parents deliberately targeting female fetuses for abortion. “In India and China,” the *Economist* noted, “sex-selective abortions are seen as crimes against humanity. Why should Canada view them any differently?”

The *Economist* has always prided itself on not panicking and taking the long view. The Lexington column in its May 12 issue was an example of that approach at its best. It also turned out to be Peter David’s posthumous valedictory, running two days after his death. As I write this, the Obama-Romney race for the White House is only beginning to heat up; by the time it appears, the election will be in its last stretch and Americans will have been undergoing a constant media bombardment, much of it negative and almost all of it overstated. They should take comfort from something David pointed to in his inadvertent May 12 farewell. He called it the “binary illusion”:

People tend to think in black and white. America is either in decline or it is ordained to be for ever the world’s greatest nation. Government is either paralysed or it is running amok, stifling liberty and enterprise and snuffing out the American dream. The election campaign accentuates the negative and sharpens this binary illusion. . . . On a variety of objective measures, [America] is in an awful mess right now. And yet America of all countries has plenty of grounds to hope for a better future, despite its underperforming politics, and no matter who triumphs in November.

Like the United States, the *Economist* has a number of glaring imperfections. But, also like the United States, it usually manages to sort things out and muddle through. Along the way it also keeps its eye out for the exotic, amusing and interesting subjects we enjoy reading about but are seldom served up by the mass media.

This is particularly true when it comes to the *Economist*’s books-and-arts section and its highly selective, sometimes offbeat obituaries. Two noteworthy examples appeared in the May 19 issue, the first being a detailed piece on the Turkish government’s aggressive campaign to recover art and artifacts from foreign museums and reclaim them as part of Turkey’s cultural heritage. The *Economist* takes a balanced approach, sympathizing with the Turkish desire to revive its neglected, multiethnic Ottoman past, which Kemal Ataturk, the founder of modern Turkey, deliberately disparaged in order to forge a new, ethnically unified nation-state. But it also points out that many of the “Turkish” treasures being sought were the work of other peoples and cultures—Greeks, Medes, Romans, Byzantines and possibly even Trojans—who occupied what would become the Ottoman Empire and parts of modern Turkey long before the first Turkic nomads migrated there from the Asian steppes.

The second piece, a perceptive and balanced obituary of Carlos Fuentes, Mexico’s foremost modern man of letters, captured all of the flamboyant, conflicting qualities that somehow managed to coexist in an elegant, self-professed Marxist with

aristocratic tastes who spoke out against tyrannies of the Left as well as the Right and was equally at home in Paris, New York and Mexico. The obituary managed to make a more coherent and likeable whole out of the bundle of contradictions that was Carlos Fuentes—whom I happened to know—in a way the man himself never quite did in either his books or his life.

The same mix of the good, the bad and the uneven ran through my immersion reading of the *Economist* all the way to the July 14 issue. Particularly valuable was the running coverage of the ongoing crisis within the European Union and, more particularly, the euro zone. The *Economist*, from its offshore perch in London, is “so near yet so far” from the European mainland in a way that gives it both a detachment and a close-up understanding of Europe that is unique.

The first glimpse at my long-awaited July 14 last number reminded me of some of the things I most admire—and a few I most dislike—about the *Economist*. The cover story, which turned out to be a very good one, was: “Comeback kid: Rebuilding America’s economy.” But the cover art was a silly, campy figure of a flexing bodybuilder’s torso topped with a somber “Uncle Sam Needs You” head



glowering at the reader. The off-putting part was two red-white-and-blue tassels attached to Uncle Sam’s nipples as if he were now working as a male stripper. Someone in authority at St. James’s Street should keep a closer eye on the art department.

In sum, then, I came away from twenty-two weeks of monitoring the *Economist* convinced that it is, indeed, the very best magazine of its kind—a status made easier by the fact that it is arguably the *only* magazine of its kind. For all its flukes and flaws, its level of intelligent reporting and analysis and the breadth of its coverage—geographically, politically, economically, scientifically, intellectually and artistically—is simply unmatched. There are frustrating moments when I am tempted to dismiss it by paraphrasing a few lines Dean Swift penned about a drafty old Irish manor house he enjoyed visiting:

*It is just half a blessing and just half a curse—
I wish, my dear sirs, it were better or worse.*

Yet, at the end of the day, I have to admit that it passes the Robinson Crusoe test with flying colors: if I were marooned on a desert isle and could receive only one magazine, it would have to be the *Economist*. □



The Vietnam War's Tragic Prologue

By A. J. Langguth

Fredrik Logevall, *Embers of War: The Fall of an Empire and the Making of America's Vietnam* (New York: Random House, 2012), 864 pp., \$40.00.

When Fredrik Logevall published *Choosing War* in 1999, he joined the ranks of historians and journalists who have contributed essential books about America's war in Indochina. Although many writers had covered the years from 1963–1965, Logevall's approach was distinguished by his wide lens, revealing the war's repercussions in foreign capitals beyond Washington and Hanoi—in London, Tokyo and Ottawa.

Now, with his huge and engrossing new study, Logevall surveys the less familiar ground of France's attempt to assert control over its colonies in Indochina after World War II. Again, he writes with an ambitious sweep and an instinct for pertinent detail, and his facility in French allows him to include material seldom available from

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previous histories in English. If Logevall's earlier work stood up well in a crowded field, *Embers of War* stands alone.

The John S. Knight Professor of International Relations at Cornell University, Logevall was born in Stockholm in 1963. He received his bachelor's degree from Canada's Simon Fraser University in 1986—eleven years after the collapse of the U.S. effort in South Vietnam—and a PhD from Yale in 1993. As a result, he brings to the subject a detachment that shields him from the surly revisionism of a few younger American-born academics.

These days, any history of Vietnam, no matter how scholarly and objective, will be read for what it teaches us now, a point seen in the title of Gordon Goldstein's *Lessons In Disaster*. If the American Century began in Los Alamos on July 16, 1945, why did it come to its end thirty years later on the roof of the Saigon embassy?

Drawing lessons from history is a different exercise from posing counterfactuals—alternatives to what actually happened and the consequences of those imagined changes. Counterfactuals are sometimes dismissed as science fiction for historians. In contrast, lessons proceed from the legitimate “why” rather than a fanciful “what if.” Logevall has acknowledged that counterfactuals can be “tantalizing” and has occasionally indulged in them in his earlier writing on Vietnam. His latest volume, however, remains solidly anchored in the facts themselves.

Although most of the twenty-seven chapters of *Embers of War* focus on French politics and military operations, Logevall

makes a concession to American readers with a preface about John F. Kennedy's junket to Saigon in 1951. Savvy New York editors advise launching a volume of history with a brand name, and few names from the second half of the twentieth century resonate like Kennedy's.

Logevall recounts a two-hour discussion Kennedy had with Seymour Topping—then the Associated Press bureau chief in Saigon, later the managing editor of the *New York Times*—that helped convince him that French troops were unlikely to prevail against Vietnamese nationalists.

Logevall then offers a prologue with another towering American figure. He repeats the story—no less poignant for its familiarity—of the moment in June 1919 when President Woodrow Wilson denied an audience at Versailles to a young Vietnamese man calling himself Nguyen Ai Quoc.

Other writers have remarked on the Chaplinesque image of a spindly nationalist in his rented morning coat, jostling with other spokesmen from Asia and Africa as they sought to persuade Wilson that his global idealism should extend to them.

Since two hundred thousand Asians and Africans had just died fighting in Europe, the colonies could claim that the sacrifice gave them a right to be heard. But the Vietnamese manifesto brought to Versailles made modest demands: representation in the French parliament, freedom of the press and right of assembly.

Focused on the future of Germany and Austria-Hungary, the American president



had neither time nor interest in those issues. And as a Virginian indifferent to Jim Crow at home, Wilson was unlikely to be moved by repression in colonies half a world away.

Logevall reminds us that one agency did take Nguyen Ai Quoc seriously. France's Surete Generale—the bureau responsible for tracking foreign spies in the country—was apparently concerned about articles agitating for political rights, and dispatched agents to stake out his apartment in the thirteenth arrondissement and intercept his letters. In time, the Surete would update his dossier under the name Ho Chi Minh—“He Who Enlightens.”

Because Ho had spent the year of 1913 in Boston and New York, where he was appalled by America's treatment of its black citizens, he already knew that the lofty language of the country's Founding Fathers was not always matched by its actions. Yet for the next three decades, he would go on hoping that the United States would live up to its aspirations.

In Franklin Roosevelt, Ho seemed to find an American president who embraced his cause, and Logevall is ready to begin his first chapter with the emergence of Charles

de Gaulle as France's leader in exile during World War II. Winston Churchill grudgingly admired de Gaulle, but Roosevelt's hostility was implacable. The Frenchman was insisting on a postwar restoration of his nation's empire. Even before Pearl Harbor, Roosevelt had spelled out his opposition. In an address to a White House Correspondents' Dinner, the president said: "There has never been, there isn't now, and there never will be, any race of people on earth fit to serve as masters over their fellow men."

Entering the narrative with de Gaulle come less familiar names: Indochina's French governor-general Georges Catroux, fearful of a Japanese invasion; Vice Admiral Jean Decoux, the pro-Vichy commander who replaced him; and Japan's foreign minister Matsuoka Yosuke, who rejected Washington's early offer to turn Indochina into a neutral zone.

During the interim between world wars, Ho and his band of Vietnamese nationalists already had decided that the communism of Vladimir Lenin was their most dependable ally in fighting for liberation. In Logevall's summation, "They saw no contradiction between their Communism and their fervent desire to make Vietnam Vietnamese again."

Since the United States was allied with the Soviet Union, Ho's strategy did not trouble most officials in Washington. Ho faced a greater obstacle in Winston Churchill. After Churchill adamantly refused Roosevelt's recommendation that Britain grant independence to India, Roosevelt dropped the subject and scaled back his vision for the future. The fate of South Asia, Logevall writes, could be set aside as "relatively

unimportant in geopolitical terms."

He argues, however, that Roosevelt never abandoned his long-range goal. When the president proposed trusteeships for the French colonies under the authority of the new United Nations, he tried to recruit China's Chiang Kai-shek for his plan. But at their single meeting in Cairo in 1942, Roosevelt found Chiang weak and indecisive. Worse, Chiang rejected a trusteeship in favor of immediate independence.

By the time a haggard Roosevelt met with Churchill and Joseph Stalin at Yalta in February 1945, he "had begun to lose control of events," but Logevall rejects the conclusion that "the United States abandoned her anticolonial impulses and supported a French return to Indochina." Rather, Roosevelt was relying on his lifelong talent for indirection. He might be forced to agree that the colonial powers themselves should administer the trusteeships, but his goal remained independence.

In a chapter called "Crossroads," Logevall offers a step-by-step description of the winding down of the war in the Pacific, with Ho watching warily as the Japanese loosened their grip on North Vietnam. At his camp at Pac Bo, Ho had relished his partnership with agents from the U.S. Office of Strategic Services.

When an OSS team led by Colonel Allison Thomas parachuted into Ho's base, they were met by two hundred of his Viet Minh troops with a banner reading: "Welcome to Our American Friends." Ho greeted Thomas in his serviceable English, but he was shaking badly and obviously

In the interim between world wars, Ho and his band of Vietnamese nationalists already had decided that the communism of Vladimir Lenin was their most dependable ally in fighting for liberation.

running a high fever. An OSS medic diagnosed him with malaria and dysentery, prescribed quinine and sulfa drugs, and saved Ho's life.

Ho's American allies were so taken with his warmth and intelligence that they took to calling him "OSS Agent 19." Logevall's expansive approach to his story permits many agreeable detours, including the 1944 report from U.S. captain Charles Fenn, who had studied graphology and produced a character analysis based on Ho's handwriting: "The essential features are simplicity, desire to make everything clear, remarkable self-control. Knows how to keep a secret. . . . Faults: diplomatic to the point of contriving. Could be moody and obstinate."

Entirely won over by Ho, Colonel Thomas radioed to his headquarters in Kunming in South China, "Forget the Communist Bogy. Viet Minh League is not Communist. Stands for freedom and reforms against French harshness." Ho responded by exempting the United States from his attacks on French colonialism and assuring his new friends that his country would "welcome 10 million Americans."

Logevall weighs Thomas's evaluation judiciously, writing that it

was wrong, or at least incomplete. If the Viet Minh stood for independence and against French repression, its core leadership that summer also remained staunchly Communist. But Ho in particular among top strategists wore the ideology lightly, so much so that even Soviet officials questioned his Communist credentials. In Mao Zedong's Chinese Communist Party,

too, analysts wondered where the Viet Minh, should it win the right to rule a free Vietnam, would take the country.

That ambiguity would persist throughout Ho's lifetime. Moscow and Beijing treated him with suspicion even as they provided him with material support. And twenty-five years later, some U.S. antiwar demonstrators could not believe that so appealing a personality as "Uncle Ho" would also be ready to sacrifice his countrymen by the tens of thousands to achieve his goal.

Roosevelt's death on April 12, 1945, changed everything. At first, the Viet Minh seemed poised for success. The collapse of the Japanese four months later allowed General Vo Nguyen Giap to lead Ho's "Viet-American Army" into Hanoi in early September. To avoid further killing, Ho dismayed many of his supporters by agreeing to allow the French to return to Vietnam south of the sixteenth parallel.

In the confrontation that soon developed between the West and the Soviet Union, Logevall does not suggest that Ho would have allied himself with the United States. But, he writes, "A decision by the Truman administration to support Vietnamese independence in the late summer and fall of 1945 would have gone a long way toward averting the mass bloodshed and destruction that was to follow."

Nor does he accept that war between Giap and the French was inevitable or that both sides shared equally in the blame. He largely faults the provocations of Georges

Thierry d'Argenlieu, a former Carmelite monk who had risen in the Free French resistance and arrived in Vietnam as de Gaulle's high commissioner for Indochina.

Logevall notes that d'Argenlieu had "thwarted the prospects for a negotiated solution at several junctures in 1946; he seemed determined to provoke" Ho's forces "into full-scale hostilities." In Paris, left-wing newspapers called him "the Bloody Monk."

As d'Argenlieu treated the wire service Agence France-Presse as his personal propaganda machine, the French public was deprived of information from the scene. With de Gaulle's backing, d'Argenlieu's policies in the first months of 1947 left whole neighborhoods of Hanoi leveled and the city's public buildings in ruins.

Over his next four hundred pages, Logevall presents in meticulous detail

the military and diplomatic skirmishing of the seven years that culminated in the siege at Dien Bien Phu. By that time, he concludes, "even Charles de Gaulle, whose intransigence in 1945–46 had done so much to start the bloodshed, had given up on military victory in Indochina."

Logevall cuts skillfully between troops within the demoralized French redoubt and the exhausted Viet Minh, who were, Giap wrote, "fatigued, worn and subject to great nervous tension." Even though readers know the outcome, his method creates genuine suspense. Some great military victories—Andrew Jackson's in New Orleans is another—continue to carry us along to their startling conclusions.

Logevall's re-creation draws on many familiar sources—Lloyd Gardner, Lucien Bodard, Ted Morgan and Bernard Fall with his evocative title *Hell in a Very Small Place*. But he also includes material from Pierre Rocolle's 1968 *Pourquoi Dien Bien Phu?*, Pierre Pellissier's *Dien Bien Phu: 20 Novembre 1953—7 Mai 1954* and Robert Guillain's *Dien Bien Phu: La Fin Des Illusions*, both from 2004.

Logevall's understatement serves him well in presenting the last radio contact between Dien Bien Phu and Major General Rene Cogne in Hanoi. Cogne was forbidding the fort's commander, Colonel Christian de Castries, from trying to protect the wounded by raising a flag of surrender. "Mon vieux," Cogne began, "of course you have to finish the whole thing now. But what you have done until now surely is magnificent. Don't spoil it by hoisting the white flag. You are going to be submerged



[by the enemy], but no surrender, no white flag.” The colonel makes another futile appeal. “There was a silence. Then de Castries bade his farewell: ‘*Bien, mon général.*’”

Logevall writes:

The Battle of Dien Bien Phu was over. The Viet Minh had won. Vo Nguyen Giap had overturned history, had accomplished the unprecedented, had beaten the West at its own game. For the first time in the annals of colonial warfare, Asian troops had defeated a European army in fixed battle.

The book’s epilogue, titled “Different Dreams, Same Footsteps,” returns the reader to John Kennedy, now president and confronting the collapse of South Vietnam under Ngo Dinh Diem. Logevall is sympathetic to the dilemma of both Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson, whose

freedom of maneuver was already constrained by the choices of their predecessors—by Truman’s tacit acknowledgment in 1945–46 that France had a right to return to Indochina; by his administration’s decision in 1950 to actively aid the French war effort; and by the Eisenhower team’s move in 1954 to intervene directly in Vietnam, displacing France as the major external power.

All the same, Logevall previously has suggested in *Virtual JFK: Vietnam If Kennedy Had Lived* that if Kennedy had survived Dallas, he would have regarded the commitment of U.S. ground troops as the worst in a range of bad options.

But before that, of course, there would be a presidential election to win, an objective that was never far from the thoughts of Kennedy, Johnson or Richard Nixon, as well as their advisers. Logevall establishes that for Nixon’s two predecessors in the White House, a central consideration in waging war in Vietnam had been ensuring another four years. But fate—and Dallas, Tet and Watergate—intervened to guarantee that none of them would serve two full terms.

Readers may find a final counterfactual occurring to them throughout *Embers of War*: What if Logevall’s book had been mandatory reading for Kennedy and his policy makers while they were escalating the U.S. presence in South Vietnam from a few hundred advisers to more than sixteen thousand? Would any lessons from France’s doomed adventure have deterred those same policy makers later when they found themselves working for Lyndon Johnson?

On the evidence, probably not. What makes Gordon Goldstein’s account of the Kennedy years particularly infuriating is the blithe ignorance of a man like McGeorge Bundy. A dazzling young academic, Bundy seemed to put his brilliance in a blind trust when he entered government service.

In February 1965, he urged a bombing campaign against North Vietnam by making the strange point that the odds were between 25 percent and 75 percent that such a strategy would fail. And yet, “even if it fails, the policy will be worth it.” At home and around the world, according to Bundy, people would have more confidence in a United States that had failed than if

We did not come as colonists, McNamara would say. We never intended to stay. The North Vietnamese looked grimly amused at that defense of his country's clean hands.

Washington had assessed the long odds and held back.

When Bundy's old friend Walter Lippmann returned from Paris to pass along de Gaulle's latest peace proposal to the White House, the columnist bridled at the disdain with which Bundy received him. The Kennedy men might not have inherited FDR's vision, but they shared his dislike for Charles de Gaulle. They knew the French had nothing to teach us.

In the decades after the Vietnam War, former secretary of defense Robert McNamara set off on a quest for public absolution and in the process displayed persistent blind spots of his own. During the mid-1990s, for example, McNamara welcomed the prospect of conferring in Hanoi with North Vietnamese military commanders and politburo leaders. Then the early planning hit a snag.

McNamara, who wanted to begin their discussion with the year that he joined the Kennedy administration, was puzzled and resistant when Vo Nguyen Giap insisted on exploring the period before 1961. McNamara seemed surprised that anything could matter that had happened before he entered the scene.

Not for the first time, General Giap prevailed, and the conference got under way in June 1997, with Vietnam's former foreign minister Nguyen Co Thach as its chairman. McNamara's hosts treated him throughout the several days with exemplary courtesy. Only once did they become visibly angry—when McNamara repeated the canard, popular with General William Westmoreland, that the United

States had been at a disadvantage on the battlefield because Americans put a higher value on human life than the Vietnamese did. A seething North Vietnamese delegate responded, "Let me assure you, Mr. McNamara, that our mothers grieve for their sons every bit as much as American mothers do."

McNamara was challenged again, though less emotionally, whenever he lectured North Vietnamese officials for failing to appreciate the difference between America's goals and those of the French. We did not come as colonists, he would say. We never intended to stay.

The North Vietnamese looked grimly amused at that defense of his country's clean hands. Patiently, they explained that while the distinction might be clear to McNamara, their countrymen were being killed by the same bullets, by the same bombs.

To conclude, a personal note:

After three years away from South Vietnam, I returned as a journalist because of the 1968 Tet Offensive. I was hitching a ride with a young Marine driving a truck out of Danang, and as we passed the roadside villages, children ran out to smile, wave and hold out their palms in hopes of candy.

"Look at that!" said the driver, no more than nineteen. "They love us here."

I said, "I'd feel better if they hadn't been smiling that same way at the French right up until 1954."

"The French!" the boy exclaimed. "What the fuck were the French doing here?"

Thanks to Professor Logevall's *Embers of War*, no one need ask that question again. □



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