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THE PRINCE of Baghdad

Iraq and the Mind of Machiavelli
by Kenneth M. Pollack



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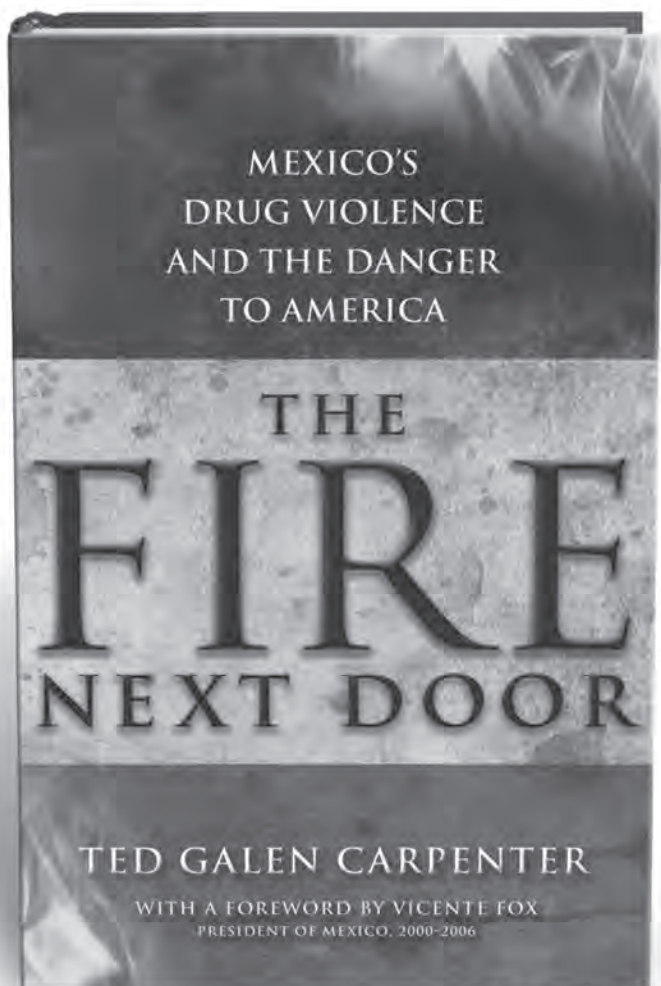
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About the author: Ted Galen Carpenter is senior fellow for defense and foreign policy studies at the Cato Institute, a contributing editor to the *National Interest*, and the author of numerous books on international affairs.

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American Interest, American Blood

By Robert W. Merry

In this year's campaign debate over foreign policy, something was missing—the intertwined elements of American interests and American blood. In the rhetoric of President Barack Obama and Republican challenger Mitt Romney, seldom did we see rigorous analysis about the country's true global interests and how much citizen blood we should expend on behalf of those interests. We got vague pronouncements about American exceptionalism, using American power to salve the wounds of humanity, the pacifying effect of spreading democracy, the necessity of America's global dominance and the need to thwart anti-Western terrorists.

But there was little talk about how these missions actually would affect the lives of Americans, the global balance of power or U.S. security. There was even less talk about the appropriate price, in terms of American lives, to be paid for these missions. And yet this ultimately is any president's crucial foreign-policy decision matrix—how he or she defines the country's vital interests and how that squares with the ultimate cost.

Robert W. Merry is editor of *The National Interest* and the author of books on American history and foreign policy. His most recent book is *Where They Stand: The American Presidents in the Eyes of Voters and Historians* (Simon & Schuster, 2012).

As Germany's Otto von Bismarck, that cold-eyed realist of the nineteenth century, once remarked, "Anyone who has ever looked into the glazed eyes of a soldier dying on the battlefield will think hard before starting a war."

This is not to say that citizen blood is too precious to be spilled in pursuit of national interests. Many of our presidents heralded as among the greatest expended plenty of American blood on behalf of American interests. But it's wrong to send young soldiers to their deaths for causes unrelated to serious national interests. Bismarck captured this when he predicted in 1888—with remarkable prescience—that the next great European war would be ignited in the Balkans. Yet he insisted those lands weren't "worth the bones of a single Pomeranian grenadier." Germany had no strategic interests there worthy of German blood.

In our time, the lack of clarity about U.S. strategic goals in the post-Cold War era has spawned all kinds of mushy thinking about what our role in the world should be and what circumstances justify U.S. intervention abroad.

Consider President Obama's actions in Libya. Much has been written about the obfuscation that attended the United Nations debate—focused as it was on protecting Benghazi civilians from mass killings by the forces of Libyan leader Muammar el-Qaddafi, when the actual goal was the elimination of Qaddafi's regime. It's a worthy critique. But conservative commentator Stanley Kurtz, writing in *National Review Online*, offered another insight—namely, that the sequence of

*It's wrong to send young soldiers to their deaths
for causes unrelated to serious national interests.*

events indicates Obama was more interested in protecting Libyan lives than in regime change. Kurtz speculates that Obama wanted to establish the precedent of humanitarian intervention—the so-called responsibility to protect—in U.S. foreign policy.

Obama received ample credit for sparing American lives in the Libyan intervention, but Kurtz is correct that the precedent has been established for future adventures that could entail much greater military involvement and cost. And the president made no effort to justify the mission in terms of U.S. vital interests. Instead, he lauded the kinds of Wilsonian missions that fall under the rubric of the responsibility to protect. “To brush aside America’s responsibility as a leader and—more profoundly—our responsibilities to our fellow human beings under such circumstances,” declared the president, “would have been a betrayal of who we are.”

Such thinking is a post-Cold War phenomenon. During the West’s confrontation with the Soviet Union, which had positioned itself ominously in the Eurasian heartland, America embraced a crisp understanding of its interests and mission. The goal was to thwart the spread of communism into areas of strategic importance to the West, particularly Europe. Given Europe’s devastation in World War II, America embraced the role of military protector of the West and stabilizing force in the world. This big job was defined in simple and clear terms. And the approach adopted to pursue it—containment—minimized the expenditure of American blood.

The first imperative was to save the West from the 1.3 million Eastern bloc troops positioned menacingly on the doorstep of Western Europe. This was accomplished through the heroic leadership of Harry S. Truman and is remembered through numerous powerful actions—aid to Greece and Turkey, the Marshall Plan, the Berlin airlift, creation of NATO, reorganization of the U.S. military and intelligence operations, and more. Once the Soviets understood that their own cost of overrunning Western Europe would be too high in blood and treasure, the Kremlin adopted a new approach of destabilizing the West’s interests in far-flung regions around the Eurasian heartland. As writer Robert D. Kaplan has pointed out, the Cold War became a contest for control over vast areas of strategic significance on the Eurasian periphery.

This epic struggle led to hot wars in Korea and Vietnam that required greater expenditures in U.S. casualties than the American people would accept. That necessitated negotiated settlements that proved not altogether satisfactory. But generally the United States avoided the kind of high-cost hostilities that could have sapped popular approval for the policy, and America capped the forty-three-year Cold War with a signal victory.

Almost immediately, the country lost sight of the need to base foreign policy on national interests and careful calibration of costs in blood—reflected in George H. W. Bush’s decision to send twenty-eight thousand troops into war-crushed Somalia to aid two million starving inhabitants. This was unprecedented in that there wasn’t

even a pretense of U.S. national interests involved. As *Time* magazine explained, “It is a major military action in the name of morality: addressing a situation that does not threaten American national security and in which the U.S. has no vital interests.”

Within a year, enough American blood would flow onto the dusty pavements of the Somali capital that the Bush mission—as expanded by his successor, Bill Clinton—would turn into a military and political embarrassment. But the precedent had been set, and humanitarian interventionists seized upon it to push America into the chaotic Balkans. *Time* emblazoned across its cover a headline: “Clinton’s first foreign challenge: If Somalia, why not Bosnia?” When Clinton hesitated to become embroiled in the region, *Time* declared: “A Lesson in Shame.” It implored Clinton to persuade Americans “that their children and their billions should be spent on Bosnia.”

Here we see a stark decoupling of U.S. interests from calculations about expenditures of blood. Of course, with America’s all-volunteer military, it wasn’t likely that *Time* writers or editors would suffer the experience of having their children “spent on Bosnia.” When the country’s elites can farm out the fighting and dying to more patriotic and less well-off Americans, humanitarianism for them is an inexpensive sentiment.

Still, post-Vietnam presidents understood that they must be careful about spilling citizen blood for causes not fully embraced by the people. Few interventionist goals seemed likely to receive that kind of citizen support. Then came 9/11, which President

George W. Bush leveraged to unleash a “war on terror” that included an incursion into Afghanistan to topple the Taliban government and disperse Al Qaeda and a preventive war against Iraq, presumed to be harboring weapons of mass destruction and cozying up to terrorists.

Here’s where the calculation of interventionist cost and benefit fell apart. With Iraq now descending into an ominous instability and getting pulled into what looks like a growing sectarian struggle throughout the Middle East, it’s difficult to argue that the war’s benefits could justify the U.S. casualty toll of nearly 4,500 dead and thirty-two thousand wounded.

Similarly, while the initial cost-benefit analysis clearly justified the Afghan incursion (and received national support), Obama’s “surge” of troops, designed to pave the way for a later troop pullout, hardly justified the added cost in blood. With the military casualty count recently passing two thousand, it isn’t clear what America gets from this intervention that justifies its cost.

Now there’s widespread talk of another preventive war against Iran. Missing in much of the debate has been a rigorous calculation of the cost of any such war in relation to America’s national interest in preventing Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons. Perhaps that cost would be worth it, but first there needs to be an understanding of its likely magnitude.

In pursuing this cost-benefit equation, America might do well to ponder yet another sage observation of Bismarck. “Preventive war,” he said, “is like committing suicide out of fear of death.” □

Reading Machiavelli in Iraq

By Kenneth M. Pollack

Most Americans know Niccolò Machiavelli only from *The Prince*, a sixteenth-century “audition tape” he dashed off in lieu of a résumé to try to land a job. It’s a shame. Not only was Machiavelli the leading advocate of democracy of his day, but his ideas also had a profound influence on the framers of our own Constitution.

It’s even more of a shame because the corpus of Machiavelli’s remarkable work on democracy, politics and international relations is easily the best guide to understanding the dynamics at play in contemporary Iraq and its situation within the wider Middle East.

Iraq today is a place that Machiavelli would have understood well. It is a weak state, riven by factions, with an embryonic democratic system increasingly undermined from within and without. It is encircled by a combination of equally weak and fragmented Arab states as well as powerful non-Arab neighbors seeking to dominate or even subjugate it. Iraq’s democratic form persists, but its weakness, combined with internal and external threats, seems more likely to drive it toward either renewed autocracy or renewed chaos. It cries out for

Kenneth M. Pollack is a contributing editor to *The National Interest* and a senior fellow at the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution. The title of this essay is, of course, an appreciation of Azar Nafisi’s remarkable work, *Reading Lolita in Tehran*.

a leader of great ability and great virtue to vanquish all of these monsters and restore it to the democratic path it had started down in 2008–2009.

That course seems less and less likely with each passing month, and it may take a true Machiavellian prince—one strong and cunning enough to secure the power of the state but foresighted enough to foster a democracy as the only recipe for true stability—to achieve it. Unfortunately, in all of human history, such figures have been rare. It is unclear whether Iraq possesses such a leader, but the reemergence of its old political culture as America’s role ebbs makes it ever less likely that such a remarkable figure could emerge to save Iraq from itself.

The Prince of Baghdad

As always, any discussion of Iraq’s problems after Saddam Hussein’s fall needs to start from an understanding of America’s endless mistakes there. The catastrophically mishandled American occupation of Iraq following the 2003 invasion created a political and security vacuum in the country that produced an ethnosectarian civil war by late 2005. Those mistakes brought forth a new Iraqi political leadership comprised largely of exiles and militia chiefs, many of whom were focused primarily on aggrandizing their own wealth and power.

Nevertheless, the “surge” of additional U.S. troops and the shift to a population-

protection strategy (often referred to erroneously as a “counterinsurgency” strategy) temporarily suppressed the security problems and generated important political progress. Thus, between the spring of 2008 and the spring of 2010, a nascent democracy flourished in Iraq. The U.S. military had snuffed out the civil war and prevented all political groups from pursuing their agendas through force. Moreover, Washington insisted that Iraqi political leaders play by the rules of the new democratic system and did what it could to diminish graft, bribery, extortion and other means of political manipulation. As a result, for the first time in their history, average Iraqis wielded real power over their leaders—and used it to hand the militia-backed parties that ran rampant during the civil war resounding defeats in the 2009 provincial and 2010 national elections.

Unfortunately, at that moment the United States turned its back on Iraq, politically and militarily. By turning the reins of government back to Iraq’s leaders prematurely, the Americans allowed a Hobbesian state of nature to reemerge.

The shift occurred first in the realm of politics. The 2010 national elections should have been a huge step forward for Iraqi democracy since the majority of voters, Sunni and Shia, had endorsed the two parties seen as most secular and least tied to the militias that had waged the civil war. Unfortunately, the elections proved to be the exact opposite. Rather than insist that the party that had secured the most votes in

the election (the secular but mostly Sunni Iraqiya party led by former prime minister Ayad Allawi) get the first chance to form a government—as is the practice in most democracies—Washington (and the UN) took no position on the matter. This threw the Iraqi political and constitutional systems into paralysis.

Frustrated with this impasse, the United States simply embraced the party of the incumbent prime minister, Nuri al-Maliki, which had received the second-most votes. Regardless of Maliki’s qualifications for the position, this sent a disastrous



message to both the Iraqi people and the political leadership: the United States is more concerned with expediency than with enforcing the system’s rules; there will be no punishment for subverting the system or rewards for playing by the rules; power will be distributed not according to the will of the people as expressed at the ballot box but by political machinations carried on in traditional, cutthroat Iraqi fashion. In effect, the United States announced that it would not prevent the reemergence of Iraq’s bad, old political

culture because it would not continue to enforce the new, democratic rules of the road. At that moment, even those parties that had benefited from Iraq's budding democratization (including Iraqiya and Maliki's State of Law coalition) knew that the rules had suddenly changed. The referee was gone, and Iraq's leaders now were free to go back to the old rules, which had produced Iraq's tragic twentieth-century history.

The following year, Washington made little effort to retain a meaningful residual military force in Iraq, and the Iraqis refused to extend the kind of legal guarantees that would have allowed even a token presence to remain. Consequently, in December 2011 the last American combat units departed Iraq.

They left behind a weak government without any civic culture or strong institutions, presiding over a deeply fragmented society with a history of intercommunal violence both long and recent. It was the kind of circumstance that Machiavelli would have understood well. It was the world of fifteenth-century Italy, with its small, weak and divided city-states, constantly at war with one another and themselves. It was the world of Machiavelli's prince.

The Iraqi Art of (Political) War

What Machiavelli understood explicitly, what Iraq's political leaders "got" intuitively and what American political leaders missed altogether was that in a state such as Iraq—weak, divided, tortured by internal rivalries and dominated by fear—the government is not a party to the conflict. Rather, it is the prize of the conflict. To a certain extent, it may be that by framing the problem of Iraq as one of "counterinsurgency," the United States helped foster its own mistaken approach to Iraq. Was there an insurgency

in Iraq? Yes, but it was not the country's principal problem. That was the security vacuum that had unleashed an intercommunal civil war.

Defeating an insurgency and ending an intercommunal civil war actually overlap significantly at the tactical military level. However, at the strategic and political levels, they are very different and require very different approaches. Insurgencies break out as a result of the unpopularity of the government, and therefore the key to a counterinsurgency effort is to simultaneously suppress the guerrilla movement and rebuild the government's popularity.

Civil wars, in contrast, are contests for power, including control of the government. They occur when the group on top loses its monopoly on violence, opening the door for other groups to try to seize control of the government. In an intercommunal civil war, radical leaders on all sides typically seek to gain control of the government to use its power against rival groups—to disenfranchise them, oppress them, expel them or even massacre them.

One of the last mistakes the United States made in Iraq was to misread its conflict for an insurgency rather than an intercommunal civil war. At first this mattered little because, at a tactical level, the early stages of an effective counterinsurgency campaign are identical to the early stages of an operation to suppress a civil war. However, over time, these courses of action diverge in important ways. In particular, a counterinsurgent must build up the strength and "legitimacy" of the government. Once the counterinsurgent has accomplished that, he can leave. In a civil war, the goal is to establish strong new governmental institutions that can withstand efforts by any group to subvert them in order to advance its own narrow agenda. This is why the military task of

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shutting down the fighting in a civil war is typically brief if done properly (recall NATO in Bosnia in 1995; the Australians in East Timor in 1999; and the United States in Iraq in 2007–2008) and can in some ways precede the major tasks of political reconstruction. But it is also why an external military presence is so important during the long years of political reconstruction that must follow, to prevent any group from reverting back to violence and reassure all parties that there will be neutral referees to enforce proper conduct while all parties learn to play by the new rules of the game.

In Iraq, in part because the United States mistook a civil war for an insurgency and in part because the Obama administration came to office determined to get out of Iraq as quickly as possible, the United States pulled its troops out and withdrew assistance before Iraq's governing institutions or political culture had been strengthened and democratized adequately to ensure that they could survive the inevitable political infighting that would follow a U.S. troop withdrawal. It is why Iraqi democracy today is hanging by a thread.

We may never know the whole story of what happened in Baghdad in December 2011 and January 2012. But the demonstrable facts are nevertheless disturbing on their own.

While Prime Minister Maliki was in Washington that December to see President Obama and discuss the future of U.S.-Iraqi relations after the American troop withdrawal, his government arrested

several of Vice President Tariq al-Hashimi's bodyguards on suspicion that they were involved in terrorist activities. Hashimi is a senior Sunni political leader within Iraqiya, leading many to suspect that the charges were trumped up by Maliki's camp against its principal political rival. Upon returning from his U.S. trip, Maliki was told by his aides that Hashimi's bodyguards had not only confessed involvement in terror operations but also claimed that Hashimi himself was the ringleader and that Hashimi—possibly in league with other Sunni political leaders—was planning a coup to take over the government. (Of course, the opposition insists that Hashimi's bodyguards were tortured into making these claims.)

The prime minister quickly ordered security personnel to lock down Baghdad's center and confine the Sunni Iraqiya leaders to their homes. Tanks and soldiers were deployed outside the houses of Hashimi and other Sunni leaders. Taped confessions—genuine according to the government, coerced according to the opposition—by Hashimi's bodyguards were aired on television before any trial or even charges were filed against them. Dozens of lower-level Iraqiya officials were arrested. Eventually, a warrant for Hashimi's arrest was produced—although Hashimi had already fled to Iraqi Kurdistan. When Deputy Prime Minister Saleh al-Mutlaq criticized these steps, pronouncing Maliki a dictator, the prime minister and cabinet deposed him from his position—although the Iraqi constitution states that only the parliament can do so. To a great many

Iraqis, this series of actions seemed to signal Maliki's determination to establish his own autocratic power.

Naturally, this terrified many Iraqis, including Shia groups ambivalent or antipathetic to Maliki—such as the Sadrist Trend—as well as the Kurds, particularly Massoud Barzani's Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), which has always disliked Maliki. These groups banded together and attempted to oust the prime minister by a vote of no confidence in the parliament. For several months, the different groups jockeyed for position, working to secure enough votes. But Maliki proved the more skillful, and by summer the threat of a no-confidence vote had evaporated.

Maliki's success was born of several factors. First, the prime minister quickly recognized that he had frightened a number of Iraqi political leaders who might have been more agnostic (even sympathetic) had he acted more carefully. So the government pulled in its horns. Many arrested Iraqiya members were released. Tanks and troops were removed. Maliki even reconciled with Saleh al-Mutlaq. Second, the prime minister managed to splinter members of the rival parties, particularly Iraqiya. When Iraqiya mounted a boycott of the cabinet (and threatened to do the same in the

parliament), Maliki announced that cabinet posts would be redistributed to government allies. This forced the opposition to end its boycott lest it lose critical sources of patronage (and graft) by which all Iraqi politicians reward their constituencies. The government then reached out to various Sunni tribal sheikhs and other political leaders—as well as some Sadrist leaders whose loyalty seemed negotiable—to bring them into the prime minister's camp through promises of government positions, jobs, largesse, protection and, reportedly, outright payoffs.

Finally, Maliki reached out to Iran. He is no puppet of Iran. In his own way, he is a staunch Iraqi nationalist and, like most Iraqi Shiites, appears to dislike the Iranians more than he likes them. It is noteworthy that Maliki's most important act as prime minister—and a critical element of the surge's success—was his Operation Charge of the Knights, which ousted the Iranian-backed Jaish al-Mahdi militia from Basra, Sadr City and other cities of southern Iraq in 2008. This broke Iran's power in Iraq (at least for a time) and persuaded Iraq's Sunnis to participate in the new government.

Nevertheless, as the United States has pulled back from Iraq, Iran has moved in to fill the gap. Tehran, not Washington, was the key to engineering Maliki's reelection in 2010. Iran strong-armed the Sadrists into backing Maliki's return as prime minister despite their hatred of him. Once Maliki had the Sadrists, it meant he effectively had a lock on Iraq's Shia majority, which in turn convinced the Kurds to go along. Despite all of this critical assistance, Maliki has tried not to become too dependent on Iran, in part by maintaining some relationship with Washington as a counterweight to Tehran.



The Iranians are not fools. They have never forgotten that it was Maliki who humiliated them in 2008. Tehran reportedly tried to find an alternative to Maliki but decided that the likely candidates—such as former prime minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari or the diabolical Ahmad Chalabi—were worse. Hence, they put intense pressure on both the Sadrists and Jalal Talabani's Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), which shares a long border with Iran, persuading both of them to back Maliki. Without them, Iraqiya and the KDP simply did not have the votes, and the entire campaign collapsed. Maliki prevailed.

The prime minister's moves are widely seen as an effort to consolidate power. There is nothing wrong with that, especially in the face of the political and security vacuum that threatened to emerge after the withdrawal of American troops. In fact, the Iraqi state's survival required that the government consolidate power.

However, by acting to consolidate power the way that a dictator would—regardless of whatever his true intentions may have been—Maliki sent the worst possible signal to the rest of Iraq. Such actions create precedents and generate fears that are incomparably more pernicious than when opposition figures act illegally or immorally. Those fears have been heightened in Iraq by Baghdad's trial of Vice President Hashimi in absentia, the court's guilty verdict and its imposition of a death sentence in September. Such actions smack of vengeance and perpetuate the dread and mistrust that pushed Iraq into civil war in the first place.

Discourses on Iraqi Democracy

If *The Prince* is the work of Machiavelli's incisive mind, the work of his inspiring heart is his *Discourses on the First Ten Books of Titus Livy*. As he wrote at length in *The*

Prince, Machiavelli was not under any illusions about how people would behave when the state was weak. He knew that most would be driven by fear to act badly in the absence of a powerful set of institutions to constrain their behavior and compel or enable them to act nobly. In the *Discourses*, he employed the Roman Republic as a practical model for the kind of democratic state that could give Italy a better society—one strong enough to keep Italy's foreign foes in check and also ensure internal stability, justice and prosperity. It was a product of his fourteen years as an official and champion of the brief Florentine Republic that ousted the Medicis but was later deposed again by them. The central lesson of that experience and his reading of past successful states was that only a prince could build the ideal republic once state and society had collapsed into anarchy. But the republic—the state system—would ensure its long-term tranquility, safety and prosperity, not the prince. The system mattered, not the man.

So too in Iraq today. If Iraqi democracy is going to be saved, it will not only take a great individual but also a leader willing and able to restore the system. Likewise, the problems of Iraq are much less the problems of a specific personality (whether Nuri al-Maliki, Massoud Barzani, Ayad Allawi or someone else) and far more the problems of the structure and nature of current Iraqi politics. They are the problems created by the unfinished transformation that the United States left behind in 2011. The incentive structure that compelled most (and allowed a few) Iraqi political leaders to act like good democratic stewards in 2008–2010 was still an artificial one, imposed from the outside by the United States. By 2011, that incentive structure had not had time to take root and supplant the incentives of the bad, old system. When Washington removed that external incentive structure prematurely, Iraq's political leaders

went back to what they knew best and what they expected to prevail anyway.

Thus, many—even most—other Iraqi leaders probably would have acted as Maliki did had they been prime minister. And many of those same people would have acted as Ayad Allawi did had they found themselves in the opposition. It is not that these people are somehow uniquely bad or that the problems would not exist if the government or opposition were in the hands of someone else. Iraq's problem is the incomplete transformation and the stumbling democracy that the United States left behind. As prime minister, Maliki is no worse than many of his rivals might have been—and arguably better than many. Although in some cases he has undermined Iraqi democracy, in others he has abided by democratic rules even when he was not compelled to do so. Moreover, he has taken other actions—most notably Operation Charge of the Knights—that undeniably established his commitment to Iraqi nationalism, even if the sectarian chauvinism that fueled the civil war often seems to be an ever-present motivation.

Still, Maliki's ultimate victory in 2012 was important to Iraq in two unfortunate ways. First, the methods by which the prime minister triumphed reinforced a widespread sentiment that Iraq's brief experiment with democracy and the rule of law was over and that politics were reverting to the old ways of violence, subterfuge, graft and betrayal. Iraq was falling back from

the world of the *Discourses* to the world of *The Prince*. Moreover, while Maliki's success represented a major victory over Iraq's political center—in the literal and figurative sense—both the victory itself and the manner of its realization had alienated key elements on the periphery of Iraqi politics: the Sunni regions in the West and North, the Kurds, and the Shia of the deep South represented by the Sadrists.

In Baghdad, Maliki reigns supreme. In person, he is far more at ease and confident than he was in early 2012. He and his senior advisers appear to recognize that they have effectively

crippled Iraqiya, their most powerful parliamentary adversary. And with their absolute control over the Iraqi military and judiciary, they have nothing to fear from Iraq's other political parties.

But elsewhere in Iraq, the prime minister's problems persist and in some areas are worsening. Many Sunnis saw Maliki's victory over Iraqiya as the first step in the establishment of a Shia tyranny that would oppress them as the Sunnis had oppressed the Shia under Saddam. Maliki has made deep inroads with some Sunni leaders in places such as Mosul, where his efforts threaten the dominance of the Nujaifi brothers, key leaders of Iraqiya. However, many other Sunni tribal leaders are rearming with help from Saudi Arabia, which is encouraging them to resist Maliki and provide aid to their tribesmen across the border in Syria



Many Sunnis saw Maliki's victory over Iraqiya as the first step in the establishment of a Shia tyranny that would oppress them as the Sunnis had oppressed the Shia under Saddam.

who are fighting against the Iranian-backed, Shia Assad regime. The result has been a notable increase in violence perpetrated by various Sunni terrorist groups, such as Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) and the Jaysh Rijal al-Tariqa Naqshbandia. The rebirth of such groups is less the product of Saudi aid—or the diminution in Baghdad's counterterror capabilities resulting from the departure of U.S. forces—than of the erosion in Sunni trust in government. In many areas, this has resulted in a resurgence of support for Sunni terrorist groups that had nearly disappeared several years ago. AQI itself was effectively dead in 2009, unable to mount more than token attacks. It is now carrying out simultaneous countrywide operations. Indeed, AQI has become strong enough to contest government control of parts of Diyala Province, something unimaginable even two years ago.

Potentially even more dangerous has been the reaction of the Kurds. Many Kurdish leaders, in particular Barzani and the KDP, are pessimistic about their ability to make their relationship with Baghdad work. They seem to believe that independence (or virtual independence) may be a viable option in the medium term. This perspective—the expanding threat from Baghdad coupled with a perceived growing opportunity for independence—is evident in all of their political calculations in a way not seen as recently as last year. On the threat side of the ledger, they believe that Maliki intends to crush Kurdistan as he crushed Iraqiya as soon as his military is fully armed by the United States. The Kurds are nervous that the Iraqi army is

growing in strength and capability whereas the Peshmerga, Kurdistan's de facto army, have lost considerable capability since they defeated the Iraqi military in 1970. This creates a sense among Kurds that time is working against them and they need to settle matters relatively soon. However, all of this is somewhat counterbalanced (or even contradicted) by the positive trends they see toward genuine prospects for independence.

Turkey looms large on this side of the ledger. The Kurds see Turkish energy needs as necessarily tying Ankara to Erbil. Kurdistan's industrious minister of natural resources, Ashti Hawrami, argues that Turkey soon will be able to rely on the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) for its energy needs. To that end, he has been forging a mix of pipeline deals with Turkey, as well as oil- and gas-production deals with major international oil companies. These deals have been moving ahead smartly, much to Baghdad's fury, with Exxon, Chevron, Total and Gazprom. In addition, Erbil expects to have both oil and natural-gas pipelines linking Kurdistan and Turkey operational within a few years. The critical energy questions are complemented by a number of factors: the growing economic interdependence of southeastern Turkey with the KRG; Turkish prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's own deepening antipathy toward Maliki; the way Syria is driving Turkey and the KRG together (and pulling Turkey away from Iran and Iraq); and the shifting regional balance as a result of the Arab Spring. Consequently, many Kurds believe they will be able to count on Turkish

support for a declaration of independence in the next two to three years, especially if the security situation in the rest of Iraq continues to deteriorate.

Finally, even the Sadrist movement is turning against Maliki, demonstrating the unhappiness of the Shia of the deep South with Maliki's consolidation of power in the center. Although Iran's pressure forced the Sadrists to abandon ambitions of unseating Maliki, they have done little to hide their hatred of him. Moktada al-Sadr has called Maliki a dictator and demanded his resignation. Across the South, there are reports of low-level violence between Sadrists and Maliki allies—bombings, assassinations, vandalism and kidnappings. Like the reemergence of Sunni terrorism, this is still at a low level relative to where Iraq was during its darkest days in 2006, but the trend reflects the increasing resistance of the periphery to Maliki's center and the return of Iraq's old tradition of violent politics.

The next big moves are likely to be Maliki's. He will have to decide how to react to the Kurds, the Sunnis and the Sadrists—not to mention the Turks and the Saudis. A great statesman would recognize that now is the perfect moment to act magnanimously and make concessions to bring his rivals back into the governmental fold. Having disarmed them, Maliki could safely pursue such a course, and doing so would undermine the claims that he is attempting to make himself the new dictator of Iraq. Indeed, this is probably the only move that might allow the country to return to the slow path toward democracy by resurrecting the prospect of true power sharing among Iraq's factions. Maliki's willingness to strike a partial deal with the Kurds on oil exports in September represented a hopeful step. But it was only a baby step and may reflect nothing more than a realization that Baghdad

had no other options—except force—to compel the Kurds, and so the government grudgingly gave in. Indeed, so far neither the prime minister nor his aides have shown much inclination to embrace such an approach wholeheartedly. They often seem to believe that any concessions would be seen as weakness and thus encourage greater efforts to overthrow them.

The great danger is that Maliki eventually will resort to violence to deal with his increasingly well-armed rivals. But this time a resort to force would likely look very different from his past moves. Subduing the Kurds, the Saudi-backed Sunni tribes or the deeply embedded Sadrist militias would require much larger military operations—which likely would result in clashes and could easily provoke one or more insurgencies against his government. This would be dangerous and potentially disastrous, however historically commonplace. This path, embraced by the three dictators who preceded Saddam Hussein, failed consistently. Learning the lessons of his predecessors, Saddam determined he had to rely on genocidal levels of violence to slaughter and terrorize his people, and he held on to power for over thirty years only because he did so.

The Florentine Histories of Iraq

Among the least well-known of Machiavelli's major works are his *Florentine Histories*. More's the pity, because the dynamics of the weak and chaotic Italian city-states mimic those of the Middle East today, and Machiavelli's historical insights are a perfect guide to Iraq's relations with its neighbors.

Like Machiavelli's Italy, today's Middle East consists mostly of weak, internally fragile states, all of them divided by factions. Moreover, in many cases those factions span national borders. Like Machiavelli's Italian city-states, the Middle

East's polities are marked by internal competition—often bloody—among various groups. Sometimes the divisions are ethnic (Arab vs. Kurd, Arab vs. Berber, Arab vs. Black African). Sometimes they are religious (Sunni vs. Shia, Muslim vs. Christian, Maronite vs. Druze). Sometimes they are geographic (Basrawi vs. Baghdadi,

up with the same factions in other states, or they will strike alliances with unlike factions in their own state that will bring with them alliances—and enemies—in other states. Finally, as the Italian city-states learned to their dismay when they foolishly brought great powers such as France, Austria and the Turks into Italian politics, Middle Easterners



Baghdadi vs. Muslawi). Sometimes they are ideological (Baathist vs. Islamist, liberal vs. Salafist, nationalist vs. royalist). Thus, like the Guelphs and Ghibellines of Florence, Milan and Pisa, so too the Sunni and Shia of Iraq, Lebanon and Syria—or the Kurds of Iraq, Syria, Iran and Turkey—see their interests communally even as they strive to dominate their own states as well.

For all of these groups, the government of their state is a weapon to be used against their rivals and a purse to reward their constituents. That means no faction accepts the domination of the government by a rival, all constantly scheme to take back the government, and every faction goes looking for support from similar factions in neighboring states and from larger states that border the region (such as Turkey and Iran) or more distant powers with interests in the region (such as the United States, Russia and China). Thus, factions in one state will line

who seek advantage by relying on external great powers often have found that their own interests are trampled by those of the great-power invitees.

Because of its own weakness and the efforts of various internal factions to secure the help of like-minded foreigners, Iraq's relations with its neighbors have become horrifyingly convoluted. Its two main Kurdish parties, the KDP and the PUK, have forged a good working relationship with each other, although this may only last for as long as PUK leader Jalal Talabani lives. But the KDP is heavily backed by the Turks, whereas the PUK is dominated by Iran (and not in a benevolent way). Iraq's Sunni Arabs are backed by Saudi Arabia, the Gulf states, Jordan and, to a certain extent, Turkey. Ankara has tried to serve as a bridge between the KDP and the Sunni Arabs; this, coupled with their common fear and hatred of Maliki, has brought them together more

than usual. On the other side, Iran backs all of the Shia groups to a greater or lesser extent, with some important exceptions such as the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq, which has broken with Tehran and is trying to subsist as a purely Iraqi entity, with distressing results so far. The other major Shia factions all rely on Iran, even though the two most important—Maliki's State of Law and the Sadrist Trend—hate both Iran and each other.

Much of Iraq's internal politics is being driven by the interests of these external states. Iran has made huge gains in filling much of the void left by the American withdrawal. This is important for Tehran because Iraq is a key neighbor, trading partner, former foe and potential rival Shia power. Moreover, Iraq is now important to Tehran as a conduit to smuggle out Iranian oil exports, a channel to provide support to its oldest ally, the Shia Alawites of Syria, and a potential replacement if the Alawites ultimately lose the civil war there. But Turkey and the Gulf states fear Iranian domination of Iraq just as much as the Iraqis do. In 2006, when it seemed as if the Iranian-backed Shia militias were winning the Iraqi civil war, the Saudis famously threatened to intervene militarily on behalf of the Sunni groups. Today, Ankara has assured the Kurds that if Maliki attempts to use force against them, Turkey will intervene to stop him. And, while Turkish officials duly intone their traditional preference for Iraq's territorial unity, there is far less vehemence about this than in the past. In fact, some in Turkey are beginning to argue privately that there are worse things for Ankara than an independent Iraqi Kurdistan.

Not only are Iraq's neighbors trying to pull the country in very different directions—and threatening to tear it apart in the process—but spillover from the Syrian civil war also is antagonizing and galvanizing its factions, prying at

these same fissures. The Shia parties that dominate the government increasingly side with Assad's Shia Alawite faction in Syria (in part because of Iranian pressure to do so). And in similar fashion, many Iraqi Sunnis sympathize with their coreligionists across the border. The fact that many Sunni Arab tribes span the border simply adds fuel to that fire: the Shammaris, Dulaimis, Ubaydis and other tribesmen of Iraq are glad to help their cousins across the border fight the Shia regime in Damascus. Likewise, the Kurds of Iraq feel kinship with the Kurds of Syria, and there is a struggle between Barzani's KDP and the anti-Turkish Kurdistan Workers' Party, allied to the Alawite regime. This reinforces the KDP's rivalry with Maliki.

With all of these machinations playing out across the country and the region, it should not be surprising that tensions are rising and violence is slowly increasing in Iraq.

Iraq Adrift

At the end of *The Prince*, Machiavelli famously cries out for some great Italian lord to employ the methods he described to save Italy from its foreign foes and from itself by uniting the country and building a strong state that could quell internal divisions and resist external domination. To many readers, it seems utterly incongruous coming at the end of a long, dispassionate discourse on the callous truths of politics, war and diplomacy.

Looking at Iraq across the oceans, it is tempting to make a similar plea—to cry out for some powerful but well-meaning nation to rescue Iraq from itself and from its neighbors by championing the cause of Iraqi democracy against its myriad foes, foreign and domestic. But there is no point in doing so. The only nation with the strength to do so is the United States, and the United States has departed from Iraq, never to return. The next U.S. administration—

whether it is the same or different—is not going to return thousands of troops to Iraq. Nor will any Iraqi government invite Washington to do so anytime soon.

Iraq is passing beyond America's power to shape it. The United States largely gave up that power, squandering it under Bush 43 and surrendering it under Obama. Unfortunately, the continuing global addiction to oil means that Iraq's future remains of great importance to the United States, and its resurgent failings raise concerns that in the future it will create as many problems for the United States as it has in the past.

Still, there are things Washington could do to coax Iraq toward a better path. American diplomats were critical to brokering the partial—but very hopeful—deal on oil exports struck between Baghdad and Erbil in September, indicating that there are still opportunities for the United States to have a positive impact in Iraq. We

could rebuild our leverage with Baghdad by offering a wider range of military and civilian aid. Perhaps of greater value, we could continue to call Iraq's political leaders on their actions, defining what "right" looks like and using our moral authority as the architects of Iraqi democracy to see its leaders conform to both the letter and the spirit of its system. But we must recognize that even that will be of limited value. As great a nation as the United States is, its power is limited—especially when there is no will to wield it.

Today's Iraq owns its future. It looks uncertain at best, and we may not be able to escape the consequences should it fail. After Machiavelli finished *The Prince*, Italy endured four and a half centuries of further civil strife, foreign invasion, misrule, poverty and weakness before emerging as something vaguely like what he had envisioned in the *Discourses*. Would that Iraq does better. □

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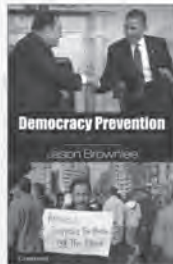


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Asia's New Age of Instability

By Michael Wesley

A central theme in the Obama administration's recent foreign-policy narrative has been that the United States is returning to Asia after a decade of distractions in the Middle East. It is easy to argue that Asia should be America's highest foreign-policy priority. After the financial crisis, Asia emerged as the growth dynamo on which the hopes for the revival of the American and global economies are pinned. At the same time, this very economic dynamism produces huge bilateral trade deficits and is largely responsible for the steady decline of American manufacturing. And Asia is home to the United States' most serious strategic competitor: China.

America is about to discover that Asia has changed dramatically over the past decade. Its main strategic competitor is now its largest creditor; its most important regional ally, Japan, has entered its third decade of economic stagnation, demographic decline and toxic politics; and once-estranged countries such as India and Vietnam have become promising but demanding partners. America has changed too. It is constrained by a war-weary population and a stifling government debt burden.

The big question is where the United States fits into this changed Asia. Its current approach appears to be a mixture of updated Asia strategies of old and

tactical responses to various demands of Asian competitors, allies and partners—some wanting the United States to be a guarantor; others wanting it to be a balancer; and yet others viewing America as an opponent. What is missing is a careful reappraisal of Asia's new strategic dynamics, a hardheaded assessment of what America's Asian interests are and a considered approach to fulfilling these interests.

Such a reappraisal requires a proper understanding of the pillars of America's successful Asia policies in the last quarter of the twentieth century. It should include an analysis of the fundamental changes that have undermined these pillars and will likely erode them further in coming decades. It must then identify American interests within the new Asia and find the best policy levers for securing them.

In the quarter century after the 1975 fall of Saigon, U.S. policy in Asia was highly successful, based on economic and security returns against strategic investments. During this period, the economies of Pacific Asia grew faster than any region in human history and pulled the American economy into a robust growth cycle. Meanwhile, American strategic interests across the region were unchallenged, while political tensions over U.S. basing were managed effectively. Conflict within and between states declined steadily. Alliance relationships were straightforward and uncomplicated.

Michael Wesley is an adjunct professor at the University of Sydney and a nonresident senior fellow at the Brookings Institution.

America's successful policies in Asia were built on four interlocking pillars. The first was the inability of any Asian state to aspire to regional leadership. The region's largest states were too poor and internally focused to make serious bids for predominance, while the richest and most cohesive were



too small. With no state making a bid for leadership, Asian nations generally accepted Washington's regional footprint.

But the United States carefully crafted a "hegemony-lite" alliance structure that maintained the region's noncompetitive dynamic by ensuring a high cost to any Asian state that tried to assert its leadership. The alliance network and historical memories discouraged Japan, the only country large and wealthy enough to contemplate the possibility, from attempting to assert regional dominance. After the Vietnam War, the United States itself reduced its regional presence, and Asian nations viewed its footprint as light enough to ensure America was a nonthreatening guarantor of regional order.

The second pillar, interlocking with the first, was the belief among Asian elites that economic development trumped

all other priorities and no political or strategic dispute should threaten the stability essential to development. The postindependence leaders in Southeast Asia believed that rivalry and confrontation resulted in widespread poverty and unrest. The formation of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 1967 created a regional ethos—that stability was essential for development and development was essential for stability. This stimulated regional growth and spread across Pacific Asia in subsequent decades.

The United States invested in the second pillar by adding a third: it let Asian states institute distinctive political and economic models allowing them to nurture and mobilize domestic wealth and expertise free of external competitors and to minimize the impact of economic retardants. Japan, for example, constructed an economy closed to outside investment, structured around the domestic mobilization of capital and the close involvement of the state in the economy, and oriented toward the maximization of manufactures exports managed by a controlled exchange rate. South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore adopted elements of the Japanese model. But they added a form of soft authoritarian governance to forestall any internal resistance to their rapid development.

The United States also kept its large, dynamic domestic market open to Asian exports, even in the face of mounting trade deficits. Meanwhile, America's alliance system allowed the Asian tigers to stint

on their own security investments while channeling resources into their economic development. The United States did not give such concessions to any other region. The third pillar validated and strengthened the first two by demonstrating quickly the returns that came from shelving ambitions and rivalries. It also stirred loyalty to the norms and structures of the global economic order without giving the Asian states any significant voice in shaping those norms. Even as the world's second-largest economy, Japan played a relatively minor role in major decisions affecting the global economic order.

The fourth interlocking pillar was the close alignment between Asian states' security partnerships and their trading and investment patterns. The noncommunist countries in Asia, whether American allies or passive beneficiaries of the alliance network, all became part of a Pacific Rim trading cycle that brought together American consumers, North Asian manufacturing, Southeast Asian labor, and Australian minerals and energy. It was a trading cycle that both compensated for the Cold War separation of Pacific Asia from its traditional economic hinterland in mainland China and promoted unprecedented growth rates.

The American alliance system, with its alignment of security and prosperity interests, made compromises easy: as Washington watched its allies and friends boom, it was easier to overlook their less-than-liberal economic and political practices. Meanwhile, as long as American troops and aircraft carriers stayed in the Pacific, Asia's dynamic economies accepted Washington's dollar-seigniorage privileges and its preferences for the global economy.

The four pillars of Asia's late-twentieth-century stability now are under unprecedented challenge. The power dis-

tribution that ensured no Asian country was in a position to make a bid for regional leadership—the first pillar of stability—has given way to a more hierarchical order. China sits atop the Asian power pyramid, with substantial economic heft, high growth rates, geographic and demographic size, and military-modernization levels that provide ample capacity to assert regional leadership.

But China lives in a crowded and jealous neighborhood that includes direct rivals with competing territorial claims and historically uneasy relationships: Japan, Vietnam, Indonesia, India and perhaps Russia. These second-tier powers don't want to cede regional leadership to Beijing, but they also don't want to balance explicitly against China's growing clout. They prefer to reach out to each other and to the United States through a network of less formal collaborations: investments in vital infrastructure, foreign direct investment, collaborative naval exercises, and joint ventures in energy and technology.

Meanwhile, the rapid growth of second-tier powers is raising apprehensions in some of their neighbors. A tertiary level of soft balancing has emerged in Asia as the neighbors of second-tier powers reach out to China for reassurance. China's trade with India's neighbors is almost four times the value of India's trade with them, while Beijing's closest relationships in Southeast Asia are with countries that have long lived in Vietnam's shadow. A destabilizing dynamic of bids and counterbids for Asian preeminence is well under way.

The second pillar also is crumbling. After five decades of economic growth, the commitment of Asian elites to a mutual understanding on stability and development is giving way to an unstable mix of vulnerability and entitlement. Industrialization and urbanization have made Asia's most dynamic economies heavily dependent on imports of minerals

and energy, a dependence that will only increase. This has generated a sense of vulnerability in some Asian capitals based on concerns about access to reasonably priced resources and the capacity of strategic rivals to interrupt supply routes. At the same time, the sudden emergence of the big Asian economies as the growth dynamos of the global economy has generated nationalist expectations that they should be treated with greater respect by other countries. A mix of greater vulnerability and growing confidence has played out in an accelerating series of confrontations in the East China Sea, the South China Sea, the Sea of Japan and the Sino-Indian border region.

Pillar three also is under challenge. The United States and the world no longer want to allow the policy choices of Asian economies to fly under the radar of scrutiny and pressure, while their sudden prominence has led Asia's major economies to demand a greater voice in global economic affairs. Concern about America's trade deficits with Pacific economies is not new. In the mid-1980s, the United States pressured Japan to revalue the yen-dollar exchange rate via the Plaza Accord; a decade later, the Asian financial crisis and International Monetary Fund (IMF) actions delivered political and economic reforms that brought Asian countries' policy settings into greater alignment with Washington's preferences. The United States and Europe used China's accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) as leverage to gain Chinese economic reforms.

But with the global financial crisis, the tables have turned. The malaise in Europe, America and Japan has given sudden prominence to Asia's emerging economies as the great hope for the global economy. This new prominence has stirred Chinese leaders such as president-in-waiting Xi Jinping to remind the West of its responsibility for

the crisis and consequently the hypocrisy of the West's attempts to pressure China into reforms. Asia's big economies, joined by other emerging powers such as Brazil, now have a major impact on global initiatives, from the WTO's Doha Development Round to action on global warming. Their exchange-rate valuations, energy pricing, fiscal policy and investment now have impact far beyond Asia. Beijing's statements about the need to end the U.S. dollar's role as the sole global currency, the growing voice of emerging Asian economies in the IMF and the increasing footprint of Asian donors in global development assistance are all signs of the burgeoning weight of Asian voices in the global economy. Thus, the gap in economic perceptions and preferences between the United States and the major Asian economies is wider than ever; what has changed is the significance of these disagreements for the global economy and their new prominence in shaping U.S.-Asian relations.

The fourth pillar of Asia's stability—the alignment between security preferences and trading and investment patterns—also has crumbled. China has begun to reclaim its natural position as the economic hinterland of the Pacific economies. Over the past decade, it has emerged at the center of the region's tightly integrated Asian system of distributed manufacturing. Industrialized economies in East and Southeast Asia increasingly have become exporters of component parts to China, the final point of assembly and export of finished products. Component exports increased from just over half of Southeast Asia's exports in 1992 to two-thirds in 2007. The main destination was China, whose imports of component parts grew from just 16 percent of its manufacturing imports from East Asia in 1992 to 46 percent in 2007. This integration is reflected in the fact that Asian nations tracked China's economic fortunes

For the first time in decades, the prospect of an Asian power hierarchy is imaginable, welcomed by some and feared by others.

during the global financial crisis more than they did those of the United States or Europe.

Many of the region's countries that are most closely bound into China's economy are either allies of the United States, rivals of China or both. Japan, South Korea, the Philippines and Australia have tightened their alliances with the United States as they have simultaneously deepened their economic integration with China. But countries that are not U.S. allies—Vietnam, India, Indonesia and Singapore—also have tightened their security ties to Washington while trading and investing more intensively with China. As Asia's rivalries deepen, instability increases, and the pulls of economic and security interests will introduce further uncertainty.

For the first time in decades, the prospect of an Asian power hierarchy is imaginable, welcomed by some and feared by others. Asian economies are major consumers of global energy, minerals and food, and this raises fears of systemic vulnerability of supplies. The postcrisis prominence of Asia's emerging economies has built a new sense of confidence, with those nations demanding respect and a greater global role. But the arrival of this prominence has been so sudden that few Asian powers have clear agendas for the global economy or its institutions. A major question mark hovers over the evolving strategic intentions of the Asian powers.

Thus, this new Asia presents unprecedented complexity in the strategic choices facing both Asian nations and the

United States. Governments, regional organizations and commentators have put forth four policy responses to Asia's new strategic picture. None fully takes into account the nature of Asia's strategic change and instability.

Some analysts and experts argue that the best mechanism for Asian stability is the one that ensured stability for the past sixty years: the U.S. system of alliances. Adherents of this concept believe Washington and its allies and partners should invest in maintaining the U.S. system's predominance in Asia. The idea is that this position of strength would keep the costs prohibitively high for any Asian power with aspirations to regional leadership. The stability and certainty provided by a robust U.S. alliance system would ensure continued prosperity and discourage potential challengers from upending the continuity of Asia's security order. But signs of an American weakening or retreat would tempt regional powers to fill the vacuum, ushering in a period of debilitating power rivalries.

This strategy enjoys bipartisan support in the United States and has strong proponents among governments and commentators in Asia. The systematic tightening of bilateral alliances between the United States and Japan, Australia, South Korea and the Philippines since 1996 and the rapid development of security "partnerships" between the United States and India, Singapore, Malaysia, Vietnam and Indonesia since 2000 suggest that Asian countries are embracing this option. But some experts question its sustainability.

They note that America's Asian allies have become used to investing relatively little in their alliances with Washington. Since the end of the Vietnam War, they haven't been asked to contribute to alliance operations in the region (though several have contributed forces to coalition operations in the Middle East), and they have made force-acquisition choices based largely on national, rather than alliance, requirements.

But the combination of China's military buildup, targeted toward vulnerabilities in the U.S. force posture in the western Pacific, and mounting government debt in the United States means that much more is likely to be asked of U.S. allies and partners in Asia. And the commitment issue goes beyond money. After America's expenditure of blood in Iraq and Afghanistan, its public would not long tolerate a U.S. Asian intervention in which local allies shed significantly less blood than the Americans. Thus, a much higher proportion of the "investment" in the U.S. alliance system—in terms of resources and explicit commitments—will need to be made by Washington's Asian allies and partners. But those allies most closely aligned with America—Japan, South Korea and Australia—lack the heft to seriously help counter the challenge of China's buildup. Those partners with the greatest heft—India, Vietnam, Indonesia—are least likely to align closely with the U.S. alliance system, given their view of their place in the world and the expanding range of options conferred by their new prominence.

Asia's age of instability also poses dilemmas for a Washington that has doubled down on its alliance commitments across the Pacific. The growing frictions between China and its smaller neighbors in the South China Sea and the East China Sea pose an entrapment danger for the United States in the western Pacific. America's embrace of the status quo in

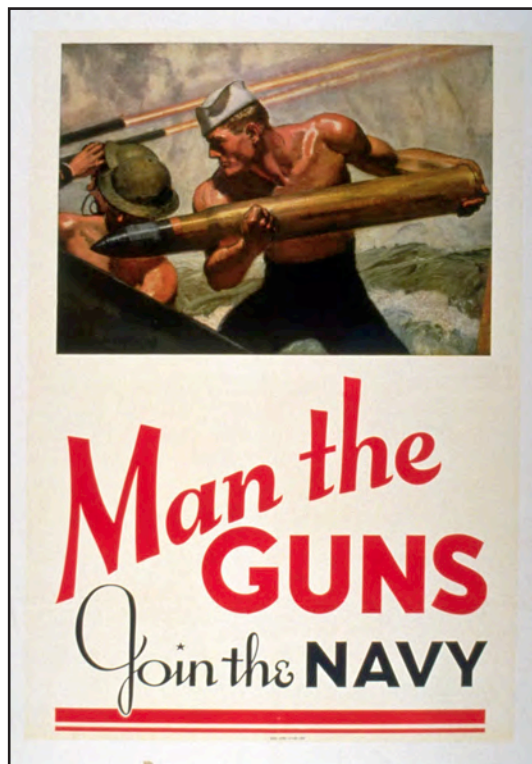
these waters has bolstered the confidence of the Philippines and Vietnam in strongly opposing Beijing's claims, militarily and diplomatically. For Washington, these low-level confrontations will pose a never-ending dilemma over when to demonstrate commitment to allies and when to stay silent to keep China's neighbors from becoming too assertive. Washington's interests in maintaining freedom of navigation and reassuring its allies of its reliability have to be balanced against the downside of giving its Asian allies and partners a blank check to push their claims aggressively. For the United States, a combination of its geographic remoteness and Asian allies' memories of its perceived unreliability during the 1997 Asian financial crisis has heightened its reliability-entrapment dilemma. For its Asian allies, the continuation of tense relations with China is the best insurance that the United States will continue supporting them.

The second prescription for bolstering Asia's stability focuses on regional institutions. The success of ASEAN in shelving regional tensions and disputes bolsters arguments that Asia's future stability lies in multilateral institutions rather than bilateral alliances. The growth of regional institutions with ASEAN at their core—including Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation, the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), ASEAN Plus Three and the East Asia Summit—is interpreted as the steady externalization of ASEAN's principles of intramural conflict avoidance. Joining these bodies are yet more regional gatherings such as meetings of the ASEAN defense ministers plus those of the United States, China, India, Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand and Russia as well as the Shangri-La Dialogue and a host of joint military exercises and patrols. The rationale here is that these forms of Asian regionalism can move Asia from a "modern," conflict-

prone region to a “postmodern,” postconflict region, as Europe did after World War II. Enhanced regionalism seeks to socialize away impulses toward hierarchy and rivalry through the repeated engagement of Asian countries in disaster relief, joint exercises, military exchanges, peacekeeping, patrolling against transnational threats and second-track discussions.

Based on the number of regional multilateral meetings, the emergence of a postmodern security order would appear to be well under way. But it is doubtful whether all this frenetic trust building has really had much impact on the deeper drivers of strategic rivalry and instability. The trend lines of Asian countries’ military expenditures tell a tale of escalating security competition. Over more than fifteen years, institutions such as the ARF have been ineffective at resolving issues of ongoing tensions such as the rival claims in the South China Sea—to a large extent because they are prevented from directly addressing actual disputes. In 2002, Indonesia and Malaysia, founding members of ASEAN, referred their territorial dispute over the Sipadan and Ligitan islands to the International Court of Justice for adjudication rather than to any regional organization. It is hard to imagine Asia’s multilateral institutions transitioning from conflict shelvees to shock absorbers and conflict resolvers, which they must do if they are to be any sort of answer to Asia’s rising instability.

There are also signs that some of Asia’s major powers have sometimes seen regional institutions less as vehicles for cooperation than for competition. Beijing’s clear preference for Asia’s premier institution is ASEAN Plus Three (China, South Korea and Japan). Tokyo, worried that such a



small grouping opens the institution up to Chinese domination, prefers to add India, the United States, Russia, Australia and New Zealand. Japan and China each engaged in frenetic campaigning in early 2005 to gain support for its own preference among Southeast Asian countries. In the end, both versions of regionalism were created; the Beijing-Tokyo competition over regionalism may have abated for now but could reemerge in future. Regional institutions could generate Asian turbulence rather than assuaging it.

A third policy solution involves a combination of alliances and regional institutions. By investing in the alliance system and thus raising the costs to a challenger, the United States and its allies can deter China from taking on the status quo. The counterpart to this “hard” balancing is “soft” engagement through

The growing frictions between China and its smaller neighbors in the South China Sea and the East China Sea pose an entrapment danger for the United States in the western Pacific.

regional institutions where the deeper engagement of China will help socialize Beijing into accepting the status quo. The rationale is to soften the confrontational aspect of hard balancing while closing off China's other options to being socialized through regional institutions.

This hedging concept, however, does nothing to mitigate the weaknesses in both the alliance and regionalism options. The United States and its allies still face real dilemmas in investing sufficiently in the predominance of the alliance system to deter China's challenge. The allies' commitment dilemmas—on both sides—don't go away. And there is scant evidence that two decades of membership in regional organizations have “socialized” Beijing in any significant way. China appears completely comfortable in Asian institutions, even taking on an increasingly vigorous role, because they give Beijing a greater say in regional affairs while allowing it to cordon off any issue it wishes to avoid. Thus, Beijing pursues its stridency in the South China Sea, confident that the region's institutions won't discuss the resulting tensions against its wishes. The Asian institutions' tendency to duck points of friction in the changing power order has led the region's states to invest heavily in other responses: arms buildups, alliances and security partnerships.

The fourth prescription focuses on a great-power agreement on a concert of power. Proponents argue that, despite increasing instability and rivalry, Asia's great powers will by necessity agree on the need to avoid conflict. A Concert of Asia

would grow from a common agreement that tensions, territorial disagreements and misunderstandings should be managed without conflict. With solidarity among the great powers on this imperative, no single power could challenge the concert system. To manage international rivalries and dissension, a Concert of Asia would rely heavily on mutual commitment of the participating powers to the prerogatives and rights of each and their common responsibilities to maintain the region's order and stability. For some proponents, this would mean that the United States and China would have to reach agreement that each has a legitimate role in regional leadership, which would require Washington to concede to Beijing a more substantial regional leadership role than it currently does.

The Concert of Asia, unlike the U.S. alliance network or regional institutions, is currently just an idea. It has no track record against which to test its prospects. But, like the other prescriptions, it generates doubts about whether it can mitigate Asia's age of instability. Concerts, after all, will endure only when their members share fundamentally compatible ideas on what constitutes a stable and acceptable order. This appears to be a remote condition in Asia. There is a fundamental divide among developed and emerging powers on many aspects of the regional and global orders, including the composition and scope of international and regional institutions, the competing imperatives of sovereignty and intervention, and the operation of global markets. For the United States, the answer

is for China and the other Asian powers to accede to the existing order; for Beijing this would be tantamount to followership, although it is unclear whether China has formulated alternatives for elements of the current order it opposes. These disagreements manifest themselves in standoffs within several institutions, and a Concert of Asia isn't likely to avoid similar disagreements. There also appears to be scant incentive for China, the United States or any other Asian great power to concede parity to others. China sees itself as rising and the United States in decline, while many Americans see America's problems as temporary and China's ascent as destined to be short-lived. As long as their expectations remain divergent, Asia's great powers aren't likely to agree on their mutual roles and prerogatives.

As Asia's emerging strategic rivalries intensify, the current menu of policy choices could actually worsen instability in the region. Strategies of predominance and hedging run the risk of exacerbating instability, while emphasizing regionalism or establishing a great-power concert would at best only paper over the region's dangerous dynamics. Instead, Washington needs to return to the philosophy that underpinned its highly successful Asia policy in the last quarter of the twentieth century: investing in the stabilizing possibilities of Asia's local strategic dynamics.

The most fundamental starting point for a new U.S. strategy in Asia must be an acceptance that the region has moved from a situation of a relative absence of rivalry to one of escalating rivalry. In this context, U.S. alliances and partnerships no longer hold the prospect of a "hegemony-lite" policy of making any bid for regional preeminence prohibitively costly. Instead, Washington should accept that the best avenue for countering Beijing's regional

preeminence is through local Asian apprehensions and balancing behaviors, which present China with a much more complicated challenge than direct military competition with the United States. American and Asian interests should coincide here in using these new dynamics of rivalry as stabilizing forces for the region.

Fortunately, Asia's other new strategic dynamics provide possibilities for mitigating local rivalries with stabilizing factors. The vulnerability of Asia's emerging powers to sudden disruptions in energy, minerals and food supplies is one such powerful stabilizing factor, reminding Asia's great powers that if their rivalries spin out of control, they could jeopardize the very bases of their newfound power and stature.

Similar possibilities exist in the growing divergence between the security and prosperity interests of regional states. The growing codependence of Asia's emerging powers on each other for their prosperity and economic growth should be fostered, as it is a compelling restraint on their strategic rivalry. At the same time, Asian states' wariness of becoming too beholden to Beijing should forestall the prospect that the rest of Asia will slowly gravitate toward China in forming an exclusive economic and political bloc.

If America gets its approach to Asia wrong, it will exacerbate the region's instabilities, ushering in a period of global unsteadiness. But as the only non-Asian country with the capacity to influence the geopolitics of Asia, and with a clear set of interests in the stability and prosperity of the region, the United States has a central role to play in helping build a stable Asia in this century. To do this, it must return to the original source of its remarkable policy success in Asia—a commitment to understanding the sources of local instability and investing in local impulses toward peace and prosperity. □

China's Inadvertent Empire

By Raffaello Pantucci and Alexandros Petersen

President Obama's late 2011 announcement of his administration's pivot to Asia marked a sea change in America's geopolitical posture away from Europe and the Middle East to Asia and the Pacific Rim. Reflecting the growing strategic repercussions of China's rise, the move presages a new era of great-power politics as the United States and China compete in Pacific waters. But is the United States looking in the right place?

A number of American strategists, Robert D. Kaplan among them, have written that a potential U.S.-Chinese cold war will be less onerous than the struggle with the Soviet Union because it will require only a naval element instead of permanent land forces stationed in allied countries to rein in a continental menace. This may be true with regard to the South China Sea, for example, or the Malacca Strait. But it misses the significance of the vast landmass of Central Asia, where China is consolidating its position into what appears to be an inadvertent empire. As General Liu Yazhou of China's People's Liberation Army

once put it, Central Asia is "the thickest piece of cake given to the modern Chinese by the heavens."

For most of its unified history, China has been an economically focused land power. In geopolitical terms today, China's rise is manifest particularly on land in Eurasia, far from the might of the U.S. Pacific Fleet and Washington's rimland allies—and far also from the influence of other Asian powers such as India. Thus, Western policy makers should be dusting off the old works of Sir Halford Mackinder, who argued that Central Asia is the most pivotal geographic zone on the planet, rather than those of Alfred Thayer Mahan, the great U.S. strategist of sea power. Greater attention needs to be paid to China's growing presence in Central Asia if the United States is to understand properly China's geopolitical and strategic rise.

Indeed, to the extent that China is able to challenge America's naval position in the Pacific, it will be because it has consolidated its land position in Central Asia and feels more secure on that flank to confront the United States at sea. As Kaplan has written, "Merely by going to sea in the manner that it is, China demonstrates its favorable position on land in the heart of Asia."

Looking at the arc of Chinese history, China has never been a naval power. Aside from the fifteenth-century explorer Zheng He's naval expeditions, Chinese empires have traditionally focused on their land power. And even Zheng He, for all his skills

Raffaello Pantucci is a visiting scholar at the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences. **Alexandros Petersen** is the author of *The World Island: Eurasian Geopolitics and the Fate of the West* (Praeger, 2011). This article is the result of a year of research across Central Asia, including Afghanistan, and is part of a larger book project. Their joint work appears at www.chinaincentralasia.com.

as a naval adventurer, was eventually shored by the Haijin edict that marked China's retreat from the sea. The focus for Chinese imperial dynasties was maintaining the integrity of their massive state.

This fixation with territorial authority is something that persists to this day with the current Chinese Communist Party's preoccupation with domestic economic growth. This is mostly a survival mechanism to prove the party's capacity for effective governance and therefore justify its continued dominance. But it also has had the effect of somewhat warping Chinese foreign policy to serve domestic interests.

Nowhere is this clearer than in Central Asia, where China's steadily developing policy toward the region has been focused on securing natural resources. This has further developed recently into a strategy to create a more prosperous neighborhood with which China's restive westernmost province, Xinjiang, can trade. Far from the center (everything in Xinjiang operates two hours later than Beijing, though the official time is the same as in Beijing), rich in natural resources but largely empty and burdened with minority tensions that periodically spill into violence, Xinjiang long has been a concern to decision makers in Beijing's governing complex of Zhongnanhai.

These concerns surged anew in July 2009 when rioting in the provincial capital of Urumqi led to more than two hundred deaths. Sparked by protests in the city against reports of Uighur workers in Guangdong Province being abused, the trouble quickly escalated into rioting in which mobs of Uighurs marched around the city beating hapless Han to death. The next day angry Han staged counter-riots directed at the Uighurs as well as at the Han authorities' inability to protect them or resolve the province's long-standing problems. Chinese president Hu Jintao

quickly departed a G-8 summit in Italy to take charge of the situation.

In the wake of the violence, Beijing decided it was time for a new approach. Senior leaders in Urumqi's security establishment were fired, and in April 2010 the long-time local party boss Wang Lequan was eased out of his position. Replacing him was Zhang Chunxian, the former governor of Hunan Province, who had received plaudits for his work in bringing economic development to that province. The capstone of this revitalized strategy toward Xinjiang was a May 2010 work conference that produced a number of key decisions related to the province. Richer provinces were given responsibility for parts of Xinjiang; national energy companies exploiting Xinjiang's rich hydrocarbon wealth were ordered to leave more money in the province in the form of taxes; and "special economic zones" were established in Kashgar (in southern Xinjiang Province) and Khorgos (a land crossing with Kazakhstan). Emphasizing external trade for provincial development, decision makers upgraded the annual Urumqi Foreign Economic Relations and Trade Fair to the far grander China-Eurasia Expo.

But a landlocked province such as Xinjiang can be developed only if its immediate periphery is stable and prosperous enough to trade with it. Bordering Pakistan, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Russia and Mongolia, Xinjiang is in the middle of a rough neighborhood. This means China has a keen interest in economic and security developments in Central Asia—stretching from the five post-Soviet Central Asian states to Afghanistan.

This concern is reflected in a combination of security, economic and cultural efforts China has instituted across the region. Interestingly, these efforts don't seem

to be a product of a complete and considered strategy. But, taken together, they show a picture more comprehensive than is often appreciated. It isn't clear that even China grasps the incidental impact of its regional activity in reshaping Central Asia or how it is perceived by regional states, as Chinese actors are simply so focused on developing Xinjiang and extracting what they want from Central Asia. With Russia's influence in the region at a historically low ebb and the widespread perception across Central Asia that the United States will strategically abandon the region once most combat troops have withdrawn from Afghanistan, Beijing has carved out an inadvertent empire. Lacking a clear strategy and attempting to keep a low profile



(a characteristic Chinese approach), China has become the most consequential actor in Central Asia.

Hallmarks of this approach are heavy investments in natural resources; infrastructure development; the establishment of Confucius Institutes, nonprofit institutions sponsored by the Chinese government that promote Chinese language and culture; security exercises; and the establishment of a multilateral regional organization. China also is bolstering

cross-border traders who are the economic lifeblood of the old Silk Road. Sitting atop it all is the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), which offers an umbrella for China to demonstrate that its regional activities are undertaken with the acquiescence of neighboring powers.

The driver is economics, seen most clearly in China's heavy purchasing of large mineral and hydrocarbon sites across the region. In Kazakhstan, the China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) has gone into partnership with the local, state-owned enterprise (SOE) KazMunaiGaz to secure 4 percent of China's oil imports from Kazakhstan. Turkmenistan currently accounts for almost a third of China's imported natural gas—mostly coming through the speedily built China-Central Asia pipeline, which in 2011 brought some 15.5 billion cubic meters (BCM) of gas to China. CNPC aims to send 24.1 BCM this year and eventually get the flow up to 65 BCM. Further, CNPC secured the rights to develop an oil field in Amu Darya in northern Afghanistan, upriver to a project it already is exploiting in Turkmenistan. According to Kabul analysts, this field, a small one for a company as large as CNPC, is a kind of toe in the water for the Chinese

SOE to prepare for future contracts in the hydrocarbon-rich area.

It is not only oil and gas that Chinese firms see in Central Asia. State-owned mining firms Jiangxi Copper and the China Metallurgical Group Corporation (MCC) partnered to invest near \$4 billion to exploit the Mes Aynak copper mine southeast of Kabul. And while Chinese firms have been less visible on recent mining tenders in Afghanistan, they doubtless noted the U.S. Geological

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Survey's estimate of nearly a trillion dollars worth of minerals in the country. Furthermore, Chinese mining firms have won concessions to mine for gold in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

But while this natural wealth will help feed China's insatiable demand for resources, it won't necessarily help develop Xinjiang. That will require the development of infrastructure across Central Asia. Crippled by aging Soviet infrastructure, the region is a blank canvas for outside developers. China is not the only player around. South Korea has a notable presence in Uzbekistan, while Turkish and French firms dominate the Turkmenistan market. But it is notable to see Chinese firms developing roads leading in and out of Xinjiang. The road from Kashgar to Osh in Kyrgyzstan through the Irkeshtam Pass was built by the China Bridge and Road Company. Chinese workers in distinctive green military greatcoats with shiny buttons could be found earlier this year directing trucks of dirt to complete the road's final stretches. Other roads can be found in Tajikistan with crews of Chinese repairing parts from Dushanbe toward the Afghan border. Dual-language Russian-Chinese signs mark the workers' presence. More notable in Tajikistan is the only toll road in the country, going north from Dushanbe to Khujand, built by a Chinese firm and broken up by a shoddily designed Iranian tunnel at the Shahrison Pass. This soon will be replaced by a Chinese-built tunnel.

China also has sought to help develop the region's rail systems. A train line is being built from China through Kyrgyzstan

to Uzbekistan. Other train networks are being developed to strengthen links with Kazakhstan, including a high-speed train to be exported there from China. Other infrastructure elements are being spearheaded or supported by Chinese firms, including gas metering in Uzbekistan, telecoms across the region and hydropower developments in Tajikistan.

Various forms of funding have emerged. Primary among them is the use of linked loans or lines of credit provided through China Export-Import Bank. Often granted with provisions guaranteeing that Chinese firms get the contracts, these loans are breeding a growing number of Chinese train carriages in the region as well as Chinese road crews. In addition, Chinese firms often are the winning bidders in projects tendered by the Asian Development Bank (ADB). Regional ADB officials openly praise the Chinese companies and their work. The ADB's Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation program dovetails with China's road-building aim of connecting the underdeveloped region with its wealthier neighbors. But China wants this infrastructure to be oriented in its direction rather than toward Afghanistan, as the ADB would prefer.

The fruits of this road and rail construction are seen in the markets of Kara-Suu in Kyrgyzstan, Barakholka in Kazakhstan or as far as Türkmenabat's bazaars in Turkmenistan, just across the border from Uzbekistan. Sprawling fields harbor truck trailers with doors cut in them so merchants can peddle goods to local buyers. Traders in Uzbekistan report

using Chinese roads and rail links to get goods from Guangzhou and Urumqi to their markets, while in Dushanbe the aptly named Shanghai Market offers a shrunken version of this model focused mostly on home construction. This trade includes such goods as air conditioners, televisions and knickknacks of the kind commonly associated with China. Xinjiang traders and truckers are largely responsible for this back and forth, which is helping expand China's market presence in Central Asia, opening up Xinjiang's markets and providing employment in the region.

Taken as a composite, this may appear to be a coherent strategy, but there is little evidence that it was developed consciously as a grand plan in Beijing. Beyond the Xinjiang development program, the other main area of Chinese concentration has been the SCO, a somewhat half-baked organization initially formed to resolve regional border disputes. For Beijing, the ideal would be for the organization to become a vehicle through which it can direct China's economic investments in the region. Beijing policy makers have advanced notions of creating an SCO development bank and an SCO free-trade zone. At the latest summit in Beijing, China pledged \$10 billion in regional support through the organization. But this eagerness is not shared by other SCO members—in particular Russia, which sees China's rise in Central Asia as a direct threat to its interests. Regional powerhouses such as Kazakhstan also fear being overwhelmed by the Chinese economic machine.

This fearful undertone of economic dominance runs throughout Central Asia. Uzbekistan looks at Kyrgyzstan with concern, nervous of its fate if Chinese goods take over Uzbekistan's economy in the same manner that they dominate Kyrgyzstan. The fact that Chinese firms entering Central Asia often bring their own workers

from China raises fears of employment deprivation and eventual Chinese regional dominance. Conscious of this, China has made efforts to develop cultural links with the region to dispel such concerns.

These efforts involve sending cultural delegations to Central Asia, including Chinese orchestras and theater troupes. But the Chinese government also has sought to import the Chinese language through a network of Confucius Institutes. In Kyrgyzstan, institutes and affiliate organizations can be found in Bishkek, Osh, Jalabad and Naryn. In Tajikistan, a main institute in Dushanbe has a single satellite in a city near Khujand. In Uzbekistan, the institute offices are poor competitors to the local Chinese-language educational system, a leftover from Tashkent's historical role as the region's educational and economic leader. But even there, local university Chinese departments rely on professors from China to help them teach locals. In Kazakhstan, institute offices are in Astana and Almaty, based out of local universities and providing Chinese education in Kazakhstan's growing educational system. Turkmenistan has no Confucius Institute presence, although a pair of Chinese teachers reportedly work out of the Turkmen National Institute of World Languages. And in Afghanistan, the institute office at Kabul University is run by an earnest, young Afghan Mandarin speaker while Beijing-sent teachers wait for the country to stabilize. Institute students largely plan to become traders or help their parents trade. A number have been recruited by Chinese firms operating regionally that seek managers or translators.

China also has welcomed Central Asian students at its universities, offering scholarships through the Confucius Institutes and other outreach efforts. Exact numbers are hard to come by, but there are at least a thousand Turkmen students in

China, and in 2010 nearly eight thousand Kazakh students studied in China. Some of these Central Asian students participate in the SCO university program, a network of fifty-four universities across member states that sends groups of students across borders for course work. The long-term effect of these educational links is that China increasingly is building a profile as the power of the next generation in Central Asia. It is difficult to project, but the impact will be felt once today's student generation begins to dominate the workforce and hold positions of power. This is not a centralized effort by China, but local knowledge of Chinese language and familiarity with Chinese culture ultimately will come to shape the future of China's inadvertent empire.

The country's engagement in Central Asia naturally pulls attention to the SCO. As the only regional organization set up and led by China, it is a symbol of the importance Beijing places on the region to its west. The SCO's makeup of China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan poses a natural rivalry with Russia's regional organizations: the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), the Eurasian Economic Community and the largely dormant Commonwealth of Independent States. There is also intense bilateral competition among member states: Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, China and Russia. It is notable, however, that of all of the multilateral organizations in the region, the SCO is the one that Tashkent, for example, seems to take most seriously, participating at high levels at summits and contributing forces to military exercises. Uzbekistan's 2012 withdrawal from the CSTO reflected not only dissatisfaction with Moscow but also a willingness to draw closer to China as a strategic partner. This does not necessarily imply the perception of a reduced threat from China. It may

be that states in the region are adjusting to the inevitable: China will dominate the region economically, even as Russia remains the most pugnacious outside power there.

The SCO's official statements would suggest it is an anti-Western and in particular an anti-American organization. In 2006, the United States sought to become an observer country but was rejected. The 2005 SCO summit issued a statement calling for NATO and the United States to set a timetable for withdrawing their military presence from SCO-member territory. Official Chinese coverage of the event interpreted the statement as calling on the United States to cease security cooperation in Central Asia so the SCO could "safeguard" the region. But these statements square neither with the broader foreign policies of the member states nor with the actions and capabilities of the SCO as an institution. They reflect the wariness toward the West of the organization's two



Strategists in Beijing may not have a coherent strategy for Central Asia, but no other outside force is as comprehensively involved, as dynamic in its engagement or as committed to the long term.

heavyweights, China and Russia, but not the studiously multivector foreign policy of Kazakhstan or the intensely flexible foreign policy of Uzbekistan. Kyrgyzstan has maintained a U.S. military presence since 2005, while Tajikistan is increasing its cooperation with the United States as the combat-troop withdrawal in Afghanistan draws nearer. Uzbekistan recently reengaged with Washington after six years of keeping its distance. But not even Beijing and Moscow have lived up to the SCO's confrontational rhetoric. Russia helps significantly in the resupply of NATO forces in Afghanistan, and China has aided U.S. efforts there in more quiet ways.

That poses two questions: How will the SCO grapple with the changed security environment in Central Asia after the U.S. combat-troop withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2014? And will its anti-Western pronouncements lead to concrete actions? Currently, the SCO is ill equipped to live up to aspirations of regional collaboration, much less lofty goals of safeguarding Central Asia. The SCO has held regular "peace missions," military exercises that combine the armed forces of some or all member states, although the vast majority of forces are from China and Russia. These have been notable as the first opportunities in decades for Chinese forces to practice operations outside China's borders. The exercises also allow China and Russia to showcase military equipment that they hope other member states will procure. But until recently such joint training exercises have been beset by troublesome language barriers. The language problem reportedly

now has been remedied, so it will be worth observing future exercises to evaluate the extent to which they serve as effective joint training to combat what the SCO terms the "three evils": terrorism, separatism and extremism.

Even so, it's an open question whether the training will be used in reality. The SCO did nothing in response to recent bouts of political unrest—including violent ethnic clashes in Kyrgyzstan in 2010 that spilled over into Uzbekistan and intense combat in Tajikistan's Gorno-Badakhshan region in 2012, which seems to have crossed the border with Afghanistan. These incidents certainly seem to be examples of terrorism, separatism or extremism and were not solely internal problems of member states. Even when Kyrgyzstan's government was toppled in 2010, the SCO declined to respond on the grounds that the events were an internal political matter.

The one concrete manifestation of SCO collaboration to combat the three evils is the unfortunately acronymed Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) in Tashkent, whose mission is to serve as an information-sharing hub coordinating joint actions by member states. During a visit to the center, officials explained that this consists of maintaining a database on undesirables submitted by member states and translating information between Chinese and Russian. Should one such undesirable from China, for example, be spotted in Kyrgyzstan, RATS would coordinate apprehension and extradition. It is not clear if RATS played a part in the bilateral understandings that reportedly exist between China and its

Central Asian neighbors on transferring suspect Uighurs to Chinese custody.

Although the SCO is a multilateral vehicle for Chinese regional engagement, it remains a largely empty institutional shell that may or may not become substantive. Prospects seem slim that it will accede to Beijing's desire that it develop its economic profile. Meanwhile, none of its members, including China, seem willing to subordinate their diplomatic pursuits or security priorities to SCO goals, and even information sharing and collaboration outside of the narrow RATS mission is limited. But the SCO contributes to China's inadvertent empire by providing a forum through which it can air ideas to its Central Asian neighbors and gauge the reaction of its most immediate geopolitical competitor in the region: Russia. In this sense, it is similar to China's embassy in Bishkek. The SCO is preparing the ground for China's future in Central Asia, even if Beijing has yet to decide what it thinks that future should be.

Until the middle of 2012, the SCO largely ignored the elephant in the Central Asian room: Afghanistan. In late 2011, when pressing Chinese think tankers in Beijing about a possible role for the SCO in a post-American Afghanistan, the authors received vociferous denials and detailed explanations about the SCO's lack of capacity for such a daunting and complex challenge. Some member states, including China, had engaged on a bilateral basis with the United States and the Afghan government to provide humanitarian aid. The Northern Distribution Network, a NATO resupply program through Central Asia, involved some SCO governments in indirectly supporting U.S.-led efforts in Afghanistan, but the SCO as an organization maintained a studied reticence.

That all changed in June 2012 at the SCO's twelfth summit for heads of state.

Not only were the summit's proceedings focused on Afghanistan's future, but the former "dialogue partner" also was accepted as an official observer, a possible step toward membership. Observer status allows Afghan representatives to take part in SCO consultations at summits and other meetings. Chinese president Hu Jintao announced that the SCO should contribute to Afghanistan's "peaceful reconstruction," although Russia's envoy to the summit emphasized the group would not assume responsibility for Afghan security. Underscoring the group's inherent tensions, the \$23 million aid package for Afghanistan announced at the summit was a bilateral agreement between Beijing and Kabul. Other member states announced their own limited bilateral assistance.

Beyond that, Hu Jintao and Afghan president Hamid Karzai signed a bilateral "strategic partnership" between their two countries. It provides for such things as Chinese investment and scholarships for Afghan students to study in China. The numbers involved are small, with Chinese imports from Afghanistan amounting to only \$4.4 million in 2011. The aid pledged is part of an estimated \$75 million that China has allocated for Afghanistan over the next five years. This pales in comparison to the \$10 billion in development loans pledged to SCO member states at the June summit alone. Part of this reflects China's general reluctance to disburse development aid abroad. The issue is controversial domestically, as large swaths of the country's interior remain underdeveloped. But a continuing sense of uncertainty about what is going to happen next in Afghanistan is also a factor.

Chinese aid tends to stand in inverse proportion to the international investments of its SOEs. The world's second-largest copper deposit at Mes Aynak was awarded to MCC in 2008 on a thirty-year lease. The



tender was secured by offering the Afghan government a number of corollary benefits: generous 20 percent royalties on the copper extracted; plans to build a coal-fired four-hundred-megawatt power plant to serve the mine as well as Kabul; and provisions for building schools and transport infrastructure in the mine's vicinity, including a railroad across the Afghan border to haul the copper to market. But, as far as could be determined through our research in Afghanistan, few if any of these plans have gone forward. China pulled back on earlier promises to develop a railroad to connect the site to possible markets. The extraction project was delayed, according to official reports, because 1500-year-old Buddhist ruins were found on the site. More likely the delays resulted from security concerns. MCC reportedly has established relationships with local leaders and militants to ensure the project's safety, but it seems that the most prudent strategy is to assess what happens after U.S. combat forces withdraw in 2014.

In contrast, CNPC's oil investment in the Amu Darya river basin in northern Afghanistan seems to be moving full speed ahead. The tender for twenty-five years of drilling rights also was won by offering generous 15 percent royalties on the oil and a 20 percent corporate tax on revenues. On top of this, 70 percent of profits will go

to the Afghan government. CNPC also has revealed plans to build a small refinery to process the oil for domestic consumption, which currently is dependent on imports. The Afghan government soon may start seeing some of the estimated \$300 million per year it expects. CNPC has moved at its customary lightning pace; production is set to begin in 2013. This is partly to do with the modest size of the project and its proximity to the

surface. With an estimated eighty-seven million barrels of oil available, its reserves pale in comparison to Persian Gulf or Caspian fields. That's why, as mentioned, speculation has mounted that CNPC's long-term goal in the area is to exploit potential natural-gas reserves, part of massive formations across the border in Turkmenistan.

Potentially related, CNPC has announced plans for the fourth string of the Central Asia-China natural-gas pipeline to be routed from Turkmenistan through northern Afghanistan and Tajikistan to Chinese territory—an alternative to the current route through Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. This may be motivated in part by transit disputes between Astana and Beijing, but Chinese officials loudly touted the development benefits to Afghanistan. The third string of the pipeline has yet to be completed, so the route for the fourth probably depends on the relative stability of Afghanistan's northern provinces over the next couple years.

Despite a track record of operating in difficult political climates and conflict zones around the world, Chinese companies in Afghanistan manifest a moderate risk tolerance. Like Afghanistan's neighbors and many elements within the country, Chinese actors look to the period after the withdrawal of U.S. combat troops to

determine their strategies there. Given the close Chinese-Pakistani relationship, Beijing likely will look to Islamabad for guidance. Still, Afghanistan remains a significant part of China's inadvertent empire in Central Asia. Beijing's search for natural resources and its eagerness to build infrastructure to get those resources efficiently to China have given it a political role in the country and a geopolitical profile in the region.

This is the story across Central Asia. Although various Chinese actors focus on individual parts of the overall regional engagement, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Strategists in Beijing may not have a coherent strategy for Central Asia, but no other outside force is as comprehensively involved, as dynamic in its engagement or as committed to the long term in all six Central Asian states, including Afghanistan. Seeing this, Central Asian government and business leaders increasingly throw in their lot with China. Kyrgyzstan does so because it must. Turkmenistan, courted by many other countries, does so because it wants to. In the rest of the countries, the situation is somewhere in between.

But the web of connections that China is forging across the region is of global consequence. It is the realization of the "New Silk Road" vision articulated by the U.S. State Department and the Asian Development Bank but with the connections oriented largely toward Xinjiang. The resources made accessible by these connections are headed for Chinese consumption. Questions remain about whether India or the states across the Caspian will be linked in as well. Russia may find itself less integrated into the new web, which could lead to greater Chinese-Russian tensions or increased Russian pugnacity in the region.

The SCO may stem some of the great-power rivalry between Beijing and Moscow,

and so far Russian leaders have reacted to China's inadvertent empire with quiet acquiescence despite attempts at a "Eurasian union" or customs agreements entailing rather feeble tariff barriers against Chinese goods. Beijing and Chinese business leaders are not fazed by either effort. While severely lacking in institutional capacity, the SCO is at the moment emerging as the most inclusive and respected international organization in Central Asia, and it is quietly expanding its geopolitical influence. It recently welcomed Turkey as a "dialogue partner," an illustration of the emerging cross-continental partnership between China and the other dynamic economies of Central Asia. The SCO's real test will be how it addresses the future of Afghanistan, and here China's role in Central Asia most affects U.S. interests.

Neither China nor the SCO is likely to take responsibility for Afghanistan should events not run smoothly once U.S. combat troops withdraw in 2014. Chinese investments, security concerns regarding Xinjiang and Beijing's close relationship with Islamabad, however, will almost certainly shape the direction of the country in the coming decade. In the long term, China's inadvertent empire in Central Asia will have geopolitical consequences for U.S. and Western influence in Mackinder's most pivotal geographic zone on the planet. Should Washington become preoccupied with the Asia-Pacific in its China policy, it not only will be missing the more profound manifestation of China's global posture but also could find it far more difficult to cultivate relationships with the countries of Central Asia. China may not be seeking an empire in the region, but it is the only power active in a comprehensive, long-term manner. If other outside powers do not also engage, China's lock on Central Asia, to the exclusion of the United States, will be not only inadvertent but also inevitable. □

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All Roads Lead to Berlin

By Jacob Heilbrunn

Back in November 2011, as Europe struggled with its ongoing financial crisis, Poland's foreign minister, Radek Sikorski, gave a speech in Berlin that beckoned toward his country's western neighbor and pleaded with it to save the euro. "You know full well that nobody else can do it," said Sikorski. "I will probably be the first Polish foreign minister in history to say so, but here it is: I fear German power less than I am beginning to fear German inactivity. You have become Europe's indispensable nation."

Indispensable? This was an extraordinary statement from a top official of a nation that was ravaged by Germany during World War II. And it reflects a profound shift taking place throughout Germany and Europe about Berlin's position at the center of the Continent. The past view that what was good for Germany was bad for the European Union is being supplanted by a new attitude that what is good for Germany is even better for its neighbors.

And Germans, who since 1945 had accepted the subservient European role forced upon them by their victorious World War II adversaries, are now cinching up their collective lederhosen and adopting a more assertive posture. The country is shedding its status as junior partner to America and embarking upon its own path. All this is evident in five important ways:

Jacob Heilbrunn is a senior editor at *The National Interest*.

- Germany is forging a new national identity that is less influenced by the Nazi past and that looks to the broader sweep of the country's place in European history dating back to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Germany is increasingly looking back at its Prussian ideals, which it sees as having been betrayed, not represented, by Nazism.

- The trend toward German independence began with the socialist chancellor Gerhard Schroeder, who denounced the George W. Bush administration for going to war in Iraq—a change from Germany's Cold War role as submissive ally. Additionally, in 2003 Schroeder, in a Nixon-goes-to-China move, courageously backed "Agenda 2010"—a set of sweeping economic reforms and social-welfare cuts that slashed government spending.

- This surge of self-confidence is bolstered by Germany's new status as Europe's economic powerhouse. As Sikorski's pleading suggests, only Germany possesses the economic muscle to push through and support a European recovery program, and this is a development that Germans, habituated to shunning the spotlight, are grudgingly beginning to accept.

- Germany increasingly is pursuing a self-confident foreign policy set apart from the wishes and demands of its erstwhile American patron. Following on its refusal to participate in the Iraq War, it shunned the West's intervention in Libya and has pursued independent ties with Russia and China, raising eyebrows in Washington, DC.

- And yet this new German emergence is accompanied by intense birth pains. Powerful political issues and forces have been unleashed, both within Germany and throughout Europe, as Berlin takes the lead in guiding the EU through its economic crisis.

All of these developments and issues are personified by Germany's controversial but politically adroit chancellor, Angela Merkel. No European leader is being attacked more virulently than Merkel as she seeks to lead the seventeen-nation currency zone through its sovereign-debt crisis. In demanding fiscal discipline from the southern European states, she has incurred the wrath of Greeks and Spaniards, who routinely depict her as a reincarnation of Otto von Bismarck and Adolf Hitler. And at home, German socialists and conservatives are apoplectic at what they see as either Merkel's foot-dragging or her folly in acceding to any bailout measures which would transfer more German wealth to the country's profligate southern neighbors.

As Germans tremble at the prospect of their retirement pensions and savings flowing to these spendthrift states, the recent decision of the German Federal Constitutional Court sanctioning Germany's participation in the decision of the European Central Bank (ECB) to buy up bonds is being treated as tantamount to a sellout of German national interests. The idea is that Merkel is being squeezed by Europe in general and Italy in particular—by Prime Minister Mario Monti and a fortiori by ECB president Mario Draghi. These apprehensions recently were captured in a column by the prominent German commentator Josef Joffe in the September 4 *Financial Times*: “Instead of ‘Germanising’ Europe, the Germans are about to be ‘Europeanised,’ or even ‘Club Med-ified.’”

But are they? Are these fears justified? Is Merkel a bungler? Is Germany doomed

to suffer a repetition of high inflation? Or are the naysayers transfixed by a bogeyman from the past that has little practical relevance for the present?

The truth is that, as Germany reclaims the economic dominance it enjoyed on the Continent during the late nineteenth century, Merkel is proving herself to be one of the most farsighted chancellors in German history. With a personal popularity rating near 70 percent, she is favored to win a new course as federal chancellor in 2013 against Social Democratic candidate Peer Steinbrück. Unlike President Obama—who is regarded in mainstream German economic and policy circles as anathema for his insistence on fiscally loose Keynesian measures—Merkel has not simply opened the economic spigot. The average German voter fears that if a Social Democratic-Green coalition were currently in power, the keys to their financial security would be blithely handed over to their European brethren.

So whatever they may think of her policies, Germans love Merkel's lack of theatrics. She is her country's Iron Lady, but she rules with a velvet touch. At a moment when polls show that a majority of German voters oppose bailouts, she has managed to pursue a sensible middle course, neither capitulating to the southern states nor embracing the equally unpopular idea of abandoning the euro. In essence, the Germans would like to have it both ways, and Merkel is ensuring that they will—up to a point.

Enter her finance minister. Wolfgang Schäuble, a protégé of former chancellor Helmut Kohl, is a tough old bird. No one has done more to maintain Germany's commitment to Europe than Schäuble, who has served in parliament for forty years and was present at the signing of the Maastricht Treaty establishing the euro in 1992. In receiving the Charlemagne Prize

this past May, Schäuble said, “Pragmatism and flexibility are usually better than sticking to principles which only produce stalemate.” He joins Merkel in pressing for a resolution to the European sovereign-debt crisis that takes into account domestic political reservations about tying German economic fortunes to the rest of Europe. But there can be no doubting that he and Merkel are following a winding fiscal road and have yet to reach their final destination. Before the June EU summit in Brussels, Merkel declared that “there will be no collectivization of debt in the European Union for as long as I live”—music to the ears of the Free Democratic Party, Merkel’s junior coalition partner, which espouses classical liberal economics and vehemently opposes transfer payments. The Free Democrats have partly managed to recoup their electoral fortunes by adopting populist stands on the euro. But the party has had to watch submissively as Merkel concedes some ground to the rest of Europe while also insisting on tougher controls over the disbursement of funds and internal austerity measures.

And so at the June summit she yielded to the inevitable, assenting to the emergence of what amounted to a banking union. Schäuble has been her point man, reprimanding the head of the German Bundesbank, Jens Weidmann, for questioning Merkel’s decision to push forward with contributing 190 billion euros to the European Stability Mechanism. Schäuble made it clear that Germany will push ahead with further such measures and a tighter European union but only if clear conditions are met, including the creation of a European banking supervisor housed at the ECB. Writing in the August 30 *Financial Times*, he stated, “It is crucial that the new system be truly effective, not just a façade. We must eschew yesterday’s light-touch approach for good and endow

this supervisor with real and clearly defined responsibilities, coercive powers and adequate resources.”

The message seems clear: verify before trusting. With adequate safeguards in place, Germany will not waver in its commitment to both the euro and European integration. To follow the course propounded by Weidmann and others, by contrast, would be to risk a European depression. They are offering moral strictures rather than a plan for European recovery. And they would



have Germany shun a role that only it can play in Europe’s ongoing fiscal drama.

The most drastic step Berlin could take would be to increase domestic consumption. Like China, it has been relying on exports. While its trade with European countries has been declining—a sign that, to some extent, Germany has emancipated itself from the vicissitudes of the other lagging European economies—it

As Germany reclaims the economic dominance it enjoyed on the Continent during the late nineteenth century, Merkel is proving to be one of the most farsighted chancellors in German history.

has dramatically increased its trade with countries outside the euro zone. Its overall trade surplus exceeds 160 billion euros.

In Germany's past since World War II, economic power has not translated into political power, and in fact the country shunned any serious leadership role. It accepted the euro largely so that it could bury itself in a wider European federation, and there's no question that the notion of a dominant European role remains somewhat daunting. But in this time of troubles, Germany and its neighbors are beginning to reassess the country's position at the center of Europe. Still, Merkel has taken great care to signal that Germany's growing dominance does not mean that it can, or wants to, assume hegemony, which is very different from leadership. Instead, Merkel is reshaping Europe by attempting to export the German economic model, which shuns the Keynesianism of the Obama administration. Consider this index of German economic success: over the past decade, while personal wealth has shriveled in America, it has more than doubled in Germany, from a total of 4.6 billion euros to more than 10 billion. The German national budget is set to be balanced by 2015, and the federal states will be legally obligated to run balanced budgets.

It should not be surprising, then, that Merkel is attempting to create a Europe in Germany's image, not America's. A consummate political survivor, Merkel is completing the process of a return to realist political principles, both in domestic and foreign policy, that began with the country's

refusal to participate in the Iraq War. But now the new Teutonic colossus that is emerging in the heart of Europe will affect events as much by what it does as by what it does not do.

This new German self-confidence first began to emerge during the government of Gerhard Schroeder, who served as chancellor from 1998 to 2005. Although Schroeder sent two thousand troops to Afghanistan after the 9/11 terrorist attacks on America, he pronounced a decisive "no" in response to America's call for help in pursuing the Iraq War—an unthinkable position for a German chancellor during the Cold War. A self-made man, the brash and confident Schroeder was anti-American from the outset. In the 1980s, he protested against the Reagan administration's rearmament policies toward the Soviet Union. Later, when this sentiment manifested itself in his refusal to support the Iraq War, he was not punished for his stance by the German electorate but was rewarded with a second term. Thus, he proved the popularity of asserting German superiority over what Germans widely considered the benighted Bush administration. And Schroeder was vindicated by his position in historical terms as well as politically, as the war in Iraq ultimately proved to be a disaster. That bolstered Germany's new realpolitik view, which asserted its national interests in the country's political arena. With the election of Obama and the departure of the reviled George W. Bush, Germans hoped for a U-turn in American foreign policy. It did not quite turn out that way. The most notable

German complaint was with Western participation in the Libyan war, opposed by Chancellor Merkel and her foreign minister Guido Westerwelle. To the incredulity of the Obama administration, Germany abstained from voting on the UN Security Council resolution when it came to endorsing intervention in Libya. Westerwelle told the *Guardian*, “The military solution seems so simple but is not so simple. It’s risky and dangerous.” He added, “We are concerned about the effects on freedom movements in north Africa and the Arab world. We admired the jasmine revolution in Tunisia . . . but we want these freedom movements to be strengthened, not weakened.” He was ridiculed in Washington at the time, but was he so wrong?

A fresh assertiveness can also be detected in Germany’s relations with Russia. Once more, it was Schroeder who led the way. Schroeder’s stance on Iraq endeared him to Putin, who had served in Dresden as a KGB officer and speaks German well. Schroeder’s relations with Russia became sufficiently close that he was invited to join the board of Gazprom, the Russian global energy company, after his tenure as chancellor ended in 2005. Now Merkel is once more following in Schroeder’s footsteps. In June 2012, at a joint press conference with Putin in Berlin, the two leaders stressed that military force from outside powers could not achieve a lasting peace in war-torn Syria. As Merkel expressed it, “We both made clear that we are pushing for a political solution, that the Annan plan can be a starting point but everything must be done in the United Nations Security Council to implement this plan.” Since then, Germany’s foreign-policy outlook has not changed. Regarding Syria, Berlin believes, as with Libya, that the costs of intervention are higher than those of staying aloof, a stark contrast with France, which is urging Washington to engage militarily in what is turning into

a protracted civil war between a secular regime and a largely Islamist opposition.

The ties between Russia and Germany should not be surprising. Historically, Germany has had close ties with Russia dating back to Peter the Great, when German advisers helped revive the czar’s country economically. There was always, however, some resentment toward the efficient Germans. In Ivan Goncharov’s satirical novel *Oblomov*, the industrious German character is named Stolz, meaning “pride,” and he attempts to rouse the protagonist from his congenital languor. After World War II, relations between Germany and Russia did not really begin to thaw until the 1970s, when Berlin started to pursue détente with the East. Today, Merkel, who speaks Russian fluently, pursues close relations with Moscow based on mutual interests.

As for China, Germany is developing what Merkel calls a “special relationship.” As the *Washington Post* reported in September, “More than any other foreign-policy effort, Merkel’s growing rapport with the Chinese signals Germany’s willingness to set the European agenda unilaterally.” Germany’s robust trade with China has allowed it to shelter its economy from the commercial troubles plaguing much of Europe. Moreover, it has allowed Germany to develop a balancing partner against America. Yet again, it was Schroeder who set the model for Merkel. But she didn’t take the cue immediately. In 2007, she enraged Beijing by meeting with the Dalai Lama, the claimant to Tibetan leadership, in the federal chancellery in Berlin. Now that is in the past. She has subordinated human-rights concerns to economic interests. Germany expects to reach a trade surplus with China next year, an almost unheard-of feat—total trade between the two countries in 2011 was \$190 billion. For German car manufacturers such as Daimler Benz and

BMW, China is a vital and lucrative market. As *Der Spiegel* observed:

The chancellor's course on China, in fact, has slowly come to resemble the business-first policies pursued by her predecessor Gerhard Schröder. He almost surely approves of the lovely images of her visiting the Airbus plant in Tianjin, where she made a stop just before flying back to Berlin. The factory visit took place a day after a contract was signed for 50 new planes ordered by the Chinese.

Under Merkel, Germany has been no less active in cultivating good relations with Eastern Europe, where it has based numerous factories. This German sphere of influence has been welcomed by the countries that inhabit it, as demonstrated by Polish foreign minister Radek Sikorski's effusive praise for his country's western neighbor.

If Germany is to become the indispensable nation described by Sikorski, however, it will need an internal cultural shift, given the weight of its Nazi past. But, as the World War II generation disappears and the memory of a divided Germany fades, attitudes also change. Perhaps nowhere can this change be discerned more acutely than in Germany's relationship to the burden of a history that prompted it, during the Cold War, to adopt a cautious and self-effacing role. The memory of the Holocaust, something that, in stark contrast to Japan, the German government and schools constantly emphasize, has hardly faded away. But it has acquired a more ritualistic quality as its meaning has become more ambiguous for a younger generation of Germans, whose own parents often have no direct connection with the crimes of the past. As the writer Bernd Ulrich asked in a lengthy essay in the August 30 weekly *Die Zeit*, "When will the past pass away?" After arguing with

his son about whether it was a bad idea to sing the first stanza of the German national anthem, "*Deutschland über alles*"—his son saw no problem with it—Ulrich concludes, "The entire package of the past that I once received will not be able to be transferred with the same contents and weight." Many Germans also now are looking more closely at their Prussian past, as reflected in the building boom taking place in Berlin, once the capital of a small Prussian duchy that successively defeated Denmark, Austria and France in expanding itself into a European superpower. This building boom is no mere facelift but major surgery that is centered in important ways on the Prussian past. The former East German Palace of the Republic, which is where the old *Volkskammer*, or People's Chamber, met to rubber-stamp Central Committee decisions, has been demolished and is slated to be replaced by a replica of the old Hohenzollern palace. Three facades will emulate the old baroque exterior, while the interior will have a more modern stamp. The approval of the project by the Berlin Senate testifies to a lingering nostalgia for the better side of Prussia and its legendary leader, Frederick the Great. It was Frederick, an exponent of the Enlightenment, who almost singlehandedly created the incorruptible Prussian bureaucracy that remains a guiding example for a number of Germans today.

It is also striking that on the *Unter den Linden* boulevard, the German History Museum just concluded an exhibition devoted to Frederick the Great's three hundredth birthday. (There is also an exhibition in nearby Potsdam, where Frederick retired, called "Prussian on Celluloid: Frederick II in Film.") The Berlin exhibition, which is subtitled "revered, revised, reviled," focuses on the Prussian king's shifting image over the centuries. As one walks into the exhibition, it features a tableau that would have been

unthinkable a few decades ago, one that the *Berliner Zeitung* called “unbearable”—unbearable because it smacks of reverence for the Prussian past rather than critical detachment.

In a vestibule that has something of the feeling of a religious shrine, Frederick’s death mask and his final gown, complete with remaining bloodstains, set the tone. The exhibition points out that Frederick’s image was exploited by the Nazis to justify ruthless expansionary policies that he would never have sanctioned. Then in the 1960s, the German Left attacked Frederick as indeed a Nazi forerunner. This intellectual movement was led by the egregious Rudolf Augstein, founder of *Der Spiegel*, who wrote a book in 1968 suggesting that Hitler represented the culmination of Frederick’s militaristic vision. As the exhibition demonstrates, this is a primitive view of Frederick as well as of Prussia, which emphasized personal rectitude, loyalty and high ideals. The recognition that those ideals were traduced by Nazism is now gaining currency in a Germany that feels comfortable discussing a topic that was largely taboo in the postwar era.

This is an important reason why Germany feels increasingly receptive toward taking a leading role in Europe. Yet, observers such as George Soros, who worry that Germany isn’t moving quickly enough to quell the crisis, are sounding alarms. Writing in the *New York Review of Books*, Soros declared, “In my judgment the best course of action is to persuade Germany to choose between becoming a more benevolent hegemon, or leading nation, or leaving the euro. In other words, Germany

must lead or leave.”

But it will never leave. The ultimate effect of the euro crisis is to accelerate, not retard, efforts toward more integration. Eleven European foreign ministers, led by Germany’s Westerwelle, have endorsed a paper that calls for the creation of a European currency fund and even moots the



possibility of a European army. Impossible? Perhaps a German-led European army will someday march into a country such as Syria to impose order. After all, it would have seemed far-fetched just over a decade ago that Germany would send troops beyond its borders and into the mountain redoubts of Afghanistan.

A profound shift, then, is taking place in Germany. Germans are becoming accustomed to it. Their neighbors are demanding it. The outlier isn’t Germany; it is America. Merkel has remained studiously deaf to Obama’s importunities for cooperation on both economic and foreign policy. For America, which has viewed Germany for decades as a pliant ally, the changes may become unsettling. Thus, it may be America that has a German problem, not Europe. Increasingly, Europe sees a German solution. □

A Modest Post-Assad Plan

By Daniel Byman and Renanah Miles

Should Syrian president Bashar al-Assad fall, Syria's problems will have only just begun. With the dictator gone, crime, score settling and a violent contest for power likely will ensue, keeping the streets unsafe and the people afraid. Iran, foreign jihadists and Syria's neighbors may meddle to protect their interests or stir up trouble. Assad kept Syria's rival communities in check through force, but his reign created underlying schisms. Now, the civil war has generated new ones. It also has turned the country's economy, always struggling, into a disaster area. So far the splintered Syrian opposition has shown no skill in reassuring Syria's minorities, and any new government's initial legitimacy is likely to be weak.

Unlike other Arab Spring conflicts that have resulted in regime capitulation (Tunisia, Egypt and Yemen) or regime decapitation (Libya), the long and bloody Syrian conflict is likely to generate a failed state requiring the kind of large-scale reconstruction efforts seen in Iraq and Afghanistan. Inevitably, some will call for

America to step in to establish order. The United States has a long and rather ugly record in trying to help countries in Syria's position. True, in Iraq and Afghanistan the United States has gained hard experience in the dos and (mostly) don'ts of state building. But the lessons from these and other state-building efforts suggest success requires considerable resources, excellent coordination within the government, long-term follow-through and serious planning for the postconflict period even as the war is being waged. None of these is likely to be present for any U.S. effort in a post-Assad Syria, given the current political and operational environment.

We argue here that the United States and its allies are unlikely to overcome Syria's myriad problems and establish a peaceful, stable and democratic Syria. The likely lack of resources, poor governmental coordination and the sheer scale of Syria's problems probably would spell failure for any ambitious efforts. Moreover, regime-change initiatives could backfire and complicate postregime plans.

Thus, going in small may be the best we can manage. The results also would be small, but being present in some capacity would offer the United States more credibility in supporting regional democracy, greater legitimacy to weigh in on key regional issues and a better strategic position to counter potential threats to U.S. interests. Still, Washington should prepare not only for a limited state-building mission

Daniel Byman is a professor at Georgetown University and the research director of the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution. **Renanah Miles** is a program analyst in the Office of the Deputy Chief Management Officer at the Department of Defense. The views expressed are those of the authors and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of Defense or the U.S. Government.

but also for the possible failure of state building in Syria.

This article has four sections. First, we detail the problems Syria is likely to face should Assad fall. Next, we review the potential role of outsiders such as the United States in ameliorating these difficulties. Third, we discuss actual U.S. and allied capabilities and their likely problems and limits. Finally, we offer recommendations for a limited engagement in Syria and assess the probable impact of such an engagement.

Assad has ruled Syria by brute force: he hollowed out the country's institutions, making a mockery of political parties, the judiciary, the media and other core parts of a functioning state. Now the civil war has destroyed cities and turned Syrian against Syrian. It follows that bringing peace to Syria involves more than toppling Assad; any new regime must also rebuild the state and mend the nation.

The current antiregime violence could morph into chaos or a new power struggle among the anti-Assad victors. The Syrian opposition is famously disunited. Despite having its back against the wall in the anti-Assad struggle, and foreign encouragement to unify, the opposition remains divided by region, ethnicity and political ambitions. No Nelson Mandela of South Africa or Daw Aung San Suu Kyi of Myanmar unites the rebels. Once Assad goes, these groups may come together through a democratic process, but it is far more likely that any near-term elections would be dubious affairs and that at least some of those fighting Assad would turn their guns on each other.

Assad's divide-and-rule methods and favoritism toward key groups will make continued strife even more likely. Favored minorities, particularly the Alawites but also the Christians and Druze, will want to

keep what they have. Poorer, disempowered Sunni Muslims, who are doing the bulk of the fighting (and dying) and comprise the largest community in Syria, will want more power and wealth. Score settling against regime servants is likely to commence almost immediately. Just as the Assad regime has mobilized the Alawites in militias to murder other communities, opposition forces will want payback. If a new government reflects the will of the majority of Syrians, it may openly discriminate against Alawites and other minorities and exclude those Sunnis, small in number but powerful, who cooperated with Assad.

In Iraq after Saddam Hussein fell, crime—even more than political violence—led to national collapse. Similarly, in Syria armed gangs masquerading as freedom fighters capture wealthy and middle-class citizens, demanding ransom or bribes before freeing them. One Aleppo resident told the *New York Times*, “Chaos, lawlessness, fear, it is just so chaotic, and with all the thugs in the streets, you never know who might kidnap you and ask for a ransom.” Such problems may grow exponentially as Syria's police, tainted by their association with Assad, will likely prove incapable of enforcing order and preventing massive looting or other crime.

Recent figures from the Quilliam Foundation estimate that the Syrian war also has attracted several hundred foreign jihadists, whose ideology is akin to that of Al Qaeda. Some (no one knows how many) owe their loyalty to Al Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri or to Al Qaeda of Iraq. These fighters want an Islamic state in the parts of Syria they control, and they will try to sway or coerce Syrians into joining their group. As former CIA official and terrorism analyst Bruce Riedel points out, “Look at Iraq, where we decimated them time and again. They're still there.” Syria may go from

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importing terrorists to exporting them, with Al Qaeda and other groups using territory they control to launch attacks on neighboring states and perhaps even Western targets outside the region. Already, Assad partisans and their enemies conduct attacks in Lebanon against one another, and this violence may grow as parties jockey for power in Syria. Compounding these fears, the *Washington Post* reports that Syria has at least several hundred tons of chemical weapons dispersed across roughly fifty towns and cities. Israel fears they might fall into the hands of Hezbollah, and the world fears Al Qaeda and other jihadist groups might acquire them.

Foreign states likely will continue to meddle in Syria. Saudi Arabia and Turkey not only want Assad out but also want their favored Syrian groups to replace him. Meanwhile, Iran will want to retain at least a toehold of influence even if Assad falls and will support Alawite rejectionists and others willing to do Tehran's bidding. Some states will fear instability while others will see it as an opportunity. Large refugee populations may fear returning home or not have homes to return to, adding to the concerns of neighboring states bearing the brunt of the ongoing refugee flow.

The war's devastation, the surge in crime, the risk of political violence and the overall civic uncertainty will make Syria's economy a basket case. All this will worsen the country's political problems. Even before the violence, Syria ranked 151st in GDP per capita. It clearly has fallen even further. Foreign investment, always scarce, will be scarcer.

Many of these post-Assad problems have become more likely because of present regime-change efforts. Numerous sanctions have helped speed Syria's economic implosion. They have devastated Syria's middle class and rendered the black market as vital as the legitimate economy. It took nearly a decade following the Iraq invasion to rebuild that economy, and it required tremendous U.S. investments, even with Iraq's massive oil resources. Layers of sanctions are also difficult to roll back quickly. In Libya, it took months after Muammar el-Qaddafi's fall for the UN, EU and United States to unfreeze assets from Libyan banks and Qaddafi's former inner circle.

Arms flooding into Syria also will confound stabilization efforts. In 2011, before the fighting began, Syria had a strong military, effective police, and a cowed and unarmed population. After Assad falls, the security forces will be weak and devastated, while popular groups will be well armed and emboldened. It is uncertain if weapons will stay in the hands that received them or even remain in Syria. A poorly secured cache of weaponry in Libya, including man-portable surface-to-air missiles, made its way out of the country to Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, according to news reports.

In theory, outsiders could help Syria maintain the security of its borders, assist with internal security, provide economic aid, encourage democratization, and otherwise assist Syria in its efforts to go from war, chaos and tyranny to peace, stability and democracy.

Syria's borders are porous, and they may grow more so if the Syrian army deteriorates further. Refugees flow out while fighters, arms and terrorists flow in. Even before the latest conflict, smuggling was common between Syria and Lebanon and between Syria and Iraq. In Iraq after Saddam Hussein, jihadists entered from Syria, Saudi Arabia and beyond, while Iran sent in hundreds of paramilitary and intelligence personnel. All made a bad situation worse. By policing borders, foreign forces could reduce the scale of neighboring states' meddling, making it harder for them to send arms and paramilitary forces to Syria. Jihadists could be stopped at the border and arrested or perhaps deterred from entering Syria at all.

But securing borders can require large numbers of troops. Borders have physical and political components. Neighboring states' interests and their own capacity for security will determine the difficulty. So will terrain and internal Syrian security considerations. Troops would also need excellent intelligence and training. But Syria's army is in disarray, and much of its officer corps will (or should) be purged if Assad goes, though Iraq has taught us to avoid a wholesale dissolution of the military, as Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta recently noted in an interview with CNN. This also holds true for Syria's police force. Purges of Syria's uniformed services—viewed by many within Syria as little more than an Alawite militia—would leave an immediate vacuum. Given the societal schisms caused and exacerbated by the conflict, an “impartial” outside role may help reassure communities and ward off dangerous cycles of violence.

Syria's armed forces still do one valuable thing: secure Syria's chemical-weapons stockpiles. Even though chemical weapons are less dangerous than conventional weapons in most cases, their psychological impact is massive. Should Assad's regime fall and the army collapse with it, securing these weapons would be a vital task for outside forces.

Protecting borders, securing chemical-weapons caches and fighting criminality could require sizable external forces. RAND studies on stabilization operations find average force-to-population ratios ranging from 2:1000 to 13:1000, depending on the levels of violence, ambition of objectives and number of contested areas. For Syria's population of more than twenty-two million, this could mean a range of 44,000–286,000 troops and will probably be on the larger end given the myriad problems



there. Of course, force-sizing considerations depend largely on the percentage of population significantly affected and the amount of the country left vulnerable to violence when the regime falls.

Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) will be difficult, yet failure to do these things could prove dangerous. Tribal and sectarian interest in settling scores and redistributing power will make fighters reluctant to lay down arms, as will fear of retribution. Unemployment also could prove dangerous. With nothing to do once fighting subsides and before the economy restarts, battle-hardened fighters must be effectively and productively engaged.

DDR efforts must be coordinated with transitional-justice efforts. A properly constituted court system to try those responsible for atrocities could forestall temptations for former victims to settle matters on their own. However, rushing to put large numbers of individuals on trial or conducting a mass purging of government officials such as in Iraq can be similarly destabilizing. The two objectives—stability and accountability—are mutually supportive, but without coordination one effort can undermine the other.

The international community can provide near-term support through forums such as truth and reconciliation commissions. It also can assist with arbitration if it becomes unclear who is the victim or the perpetrator. Though

the United States is clearly rooting for the opposition, and Assad's forces and paramilitary *shabiha* are committing the bulk of the killing of civilians, the atrocities are not one-sided, and rebel reprisals may increase as the war drags on.

An international presence in Syria can help discourage secessionism—a danger that can spread across borders and, for that reason, invite meddling from neighboring states. Syria's Kurds could seek to secede not because the demand for their own state is overwhelming but simply because the Syrian state is dysfunctional and denies them just rights. They may also believe that Iraqi and Turkish Kurds, or even sympathetic governments, can help their quest. Outside powers, by providing security and preventing foreign meddling, can dampen this enthusiasm.

The most pressing initial need for aid will be humanitarian assistance. This also is likely to overwhelm any remaining or nascent governmental capacity. The need for shelter, food and health care will be most acute with internally displaced populations and refugees. Current UN figures estimate over 2.5 million people need assistance within Syria's borders, while over two hundred thousand have fled the country. Many will return to destroyed homes and livelihoods, throwing them at the mercy of external support.

Outsiders can also help economically—and will be expected to do so. A provincial-reconstruction-team member in Iraq commented in conversation on the challenges she observed on the job, saying, "Democracy does not mean free electricity"—yet this was the expectation she routinely encountered.



As the most immediate security and humanitarian needs subside, expectations will grow apace. Restoring—or, more accurately, establishing for the first time—a real economy will be an important part of reconstruction as well as longer-term development efforts. A corollary is the need to manage expectations. In Iraq, when expectations were not met the result was anger and frustration.

Finally, outside powers also can offer expertise for the myriad problems any new regime would face. Syria's government always functioned poorly, and many of the more apolitical and competent civil servants will have fled. Whether it is designing a constitution, rebuilding the electric grid or training military forces to defend borders, the United States and its allies can help the Syrians.

The United States is far from ready, politically and institutionally, to bear the burden of helping Syria. But the United States has several key strengths when it comes to state building. Perhaps most significant is its long history of involvement in such missions, in particular using the U.S. military. From the Mexican-American and Spanish-American wars through both world wars, the military conducted postconflict reconstruction and military government, albeit, as historian Earl Ziemke noted, as “a kind of reluctant afterthought.” Since the end of the Cold War, the tempo has increased. A 2007 RAND study found the United States launching a new stability operation roughly every other year, while UN peacekeeping missions increased from once every four years to once every six months. Afghanistan and Iraq also have offered painful experiences that generated tremendous study. Coordination of diplomatic, development and defense assets is better, particularly at operational and tactical levels. For U.S. civilian agencies (with the exception of

USAID and its operationally focused culture), these skills present a new kind of “operational diplomacy.”

Another significant improvement in U.S. capabilities is the creation of stabilization and reconstruction committees. In 2004, the State Department created the Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization, followed last year by the Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations. Together with the Defense Department's recent embrace of stability operations, the U.S. executive branch has undertaken notable, if limited, efforts to develop and maintain state-building capabilities.

Still, the U.S. government remains plagued with structural shortcomings in state building. There remain indications of failure to institutionalize lessons learned from Afghanistan and Iraq. The government seems unsure of what its role in state building can or should be.

Civilian capabilities remain particularly weak. One reason discussion of alternative courses often swings between doing nothing and military intervention is the persistent absence of a robust nonmilitary capability. The underlying premise in Iraq was that the military would stabilize the country and then hand the mission over to civilians for reconstruction, but the handoff never occurred. Civilian organizations dedicated to stabilization and reconstruction materialized too late. Beltway turf battles do not help either; the State Department's powerful regional bureaus refused to give the predecessor organization to the Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations control of any missions, thus contributing to its demise.

Although planning and coordination have improved, weaknesses remain. How early and how effectively executive agencies engage each other in the planning process is still largely personality-driven, and plans are

closely held. The biggest lesson from Iraq is the imperative to plan early and inclusively. Many of the missteps and breathtaking oversights following the Iraq invasion are attributed to flawed plans that failed to take into account critical outside perspectives.

Another potential pitfall is in dispensing aid. In Iraq, aid dollars flowed through a single source—the U.S. government—with substantial delays reaching target recipients or achieving desired economic conditions. Afghanistan saw a web of donor countries and nongovernmental organizations achieve similarly poor results, sometimes undermining the Afghan governmental controls. The danger in Syria is that dollars could be used in ways that could put its economic viability further out of reach or create unsustainable expectations. A Senate report last year found that 97 percent of Afghan GDP derived from military spending and international support. Without that support, it concluded Afghanistan could suffer “a severe economic depression.”

Even when presidents generate political and public support for intervention, the United States historically has lacked the will to stay committed. Without strong support for war, domestic tolerance for casualties is near zero, and interest in spending large sums on foreign development has never been strong. The idea that nation building can be done on the cheap largely has been debunked, and the crippling bills racked up in Afghanistan and Iraq make for a nasty reality. Fatigue and overextension resulting from those conflicts make the likelihood of domestic support for a long, costly engagement nearly nil. Pew Research Center polls found only 25 percent of Americans believed the United States should intervene in Syria (with only 14 percent calling for deploying troops), and support would surely be less for a messy and expensive state-building effort.

The U.S. military also believes it is overstretched, and with the risks of significant cuts and even “sequestration” on the horizon, it will not be eager for a costly, troop-intensive mission that has little support at home and no clear end date. The new Defense Strategic Guidance puts it bluntly: “U.S. forces will no longer be sized to conduct large-scale, prolonged stability operations.”

The idea of allies taking over in lieu of U.S. leadership is similarly implausible. European capabilities for such missions have been steadily deteriorating for some time as the Continent’s economic crisis has lingered on. Even if willing, NATO seems unlikely to have the capacity to shoulder the burden, given its capability shortfalls and least-common-denominator approach to action. Robert Gates’s stinging remarks in his last policy speech as secretary of defense laid the blame on lack of will and lack of resources, resulting in European defense budgets “chronically starved for adequate funding for a long time.”

Turkey is the country likely to do the most. It has large numbers of competent forces, its economy is robust and its citizens care about the fate of Syria. Most important, Turkey fears massive refugee flows, the spread of secessionist sentiment to its own Kurdish population, terrorist activity and other evils that could emanate from a chaotic Syria. A Turkish role should be encouraged, while remembering that Turkey is not an impartial power and it will favor Syrian groups that may be anti-American, or at least not eager to embrace Washington.

The United States will also push democracy—but here Syrians likely will take a different course than Washington wants. The big issue is whether the civic structure will be liberal, guaranteeing individual and minority rights, or majoritarian, reflecting only the interests of the Sunni Arab community. Religious minorities—

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particularly the Alawites but also Christians, Druze and others who enjoyed some favor during the Assad years—likely will lose their special privileges and may also suffer open discrimination or even persecution. Elections can make the problems worse. Groups may rally against one another, make chauvinistic electoral promises and sow fear within their own communities. Warlords will attempt to control and manipulate the process, with power coming out of the barrel of guns. If the new government is Islamist in orientation, the discrimination may be even more intense. While Islamists in Egypt so far have shown respect for minority rights, in Syria there likely will be more pressure to discriminate because minority communities will be painted as sympathizers of the old regime. Assad's regime has stoked sectarian tension, and those to whom evil is done often do evil in return.

While opposition forces are indeed vocal in requests for lethal aid to break the regime's back, it is not at all clear to what degree U.S. assistance will be solicited to fashion a post-Assad state. Lack of government legitimacy is one of the main problems facing a new Syrian nation. A conspicuous foreign presence propping up a new government, possibly at the perceived expense of certain minorities, may further undermine legitimacy.

These considerations suggest that any state-building effort should be approached with restraint, but a limited U.S. role may actually *encourage* neighbors to meddle. Proxy battles between regional actors such as Saudi Arabia and Iran may confound efforts to stabilize Syria without a strong

intervening presence. An absent America plays into a broader narrative of a weak and faltering superpower, strength sapped by foreign battlefields in Afghanistan and Iraq. Conversely, an expansive U.S. role may likewise provoke external interference, particularly from Iran and foreign jihadists.

How the United States supports regime change—and whether it should support Assad's fall at all—should depend in part on U.S. plans for the aftermath. The long-term political objective should be a stable and democratic (or at least representative) government that both Syrians and their neighbors can live with. Helping neighbors manage refugees, police their borders, go after terrorist groups and solve other problems should be central considerations in any U.S. strategy for Syria.

Effective planning for the day after Assad's fall, despite all the uncertainties and contingencies, is essential now. Planning involves more, however, than small cells in large bureaucracies such as the Pentagon or State Department. It involves a comprehensive effort across agencies that includes the highest decision makers. The big decisions, and the big fights, must be done in advance.

Getting significant resources for such a mission is unlikely given current fiscal constraints and the political environment. To invoke the admonition attributed to Winston Churchill, "Gentlemen, we have run out of money. Now we have to think." Recognizing limitations up front allows for strategic and prioritized use of finite resources. Too often the United States

has failed to fully grasp this imperative. It has underestimated the challenge, overestimated its own capabilities, and overpromised in extending political pledges and impassioned, intermittent pleas for intervention. All this can result in overextension. Or the United States could find itself in a middle ground on resources and commitment, with its exposure maximized and its ability to achieve its objectives limited. This would be the worst of both worlds. Instead, the best the United States is likely to manage will be a limited engagement with modest aims and a modest commitment of resources, working with the larger international community. It is better to go small and achieve less than to launch large, ambitious projects that are ultimately unsustainable.

But this does not suggest an entirely hands-off approach. Inaction has its own costs. One emerges in the battle for public opinion as Arab publics look for evidence that the United States is credible in its claims to promote democracy and human rights. Criticism already has been levied over NATO and U.S. willingness to engage in Libya, ostensibly to prevent mass atrocities, but not in Syria, where atrocities already committed long since overtook the mere threats that were present in Libya. Standing by as chaos enveloped Syria would further diminish opinion of the United States. Providing some help lends Washington greater legitimacy (and access) to weigh in on issues that it cares about, such as securing Syria's chemical weapons and reducing Iran's influence in a post-Assad Syria. With people on the ground, the United States also gains an intelligence advantage and is less likely to be blindsided should things go awry.

The United States also has interests in Syria that go beyond what most Syrians care about. The threat of Syria's chemical arsenal falling into terrorist hands, for example, is a

greater concern for Syria's neighbors and the West than for Syrians, who understandably would put more focus on immediate issues of security and economic rebuilding. Washington also will be concerned about the security of Israel, which most Syrians see as an enemy. The United States should prepare for the possibility that a post-Assad crisis involving the compromise of chemical-weapons arsenals could trigger an intervention.

Any effort would require both soldiers and civilians—though preferably as few soldiers on the ground as possible. Given U.S. weaknesses on the civilian side, reaching out to the international community is essential, though it too is weak on this score. Moreover, an American-led stabilizing force would probably not be welcome in Syria, and there would be little support for a sustained presence among the American people. The United States should consider being part of a multinational body and playing a supporting role to demonstrate it is contributing to Syria's security. Recognizing U.S. intent in pursuing a limited course of action now would help focus attention on unity of effort with partners who will augment and/or lead external state-building efforts.

But what should these people do? A multinational body of uniformed and civilian personnel could help reconstitute Syrian uniformed forces, lend expertise in setting up impartial and functional political institutions, and help restore basic services. Washington should also work with any new Syrian government to fight terrorists. Here Yemen is a model, with the United States providing a broad range of assistance and conducting unilateral actions with the fig leaf of a government claiming them as its own. Perhaps most important, the United States can help set conditions for economic recovery: rolling back sanctions, helping to repair banking infrastructure, encouraging



foreign investment, and coordinating assistance from Syria's neighbors and other parties to ensure that aid is used efficiently.

The United States also could coordinate efforts of U.S. allies. Each will come to Syria with its own interests, and a modest U.S. role means the United States cannot impose its agenda. Washington can, however, try to prevent inevitable differences from getting out of hand and push for a sensible division of labor.

Among U.S. allies, Turkey is best positioned to intervene rapidly. The so-called golden hour after Assad falls will be critical, and Turkey already will be present. Also, Turkish forces are prepared to operate in an integrated way with civilians and NATO partners, as they have done in leading two provincial reconstruction teams in Afghanistan. Gaining a NATO mandate and UN support for Turkish activities would embolden Ankara and give its moves more legitimacy. Turkey, of course, will pursue

This article was derived entirely from open-source, unclassified material. The authors are happy to provide extensive original footnotes and a bibliography upon request.

its own interests in Syria, but for the most part these coincide with America's: Ankara wants a stable and secure Syria that has a legitimate government. The moderate Islamist regime in Turkey is likely to continue supporting moderate Islamists in Syria, but the weakness of pro-American secular forces makes this the best outcome Washington could reasonably expect.

Washington also should prepare for failure. It is possible that Assad's fall will be the beginning, not the end, of a long and chaotic period in Syria's history, with civil war continuing and the conflagration inflaming neighbors. Even with neighboring states such as Turkey capable of intervening, by the time the international community determines how to respond, the honeymoon period may have passed, severely raising the costs of intervention and reducing the likelihood of success.

Part of why the Iraq War went so wrong was that U.S. leaders misunderstood not only Iraq but also U.S. capabilities. To avoid repeating this mistake in a post-Assad Syria, Washington must better anticipate what might go wrong and be more humble about its own capacity to remake Syria. □

Evangelists of Democracy

By David Rieff

Like the human-rights movement, democracy promotion is a radical project of social and political transformation whose adherents will not or cannot acknowledge either the ideological or the revolutionary character of their enterprise. In this, democracy promotion should be understood as a subset of contemporary liberalism—the only major modern ideology that denies it is an ideology at all. More precisely, it is the end state of human political organization after all the other ideologies have withered away, the future’s moral default position. To hear Western democracy-promotion activists tell it, when they work to “transition” states from a totalitarian or authoritarian social order to a liberal-democratic one, they are merely hastening the inevitable. George Soros’s formulation, derived from Karl Popper and serving as the ideological underpinning for his democracy-promotion entity, the Open Society Foundations, is expressed thus: “Opening up closed societies, making open societies more viable, and promoting a critical mode of thinking.” In this account, it is self-evident that history is moving in one direction—toward more freedom, more openness and more democracy. Thus, democracy promotion is best understood as embodying

David Rieff is the author of eight books, including *A Bed for the Night: Humanitarianism in Crisis* (Simon & Schuster, 2003) and *At the Point of a Gun: Democratic Dreams and Armed Intervention* (Simon & Schuster, 2005).

the main premise of Francis Fukuyama’s 1989 article “The End of History?,” which claimed that the West’s Cold War victory marked “the end point of mankind’s ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government.”

There is irony in this proud assertion of openness to new ideas and dismissal of “closed,” undemocratic societies on the grounds that they, as Soros once complained, “claim to be in possession of the ultimate truth.” After all, this contemporary Western democratic-capitalist vision, of which the democracy-promotion and human-rights movements should be viewed as subsets, also claims a monopoly on social, ethical and political truth. Soros has reminisced that he knew communism was false because “it was a dogma.” But what could be more Manichaean and philosophically primitive than the blanket division of the entire world into open and closed societies? And what could be more dogmatic than Soros’s audacious claim that communism’s defeat “laid the groundwork for a universal open society”? For that matter, what could be more closed-minded than Fukuyama’s assertion that history’s only important remaining questions were how quickly and under what circumstances universalization of Western liberal capitalism would take place?

These claims may employ secular language to justify the conclusion that open societies are preferable to closed societies

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in large part because, again quoting Soros, “in an open society each citizen is not only allowed but required to think for himself.” But that cannot obscure their uncanny resemblance to both the familiar wartime claim that God is on one’s side and the Marxist idea that communism’s victory was inevitable. As Nikita Khrushchev boasted to a 1956 gathering of Western ambassadors in Warsaw, “Whether you like it or not, history is on our side.” Then he added the celebrated line, “We will bury you.” It was an expression of historical determinism at its most vulgar. But it was no worse than Fukuyama’s insistence that the only entirely legitimate political order was a developed state with the rule of law and accountable government, combined “in a stable balance.” As John Gray rightly observed, this vision of the future amounted to little more than “an idealized version of American government.”

Whether this claim took the form of Soros’s Popperian universalism, Fukuyama’s neo-Hegelianism or the dogma of democracy promotion, it was defined by the conviction that it was not so much that the West was remaking the world in its own image as that this image of a globalized open society was the only one left intact. By contrast, Khrushchev looks like a philosophical pragmatist.

What is it about democracy promotion that drives otherwise hardheaded people to such extremes? What, for example, was President Bill Clinton thinking when he prophesied during his second inaugural address in 1997 that “the world’s greatest democracy will lead a whole world of

democracies”? And did Secretary of State Hillary Clinton really believe, as she said in a 2012 speech, that countries closed to “change, to ideas, cultures and beliefs that are different from theirs, will quickly find that in our internet world they will be left behind”? Beyond the Silicon Valley technoutopianism and the Soros-lite boilerplate, did Clinton also believe that with the Western liberal-capitalist world mired in a deepening economic crisis, and with the United States now the greatest debtor nation in human history, she was really on solid ground in warning the Chinese that if they did not embrace the idea of an open society they would be consigned to the ash heap of history?

It is difficult to explain, other than perhaps in quasi-religious terms, how someone as intelligent and realistic as Secretary Clinton could say something so categorical with so little empirical evidence and so much familiar data that contradict her argument. But perhaps this is the essential point. The mainstream view of the American project from its founding has been marked by a mystical sense of mission, a belief in the redemptive role of the United States in global affairs, a missionary zeal in which remaking the world in America’s image seems not an act of hubris but the fulfillment of a moral duty. Viewed through the prism of American exceptionalism, the belief that the United States is the shining city on the hill, the last best hope of mankind, will always trump “mere” economic data or geostrategic trends. If God is on our side, then history must be too. To think otherwise is to betray the

American project. Thus, Secretary Clinton's speech was very much in the tradition of Khrushchev's burial warning.

The language of Clinton's speech may have been contemporary, particularly in its conflation of technology with liberty, but there was hardly anything new about it. The conviction that promoting democracy internationally is or should be an irreducible element of American foreign policy dates back at least to Woodrow Wilson and in some important ways to Abraham Lincoln. Even before that, journalist John L. O'Sullivan, who coined the term "Manifest Destiny" in 1845, asserted that the historic mission of the United States was "to establish on earth the moral dignity and salvation of man." This is not to say that the role of democracy promotion has not



changed radically over the past hundred years. To the contrary, Wilson promised that U.S. entry into World War I would make the world "safe for democracy." A generation later, Franklin D. Roosevelt promised that once dictatorship in Europe and Asia had been defeated (the dictatorship that was British and French colonialism got

nary a mention), the global order would be refounded on the basis of what FDR called "the four freedoms"—in other words, democracy building as a sustained process, rather than a desired end state of a war. The idea of democracy building through military occupation came into its own when deployed by the United States during the Cold War against the Soviet Union, not as a lofty goal but as one of the most important nonmilitary methods of prosecuting that war.

In the 1950s and 1960s, this democracy-promotion project began modestly, largely taking the form of covert CIA funding for cultural projects channeled through philanthropies such as the Ford Foundation (usually without the knowledge of the writers and artists concerned). These included setting up high-brow magazines such as *Encounter* in Britain, *Der Monat* in Germany and *Preuves* in France. It also involved establishing the Congress for Cultural Freedom, designed to marshal the forces of the anti-communist and anti-Soviet Left against the Western European cultural elite (Picasso and Sartre, for example) that continued to either sympathize with communism or take a neutral stance. Painting was a particularly important battleground, and throughout the 1950s the CIA sponsored exhibitions of American abstract expressionist painters, the most important of

whom were Willem de Kooning, Jackson Pollock and Robert Motherwell. The young Nelson Rockefeller, who helped organize many of these exhibitions through the Museum of Modern Art in New York, all but gave the game away when he called abstract expressionism "free enterprise painting." And Tom Braden, head of the CIA's Interna-

tional Organizations Division at the time, later recalled:

We wanted to unite all the people who were writers, who were musicians, who were artists, to demonstrate that the West and the United States was devoted to freedom of expression and to intellectual achievement, without any rigid barriers as to what you must write, and what you must say, and what you must do, and what you must paint, which was what was going on in the Soviet Union. I think it was the most important division that the agency had.

Braden was not being boastful. Joseph Nye may have invented the term “soft power” in 1990 as shorthand for ways in which American power could be recalibrated to meet the challenges of the post–Cold War world. But democracy promotion appears to be the prototypical example of soft power almost a full half century before Nye’s coinage, and its success in turning the cultural tide is no mere figment of the hard Left’s imagination. This should not be surprising. The Cold War was precisely that, cold, and sustained military action took place almost exclusively at the periphery of the American and Soviet empires—Cuba, Korea, Vietnam, Central America, Congo and the Horn of Africa. Instead, it was fought largely through economic competition and in a global contest for hearts and minds in which the essential question was whether communism or liberal capitalism would be embraced by the emerging nations of the postcolonial world. How else should a war in which the two main belligerents were not shooting at each other be fought *except* with soft power—or, if one prefers the grander formulation, through ideas, literature and art? To paraphrase Clausewitz, in such a context culture is the continuation of war by other means.

However horrified many of the writers and artists were who had unknowingly been the beneficiaries of the CIA’s largesse (some were while others pretended to be), in Cold War terms this form of democracy promotion made a great deal of tactical sense. And in the 1970s and 1980s, with the appeal of Soviet-style communism almost entirely a thing of the past, American democracy promotion was increasingly focused on supporting political and cultural dissidents within the Warsaw Pact countries. This project, too, was immensely successful, and some of the most important Eastern bloc dissidents—including Vaclav Havel, the great Russian poet Joseph Brodsky and many more—were immensely grateful. The dissidents didn’t “create” the events of 1989, but they were its vanguard, to use an old Marxist term. American support helped Havel hang on until history confirmed his intuition that, as he would later put it, “seemingly unshakable totalitarian monoliths are in fact sometimes as cohesive as proverbial houses of cards, and fall just as quickly.” And the European experience demonstrated that democracy promotion could actually contribute to U.S. victories such as the Cold War.

Thus, for Washington to have failed to employ the strategy of democracy promotion would have been foolish in the extreme. Ronald Reagan characterized the early 1980s as ushering in a “worldwide democratic revolution,” and his administration in 1983 formalized these efforts with the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and its four subsidiary organizations: the International Republican Institute, the National Democratic Institute (NDI), the Center for International Private Enterprise and the American Center for International Labor Solidarity. At this point, the actual term “democracy promotion” came into widespread use.

None of this was particularly admirable. Indeed, some of the effects of this democracy promotion were unquestionably malign, others merely sordid. But war is a sordid business, and the rationale for the steady buildup of U.S. democracy-promotion efforts throughout the Cold War made perfect sense then and still makes sense in retrospect.

The question today, however, is why, a full two decades after the collapse of the Soviet Union, American government agencies, major philanthropies and NGOs—notably the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the NED and its subsidiaries, Freedom House and George Soros's Open Society Foundations—still push for democracy-promotion expansion.

And this expansion has been prodigious. Of USAID's seven stated strategic goals, in 2011 it allocated \$17 billion (or 55 percent of the total State Department and USAID foreign-assistance budget) to the third of these goals, which it defined as being to "expand and sustain the ranks of prosperous, stable and democratic states by promoting effective, accountable, democratic governance; respect for human rights; sustainable, broad-based economic growth; and well-being."

Obviously, a great deal of this money went to economic development, global health and nutrition. Still, the substantial proportion committed to democracy promotion and the centrality that secretaries of state during the Clinton, George W. Bush and Obama administrations have given these efforts in U.S. foreign policy suggest that confidence in democracy promotion remains unshaken in Washington—despite the reverses this outlook has suffered in the battle spaces of the "long war" and the problems emanating from what George W. Bush liked to call the "global freedom agenda."

Yet this powerful faith and commitment should not be accepted as dispositive. It is reasonable in 2012 to ask whether democracy promotion can legitimately be described as a coherent doctrine at all and to wonder whether it can ever recover from the shocks it has undergone since the heady days of the Berlin Wall's fall. Most American policy makers and human-rights activists may believe that history is on their side, but for the first time since the Soviet collapse their efforts are encountering serious resistance not only from resurgent states such as Russia and emergent powers such as China but also from many nations in the Global South. For these countries, the democracy promoters' claims sound more like moral flags of convenience to further U.S. interests than disinterested efforts in the name of the global public good.

After all, the George W. Bush administration used the democracy agenda to justify its Iraq invasion and the global prosecution of its long war against jihadis. The perception that the United States wasn't exactly the paragon of the democratic norms it preached called into question the moral bona fides of the entire project. This questioning emerged even in the United States. But, even before these contradictions were widely perceived by American policy makers as constituting a potential threat, democracy promotion was becoming the victim of its own success. There is a business-school adage that the greatest danger a successful corporation faces is expanding too fast. That is what occurred with democracy promotion, for reasons that were as convincing at the time as they are foolish in retrospect. The collapse of the Soviet Union, though hardly as inevitable as commonly assumed, seemed to many intelligent people, including Washington policy makers, to confirm the rightness of the democracy agenda. This silly season

*Democracy became as much a faith as a system, and
in promoting it governments and NGOs were
performing the secular equivalent of the Lord's work.*

of post–Cold War triumphalism endured through the Clinton administration and, more surprisingly, lingers on today, as seen clearly in the policy positions of Secretary Clinton's State Department and the renewed emphasis on democracy promotion within USAID.

In fairness, how could the United States' Cold War victory *not* have distorted people's perceptions? Wasn't this victory and America's emergence as the globe's sole superpower a vindication of its form of social organization? But the Iraqi disaster and the quagmire in Afghanistan would prove that, while in terms of military assets the United States was now unparalleled, it was nonetheless still incapable of shaping events in accordance with its wishes. Besides, the dysfunctionality of the American political system that began under George W. Bush and intensified under Barack Obama damaged the belief that American democracy was without equal in the world. Despite Secretary Clinton's foolhardy statements, the success of authoritarian capitalism in China, particularly when contrasted with the Western financial crisis, has raised the question of whether the United States has either the means or the moral authority to engage in democracy promotion on a global scale.

But in the 1990s, all this was in the future. Then, it seemed perfectly reasonable to think that all nations would soon be liberal democracies and that the U.S. mission was to get them there as quickly as possible. To help facilitate this outcome, democracy promotion in the 1990s focused

largely on what often were called transition initiatives—that is, the shepherding of formerly communist countries and the less ideologically defined dictatorships in the Global South toward Fukuyama's promised land. Where successor regimes were not willing to sign on, the United States and certain private groups (notably the Soros Foundations in Georgia) threw their weight and money behind opposition figures eager to do just that. Not surprisingly, in an economically successful tyranny such as China or a politically effective tyranny such as Putin's Russia, Washington's idea of the democracy transition was viewed as “regime change.” It is difficult to say whether Washington was simply oblivious to these concerns or felt so confident it held the geopolitical whip hand that it did not need to heed them. Perhaps it simply was convinced, as reflected in confident statements by American politicians and democracy-promotion activists, that Russia and China too would simply have to join President Clinton's “world of democracies.”

This hubris should not be surprising. To be sure, the 1990s are not usually regarded as a time of ideological fervor in the United States. Bill Clinton's presidency is widely viewed as a time of comparative comity (leaving aside the impeachment crisis). But ideological fervor fueled the idea that we were all witnessing the birth of a world in which practically everyone on the planet would live under the same political and economic system. There certainly was no historical basis for such a vision. What emerged was what must be called a missionary zeal for the universalization of

democracy curated by the United States. Democracy became as much a faith as a system, and in promoting it governments and NGOs were performing the secular equivalent of the Lord's work. The force of the comparison between post-Cold War democracy promoters and Christian missionaries of old lies in their confidence that each of their systems—Christianity for the missionary, democratic capitalism for the democracy promoter—is not an answer but *the* answer.

Thus, Christianity was not some “idea” about which reasonable people could differ. The missionaries saw it as offering the truth, pure and simple. Proponents of democracy building, which itself is best viewed as one subset of the international human-rights movement, do not literally believe themselves to be preaching God's word. But it was not for nothing that many people both within and outside the human-rights movement have described it as a secular religion. And this heady mixture of Fukuyama, Human Rights Watch and the Soros Foundations stirred in the democracy-promotion movement a moral confidence as robust as that of any member of the White Fathers order in Kenya or Scottish Presbyterian missionaries in China—that is, fallible perhaps on details but infallible on the essential dogma.

Such a comparison with missionary activity would be rejected by most contemporary democracy promoters, not least on the grounds that, as the mission statement of the NDI puts it on its website, the organization

does not presume to impose solutions on local partners. Nor does it believe that one democratic system can be replicated elsewhere. Rather, NDI shares experiences and offers a range of options, so that leaders and activists can select those practices and institutions that may work best in their own circumstances.

But there is something more than a little disingenuous about such an assertion. Indeed, it is somewhat reminiscent of the old Argentine joke about the dictator Juan Perón who, when informed about a particularly bitter and divisive political issue that was convulsing the country, observed that the rival groups, whatever their differences, were at least all Peronists. The NDI's assertion that it holds no brief for any particular democratic system cannot be taken at face value. For either this means its leaders would accept a decision by a country to opt for a totalitarian regime such as China's, in which case they are not in fact committed to promoting democracy, or they are saying that within the context of democratic capitalism, Western-style property rights and legal norms, and so on, they have no wish to take a stand on which variant is best suited for a particular country. In that case, to paraphrase Dorothy Parker's line about the emotional range of Katherine Hepburn's acting, they are open to the entire gamut of political possibilities . . . from A to B.

When the NDI says it is above politics, it really means party politics.¹ But this amounts to making the claim that, while democracy may be the frame of politics, it is not political per se—a ludicrous claim in philosophical terms, however convenient.

In any case, whether or not the advocates of democracy promotion within and outside of government recognize it, such claims to altruism ring hollow to many

¹ It is important to state here that in this sense, Republicans and Democrats in the United States, and Social Democrats, Christian Democrats and, most importantly, Eurocrats in Europe, are all small “I” liberals, whose disputes over democracy and human rights internationally, however bitterly engaged in, are more illustrations of Freud's idea of the narcissism of small differences than they are of serious ideological conflict.

outside the United States. One of the most important trends of the past decade, largely unrecognized in Washington, is the renaissance of the strong state in countries of the Global South such as Rwanda, Ethiopia and Sri Lanka. In the 1980s and 1990s, free-wheeling groups such as Doctors Without Borders, Save the Children and the International Rescue Committee could operate in many parts of the world almost entirely as they saw fit. But now, even in war zones



and during refugee emergencies, local authorities largely have the upper hand. Thus, while Washington may complain that populist leaders such as Hugo Chávez or autocrats such as Vladimir Putin are resisting outside democracy-promotion efforts because such activities threaten their hold on power, the days are long gone when democracy promotion under Washington's aegis enjoyed a tremendous amount of leeway.

The strongest example of this pushback occurred this September 19, when Russia ordered USAID to permanently halt all its operations and programs in the Russian Federation within ten days. The Putin regime's justification for this de facto expulsion order, which appears to be the first of its kind in any major country, was, as the Russian foreign ministry's statement put it, "because the work of the agency's officials far from always responded to the stated goals of development and humanitarian cooperation. We are talking about attempts to influence political processes through its grants."

The U.S. State Department's outraged reaction to the news was a case study in the hypocrisy and confusion that have attended post-Cold War democracy promotion from the start. Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland declared that the United States remained "committed to supporting democracy, human rights, and the development of a more robust civil society in Russia." She added defiantly that Washington looked forward to "continuing our close cooperation with Russian non-governmental organizations."

It is perfectly legitimate for the Obama administration to oppose the Putin government and to favor dissident groups like Memorial, the election-monitoring NGO Golos and other organizations that oppose the Putin regime. But it is absurd to pretend that, in doing so, Washington is not meddling in Russia's internal affairs. Vladimir Putin may be everything his adversaries in the democratic Russian opposition say he is, but the fact that he is bad does not mean he is wrong. USAID has been funding groups that would like to see a different and more democratic government in the Kremlin. For Washington to express indignation that this dictatorship is not prepared to let America continue underwriting its enemies really

tells you all you need to know about the self-delusional sense of arrogant entitlement that pervades the democracy-building project.

Sooner or later, Washington will recognize that the global rules of the game have changed, just as it already recognizes its inability to exert much influence over whether China democratizes. But American policy makers aren't likely to reconsider their commitment to democracy. For now, democracy-promotion advocates are largely circling the wagons. The ablest of them, such as the brilliant Tom Carothers of the Carnegie Endowment, readily concede the setbacks that democracy promotion has suffered. But they believe it can continue to be tremendously effective even in today's far more difficult environment. It remains to be seen if this is correct. But American policy makers should be asking a different question: whether the U.S. government's commitment to democracy promotion still makes sense in terms of national interest. We will never know if George Soros was correct when he claimed that in the immediate aftermath of the Soviet collapse, there existed the possibility to bring a universal open society into being. But it is clear that this moment, if it ever existed, is now past. In a world where history has emphatically not ended, where there are a number of competing economic models that will have to coexist and there is no global democratic consensus, why does democracy promotion remain a major foreign-policy priority for the United States?

During the Cold War, the utility of democracy promotion was clear: it was a weapon in that conflict. In the immediate aftermath of the Cold War, it was possible to believe a new world order curated by the United States might actually come

into being. Then, pursuing democracy promotion was an entirely rational decision for policy makers, for it would have strengthened that world order. But now, when the new world order has turned out to be a chimera, why continue to pursue a policy configured for other times and other conditions? It is true that, historically, the United States has had a revolutionary conception of its role in the world. But particularly given its straitened circumstances, is it wise for the United States to pursue the missionary agenda it has pushed at particular times in the past? Again, consider the Russian Federation. In some parts of the world, U.S. and Russian interests are at odds; in other parts of the world, they have interests in common. Under these circumstances, what is the national-interest rationale for supporting the internal opposition to the Putin regime and insisting that whatever happens, this support will continue? There is a term for that project: regime change. And the fact that it is being undertaken through peaceful means rather than military expeditions changes nothing about the desired end state of the democracy-building project.

The Russian case is certainly going to be only the first of many. Understandably, the rise of China and the relative decline of the United States have unsettled the American policy establishment. And Washington has no experience dealing with successful pushback to its democracy-building ambitions and doubtless is scrambling to figure out what to do. In times of uncertainty, people's first instinct often is to carry on as if nothing has changed. If Washington's continued reliance on democracy promotion is an emblem of this, it would be entirely understandable. But this does not make it any less unwise. □

“Etzioni provides a perspective that will remain relevant and useful for years to come.”

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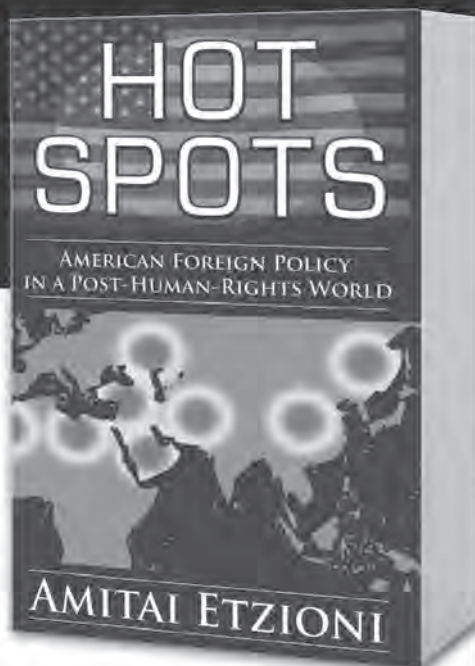
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Amitai Etzioni is professor of international relations at The George Washington University. He served as president of the American Sociological Association. He was professor of sociology at Columbia University, guest scholar at the Brookings Institute, senior advisor to the White House under Jimmy Carter, and Thomas Henry Carroll Ford Foundation Professor at Harvard Business School. He is the author of more than twenty books.



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PENNSTATE





The Peculiar Life of Joseph Kennedy

By Conrad Black

David Nasaw, *The Patriarch: The Remarkable Life and Turbulent Times of Joseph P. Kennedy* (New York: Penguin, 2012), 896 pp., \$40.00.

The *Patriarch* is a thorough and balanced biography that illuminates American public policy from the time of Herbert Hoover to the brief era dominated by the subject's sons. David Nasaw, an accomplished writer, explores all of the controversial high points of Joseph Kennedy's career meticulously, and the record is usefully set straight in many places. For the most part, the narrative is absorbing.

It is well-known that Kennedy's father and father-in-law were prominent Irish Boston figures. It is less widely known that his father, Patrick J. Kennedy, a prosperous financier, gave him an upbringing similar to what upper-middle-class Protestant East Coast families generally provided, including Boston Latin School and Harvard. Joseph

Conrad Black is chairman emeritus of *The National Interest* as well as a columnist and biographer of Franklin D. Roosevelt and Richard Nixon. His latest book is *A Matter of Principle* (Encounter Books, 2012). He was chairman of the *London Daily Telegraph* from 1987 to 2004 and is a member of the British House of Lords.

Kennedy made no bones of the fact that he did not see it as his role to fight "for the British" during World War I, although he seems to have been too pugnacious a character to have believed that the United States should accept passively the German submarine sinkings of American merchant ships on the high seas. He was no pacifist, as he amply demonstrated after Pearl Harbor, and was certainly not a coward. But Kennedy used political connections to obtain a draft-exempt position in the shipbuilding industry after America's entry into the Great War.

After the war, Kennedy joined a Boston merchant bank, Hayden Stone, and largely fulfilled his early ambition of cracking the Boston Brahmin financial establishment. Previously, he had been head of the Columbia Trust Bank, where his father was a director and substantial shareholder. He took this company over as almost a private bank for his stock and investment plunging at Hayden Stone. Kennedy proved a preternaturally agile investor and was almost always successful in generating gains, yet not always with complete probity. Though well established at Hayden Stone, Kennedy saw that he would never be entirely accepted. As the Roaring Twenties began in earnest on Wall Street and across the land, he shifted his sights to the immensely larger New York financial market.

Kennedy soon saw that motion pictures were a growth industry, chronically mismanaged by fly-by-night impresarios who knew nothing of administrative economics, whatever their talents at cinematic artistry and marketing. It also was



a glamorous industry. He set out to achieve fame and fortune and accomplished no less. He began with film distribution in New England but quickly moved on to industry-wide arrangements and production. “Joseph P. Kennedy Presents” became a familiar tag on film credits, and Kennedy helped amalgamate several film houses in the manner of new industries that consolidate swiftly.

Nasaw estimates that Kennedy quintupled his net worth between 1926 and 1929—to perhaps \$30 million in today’s money. Using his own trust company to make loans to himself (a bold but perfectly legal move), Kennedy bought a growing number of movie theaters and soon took control of the Film Booking Offices of America, Keith-Albee-Orpheum, Pathé Films and First National Corporation. He also conducted extensive negotiations with David Sarnoff of Radio Corporation of America. Then he withdrew from them profitably as they consolidated into Radio Keith Orpheum (RKO).

Despite his ostentatious Roman Catholicism, Kennedy was proud of his extensive sex life and his many attractive companions—including, over decades, legions of assistants, secretaries, masseuses and even young female golf caddies. But in

Hollywood, he was able to fish greedily in the pool of starlets and aspirants to stardom. Here Nasaw strays into the swirling waters of surmise and mind reading. He assumes Kennedy’s Catholicism actually enabled him to commit such egregious serial infidelities against the mother of his nine children. Nasaw asserts this theory through the memoirs of Gloria Swanson, one of the greatest and sexiest stars of the 1930s, with whom Kennedy had a torrid affair, notorious in Hollywood but studiously ignored by his wife, Rose, who professed not to notice. Nasaw does effectively debunk, by barely referring to it, the Swanson allegation that Boston’s cardinal William O’Connell, a notoriously imperious and abrasive man, attempted to order Swanson to desist from the relationship.

Swanson broke rather angrily with Kennedy and accused him of exploiting her financially. But before that, Kennedy combined his romantic and industrial ambitions in setting himself up as Swanson’s producer and financial adviser. He cast her as the lead in a new film by Hollywood’s most temperamental director, Erich von Stroheim, a “self-destructive madman.” It was shut down midshoot after more than a million dollars had been wasted on it. Kennedy then cast Swanson in the 1929 film *The Trespasser*,

which premiered in Europe very successfully. Afterward, Joe and Rose Kennedy joined Gloria and members of both families on the return ocean passage to New York. Kennedy lavished copious attention on Swanson while Rose, expecting their ninth child (Edward), stayed above it all.

Kennedy flourished in the Depression. He was a pessimist except on the question of his own ability to succeed, and he recognized that America's prosperity in the late 1920s was uneven and that the stock market was overbought. He sold shares and assets and was largely liquid and nearly debt free when the crash came.

David Nasaw does usefully debunk two Kennedy financial legends: One was that he had made a great financial score on Yellow Cab Company and the original Hertz rent-a-car business. He did moderately well, but John Hertz declined his offer to invest heavily in the car-rental venture. Nasaw also disposes of the malicious canard that Kennedy was a bootlegger during Prohibition. But like many others, Kennedy foresaw the end of the Prohibition folly, which effectively delivered one of the country's greatest industries into the hands of organized crime. He secured large stocks of premium Scotch and exclusive importing arrangements, founded Somerset Importers and collected huge profits. Kennedy also led a syndicate that included Walter Chrysler, the automobile manufacturer, and the investment banks Kuhn, Loeb Co. and Lehman Brothers. Together they bought large quantities of stock in Libbey-Owens-Ford, an auto-glass manufacturer, and wash-traded huge volumes of stock

among themselves while promoting the outright fraud that their company was related to Owens-Illinois, which made glass bottles and presumably would profit from repeal of Prohibition. It was brazen and cynical, but these "pump and dump" activities didn't include the filing of written misrepresentations. Hence, it wasn't illegal.

Kennedy's departure from Pathé Films after it ran into trouble was a case study in the use of insider information. Kennedy arranged the takeout of his own stock in the company, which flattened the interest of uninformed minority shareholders. Then he short sold the stock as the company collapsed into the hands of Kennedy's buyer, RKO. When he appeared at the subsequent shareholders' meeting, according to the *New York Times*, "heavily armed private detectives were unable to preserve order," although they did prevent physical violence. Kennedy was greeted with epithets but remained relatively unfazed. He short sold other stocks, but he also bought, as long-term investments, shares and other assets that he believed had been sold down to the point of being underpriced in the panic and distress. According to Nasaw, Kennedy's net worth rose steadily through the Depression, even as deflation flattened values.

Like most Boston Irish, Kennedy was a Democrat, but he did not support New York's Irish Catholic governor Alfred E. Smith when he ran for president in 1928 against Republican Herbert Hoover. Kennedy viewed Smith as a clownish Irish pol, rather like four-term Boston mayor James

His gamecock aggressiveness and tendency to feel exploited or under-recognized served him well at trading, where he kept his eyes open and his guard up. But he lacked the self-confidence of a great leader.

Michael Curley (once elected from a jail cell). This was an unjust rap on Smith. True, he had a broad Lower East Side accent and left school at age ten, but he was a reform governor and scrupulously honest. Kennedy identified with the educated and modern engineer and businessman, Hoover, who had distinguished himself distributing aid in war-ravaged Europe and engineering big projects in China. But Kennedy became concerned during the Depression that the economic and social problems of America were so serious that the United States could blow up in social discord. He had respected Franklin D. Roosevelt from a distance in World War I, noting that he was completely without religious prejudice as he led the pro-Smith faction in the Democratic Party at the 1924 and 1928 conventions. Kennedy saw a necessity for some radical adjustments to avoid complete catastrophe, while Hoover offered nothing but reinforcement of failure.

In this, Kennedy showed far more prescience than most businessmen, who harrumphed and quavered in their clubs, quoting the Bible, Mother Hubbard and Dickens about the immutability of the economic cycle. The Roosevelt-Kennedy relationship was strange. Kennedy had the Midas touch but was completely inept politically; Roosevelt, an unsuccessful financial dabbler, was the all-time heavyweight champion of electoral politics in the democratic world. Writes Nasaw: "What is remarkable about their relationship is how adept Roosevelt was at getting from Kennedy what he needed and how regularly he would resist giving much back." This was part of Roosevelt's genius

and ultimately extended even to Churchill and Stalin. Kennedy never understood it.

Throughout his thirteen-year career as presidential candidate and president, Roosevelt needed only two things from Kennedy—to help persuade publisher and media owner William Randolph Hearst to abandon the spoiling candidacy of House Speaker John Nance Garner of Texas at the 1932 Democratic convention; and to soothe the Irish Americans while FDR gave all aid "short of war" to Britain as he ran for a third term in 1940.

Roosevelt had succeeded Smith as governor of New York and supplanted him as the leading Democratic candidate for the presidency after Smith's 1928 defeat. The Democrats required a two-thirds convention majority to nominate a presidential candidate, and Hearst, by promoting the Garner candidacy, denied Roosevelt that majority.

Hearst was a militant isolationist who generally preferred the Germans to the British. Because he suspected Roosevelt (with some reason) of being an internationalist, he fluffed up the Garner candidacy, although Garner himself had no interest in the nomination. Roosevelt inched toward the two-thirds majority he needed through the third ballot, but his famous campaign managers, Louis McHenry Howe and James A. Farley, had no more delegates to bring over.

Kennedy had struck up a cordial relationship with Hearst in his Hollywood days and succeeded in getting through his switchboard at San Simeon. He persuaded Hearst to release Garner from the spoiling

campaign in exchange for Garner getting the vice presidential slot. Garner got the vice presidency, which he later described as “not worth a bucket of warm piss.” Thus was Roosevelt nominated in a political climate that almost guaranteed his election, given the magnitude of the Depression.

Kennedy’s public career, though it had its moments, was a crushing disappointment, only ameliorated in his old age by the rise of his sons. On the first of Roosevelt’s railway campaign trips, Kennedy’s bonhomous talents as raconteur and his political largesse made him popular with some of Roosevelt’s entourage, while his insidious, swashbuckling self-promotion raised hackles with others. Roosevelt won by over seven million votes, and he didn’t need Kennedy to pad his majority.

Kennedy possessed administrative talents, as he had shown in the film industry and would demonstrate again soon. His gamecock aggressiveness and tendency to feel exploited or under-recognized served him well at trading, where he kept his eyes open and his guard up. But he lacked the self-confidence of a great leader. Roosevelt was an American aristocrat who spoke French and German, the cousin and nephew-in-law of a beloved president, connected to the Astors, Belmonts and Vanderbilts. As he said of the polio that afflicted him in his young adulthood, “If you spent two years in bed trying to wiggle your toe, after that anything would seem easy.”

Roosevelt’s intuition of the tides and currents of popular opinion were as demiurgic as, and much more complicated

than, Kennedy’s shrewdness as an investor. He had the confidence of the well-born and much-loved only child, amplified by having overcome his terrible affliction and having achieved immense political popularity. He was an enigma. As one of his vice presidents, Henry Wallace, said: “No one knows him.” His sometime assistant secretary of treasury and of state, Dean Acheson, said Roosevelt ruled like a monarch—not a bourgeois British monarch but a Bourbon—by a combination of divine right, natural aptitude and popular will. “He called everyone by his first name and made no distinction between the secretary of state and the stable boy.” His successor, Harry Truman, said of FDR: “He was the coldest man I ever met. He didn’t give a damn personally for me or you or anyone else. . . . But he was a great President.”

Joe Kennedy was not equipped to deal with such a man—charming to everyone but revealing to no one. In the administration’s early days, Kennedy fumed to Roosevelt’s entourage about not being offered a job, then sent the president obsequious messages suggesting his inauguration “seemed like another resurrection,” as he put it in one letter. Roosevelt, on the other hand, read Kennedy exactly—a rich man who thought his commercial acumen could be transposed into other fields, convinced he could buy anything and anyone (starting with the president’s avaricious son James). It was the meeting of a guileless, hypersensitive, ethnic outsider and striver with an unfathomably enigmatic, overpowering national ruler

and political magician. Kennedy never realized what and whom he was dealing with; Roosevelt knew precisely whom he was manipulating.

Finally, the call came in the summer of 1934. Roosevelt found himself less concerned about the feckless Republicans than about the rabble-rousing splinter groups led by Louisiana boss Huey P. Long, radio priest Charles E. Coughlin and the retirees' pied piper, Francis Townsend. Thus, he created the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) to round up the millions who were convinced that shady stock-market practices, false prospectuses and crooked trading had brought on the Depression. He viewed Kennedy as someone who knew all the financial tricks but was an unambiguous capitalist and no apologist of the pre-crash ancien régime. It was an astute appointment. As Roosevelt disarmingly explained to an incredulous reporter: "Set a thief to catch a thief."

Nasaw exaggerates the crisis in financial markets at the time of Kennedy's installation. Of the approximately seventeen million unemployed at the time of Roosevelt's inauguration, about five million had been rehired by the private sector and seven million put to work in the New Deal workfare programs that built what would today be called infrastructure (Lincoln Tunnel, Triborough Bridge, Chicago waterfront, Tennessee Valley Authority) and conservation projects. The rest were at least receiving direct unemployment compensation, and the stock market had risen by more than 100 percent from its early 1933 low. Kennedy's task wasn't really,

as Nasaw writes, to restore confidence in investors, though there was an aspect of that; it was to satisfy people that the markets functioned honestly and that the administration was not hostile to business.

It is a moot point whether the United States would have been better off without the monster the SEC has become, meddling and indicting in all directions and terrorizing the liver out of people throughout the economic system. But Kennedy staffed the commission with able people, ran it fairly and efficiently, and gave it a good launch. He retired in autumn 1935, and everyone agreed he had acquitted himself with distinction. He also entertained lavishly in Washington, previewing Hollywood movies after dinner. The president himself often enjoyed and reciprocated his hospitality.

In early 1937, Roosevelt gave Kennedy the chairmanship of the derelict Maritime Commission, saddled with protectionism, uncontrollable employment costs and a history of regulatory zeal. Kennedy studied the situation, then prepared an excellent report on what should be done to fix the U.S. merchant-shipping industry. Thus did he master another difficult assignment. Now he was ready for the real payoff, earned for his enthusiastic backing of the New Deal in a business community that generally felt threatened by it.

Roosevelt fully understood Kennedy's mercurial personality and his delusions of aptitude for higher office. Some in his entourage blanched at the thought of rewarding Kennedy, but Roosevelt argued that sending him to London as ambassador would get him out of the way and dampen

his unceasing maneuvering and backbiting. Besides, it would be a refreshing change of pace for the staid Court of St. James, which exasperated Roosevelt with its tendency to appease Hitler, as reflected in the diplomacy of prime ministers Ramsay MacDonald, Stanley Baldwin and Neville Chamberlain.

But Roosevelt underestimated the extent to which Kennedy would tuck himself in with the Chamberlain coterie and become a witless dupe of the appeasers—and indirectly of Hitler. It was one of the most catastrophic appointments in U.S. diplomatic history (rivaled by his almost simultaneous nomination of the Stalin bootlicker Joseph E. Davies to Moscow). Roosevelt got more than he bargained for when he sent Joe Kennedy to London in March 1938.

The pugnacious Irishman arrived just before the German Anschluss of Austria, and he fell in at once with the British government's appeasement policy. Kennedy made himself the spokesman for the most absurd notions: German economic conditions required expansion; only an enlargement of American trade could avert war; Chamberlain's desertion of Czechoslovakia was "a masterpiece."

Kennedy told the incoming German ambassador, Herbert von Dirksen, as he had told his predecessor, Joachim von Ribbentrop, that he understood completely Germany's concern with Jews and that Jewish influence in the media



was responsible for Germany's hostile press in America. According to Dirksen's diplomatic cables, Kennedy said Hitler's "ideas in the social and economic field which were responsible for such extraordinary achievements in Germany, would be a determining influence on the economic development of the United States." Kennedy soon was sending cables to Washington predicting America would have to enact fascist economic controls; far from considering Roosevelt too economically interventionist, he was soon predicting American corporatism. He had no more economic moorings than he had any notion of geopolitical reality. He became preoccupied with the danger of war to the safety of his sons. He sent a weekly newsletter to various prominent Americans, including Walter Lippmann, William Randolph Hearst, columnist Drew Pearson, his paid mouthpiece Arthur Krock, and various isolationist journalists and senators in which he poured out his preemptive grovelings to Hitler. Nasaw records: "It was apparent now, six months into his tenure, that Joseph P. Kennedy was unfit to serve as ambassador."

Kennedy was like a hyperactive child, never content to let events take their course. When Chamberlain and his foreign

The pugnacious Irishman arrived just before the German Anschluss of Austria, and he fell in at once with the British government's appeasement policy.

minister, Lord Halifax, decided to take a harder line, Kennedy briefly got in step. He invited the Lindberghs, who were living in Germany, to London and commissioned a report from Charles Lindbergh on the effects of war. Lindbergh produced a hair-raising forecast of utter aerial devastation of Britain. At a dinner at the Astors' splendid Cliveden estate attended by Chamberlain, Kennedy read a letter from Germany from his son Joseph. When he finished, wrote fascist sympathizer Anne Morrow Lindbergh, Kennedy looked "like a small boy, pleased and shy . . . like an Irish terrier wagging his tail." When Chamberlain and Halifax veered back to appeasement as the Czech crisis reached its climax, Roosevelt had to veto Kennedy's request that one of the prime minister's defeatist addresses be broadcast directly to the United States.

Only a few weeks after the Munich summit meeting between Chamberlain and Hitler, a Polish Jew in France murdered an official of the German embassy in Paris. Hitler and his spokesmen unleashed the horrible pogrom of Kristallnacht (the night of the broken glass), in which scores of Jews were murdered, thousands were imprisoned and hundreds of synagogues were burned. Roosevelt, who had called for the "quarantine" of the world's dictators a year before, pulled the U.S. ambassador to Germany, and Hitler withdrew his from Washington just before he was expelled.

As Hitler propelled Europe toward war, Kennedy torqued himself up to lurid political fantasies: the United States would have to adopt a fascist economic model. He badgered Arthur Krock to get the Senate

Foreign Relations Committee to call him as a witness, as he considered himself an expert on European affairs. After Hitler seized Prague and all Bohemia in March 1939, Chamberlain and Halifax abandoned appeasement and unilaterally guaranteed they would defend Poland, but Kennedy took the failed policy to new depths. He proposed to the British and American governments that Hitler be offered cash incentives not to attack his next target, Poland.

He explained to Lippmann in June 1939 that the Royal Navy was "valueless" because the German air force could sink it, after effortlessly brushing aside the Royal Air Force. When the Nazi-Soviet pact was concluded, Kennedy begged Roosevelt to urge Poland to negotiate with Hitler, as if that could have accomplished anything. He was clearly in a delusional state.

Fortunately, Roosevelt paid no attention to any of it. He had known from the beginning that it would come to war with Hitler, that Germany was too strong for France, that appeasement would almost certainly fail and that civilization could only be saved by the United States, preferably after Germany was immersed in the morass of Russia, with Japan in the morass of China.

Kennedy was now a virtual mental case. On September 30, 1939, he wrote the president three letters saying that Britain could not be saved and wasn't worth saving, and that it had only gone to war to save its colonies (which Germany didn't want). Neither the moral nor strategic implications of the war were remotely comprehensible to him. Roosevelt had a

raving fascist sympathizer in his embassy in London. But he was secretly planning to break a tradition as old as the Republic and run for a third term, and so he had to keep Kennedy in place and out of the domestic debate. Roosevelt couldn't deal with Chamberlain, so he spoke with the British ambassador, first Ronald Lindsay and then Lord Lothian, and struck up direct communications with the returned head of the navy, Winston Churchill, whom he had not liked when they met in World War I but now embraced as someone who would carry the fight to Hitler. (His initial message to Churchill purported to thank him for a hitherto unacknowledged book Churchill had sent him—seven years before.) Kennedy, in what Roosevelt described as “typical asinine Joe Kennedy letters,” urged that America fight in its own backyard. Roosevelt understood it was better to stop the enemy, using the forces of other countries, on the far sides of the Atlantic and Pacific.

On May 20, 1940, with Churchill (a warmonger and a drunkard, in Kennedy's view) now prime minister and with Germany slicing through France, Kennedy wrote Rose: “My God how right I've been in my predictions.” Of course, it all turned, and he soon resented the prowess of the Royal Air Force and Churchill's eloquence, seeing them as somehow increasing the likelihood of U.S. involvement in war. He was at this point, as Nasaw rightly summarizes, “exhausted, lonely, frightened, bitter, and self-pitying.” He claimed to believe that if he had been allowed to meet Hitler, he could have worked it out. Kennedy's private

plan was to take over Canada, Mexico and Central America militarily and impose a fascist dictatorship in the United States, though he shared this brainwave only with himself in his private notes.

Roosevelt played a supremely deft hand, resupplying the British Army by executive authority after the Dunkirk evacuation, selling his policy of all aid short of war, insisting the best way to stay out of war was to keep the British and Canadians in it, engineering a bogus draft of himself for a third term as president, lending Britain fifty destroyers and instituting the first peacetime conscription in American history. Nasaw presents this gripping drama well, though there are a few irritating lapses, such as the references to Sir Alexander Cadogan as a lord and the resuscitation of the hackneyed myth that Hitler deliberately allowed the escape at Dunkirk by holding back two armored divisions. As the Blitz opened in September 1940, Kennedy bet one of his officials that “Hitler will be in Buckingham Palace in two weeks.”

Kennedy was desperate to leave his post and spent much of his time in the British countryside, out of harm's way. He was now despised by the British for wailing that Britain was finished and that Roosevelt was insane and incompetent. He let it be known to friends in the administration that he had written an inside account of Roosevelt's dealings with the British government, for release if he were not back in America before the election—an act of gross insubordination, as well as a falsehood, as he didn't know the full inside story. He believed the presence of the Labour Party in



Churchill's coalition showed that socialism, and therefore Nazism, was "budding up so fast that these fellows don't recognize it."

Kennedy finally returned to America, arriving just a few days before the election. Roosevelt cleverly invited Joe and Rose to the White House without any press involvement. When they met, the president adhered to his practice of ignoring the vast accumulation of Kennedy's insolences and disloyalties and told him that all his problems were due to the "officious" people in the State Department, whom he would clean out as soon as the election was over. There is some dispute about what was said next; only Roosevelt, Joe and Rose Kennedy, Senator James Byrnes and the president's assistant, Missy LeHand, were present. But there seems little doubt that Roosevelt warned, obliquely or explicitly, that Kennedy's sons would have no future in the Democratic Party if Kennedy defected at this point. Kennedy gave a speech for Roosevelt three nights later and paid for it himself. Though not effusive, it was an unambiguous endorsement. Roosevelt was reelected comfortably enough, whereupon Kennedy went public with his crusade against the war and his assertion that Britain was washed up. He even gave a three-hour anti-Semitic

harangue to a largely Jewish movie-industry audience in Hollywood. He retired as ambassador and did not return to England until after the war. If he had just behaved like a normal diplomat, with any idea of the moral forces at issue in the

war and the real strategic balance, he could have served through the war, gained great distinction and possibly have even been the vice presidential candidate in 1944 or 1948.

He didn't break openly with Roosevelt personally, but he wasn't relevant anymore, and Roosevelt paid no attention to him. As Nasaw accurately states:

He had never been able to accept the reality that being an "insider" meant sacrificing something to the team. His sense of his own wisdom and unique talents was so overblown that he truly believed he could stake out an independent position for himself and still remain a trusted and vital part of the Roosevelt team.

After Pearl Harbor, Kennedy grandly telegrammed Roosevelt: "I'm yours to command." Roosevelt ignored him. Kennedy, believing Roosevelt had provoked Hitler into war, now made a specialty of being abrasive and obnoxious to the great officeholders he met. Kennedy's latest crusade, which began shortly after the war, was against any attempt to combat communism in Europe. He was as faithful a dupe to Stalin as he had been to Hitler, and he fatuously debated with Truman and Eisenhower as he had tried unsuccessfully to do with Roosevelt. He had no notion of or

The Kennedys were really only a dynasty for the decade of the 1960s, a glamorous and tragic meteor of a family that fleetingly brightened the sky of America and then passed on.

respect for the greatness of any of them, or of Churchill, only a chippy sense of his own right to know better.

Nasaw gives him too much credit for starting a “great debate” over postwar involvement in Europe and East Asia. It wasn’t much of a debate, and Kennedy didn’t contribute much to it. He never grasped that Hitler was incompatible with Western civilization, that a rampant Nazi Germany was a mortal threat to the United States and that Roosevelt had made the United States the supreme power in the world while Stalin took 95 percent of the casualties in fighting Hitler. America’s prewar rivals—Germany, Britain, Japan, France and Italy—were all docile American allies now, and functioning democracies.

Kennedy retained his genius for profit and invested intelligently, including in America’s largest building after the Pentagon, the Merchandise Mart in Chicago. It must be said that his most endearing characteristic was his devotion to his children. He was always accessible and concerned, never overly stern or too busy for them. Nasaw believably explains that Kennedy acted reasonably in ordering a lobotomy for his mentally handicapped daughter Rosemary in 1942. When it failed, he was horribly upset and even more so by the deaths of his eldest son Joe Jr., heroically in a 1944 bombing mission, and his universally liked daughter Kathleen, in an air accident in 1948. He made prodigious efforts to assist his surviving sons in their political careers, getting John F. Kennedy’s books “edited,” published and excerpted, financially assisting James Curley back into

city hall to open up for Jack the congressional district that had once been held by Rose’s father and contributing tangibly to the effort to keep Joseph R. McCarthy out of Massachusetts when JFK ran for the Senate there in 1952. He had been egregiously tolerant of McCarthy, a red-baiting grandstander who sought to attach the communist label to Roosevelt, Truman, Eisenhower and General George C. Marshall—four of America’s greatest statesmen. The third Kennedy son, Bobby, was McCarthy’s assistant committee counsel for six months.

He contributed generously to his son’s presidential campaign and was a member of the strategy committee. But he did nothing indicating JFK was not his own man. The author suggests John Kennedy shared some of his father’s reservations about overreaching for the defense of Europe, but he soon got over those. This book is not a history of that campaign, but it does pass rather swiftly over the extent of Nixon’s potential grievances. There is little doubt that Illinois—won by Kennedy by less than nine thousand votes out of nearly five million cast, with many ballots missing—was stolen; nor that Nixon won the popular vote, if the votes in Alabama had been allotted fairly between Kennedy and the splinter southern Democrat, Senator Harry Byrd. The many other very close states, including Texas, are not referred to specifically, and the election was really a toss-up. Nixon had a right to contest it, and he deserves credit for not forcing the issue.

Joseph Kennedy, turbulent soul that he was, felt that too few Roman Catholics had voted for his son in 1960 and too many



Protestants had voted against him because of his religion. Yet he was rightly jubilant at being father of a U.S. president.

In 1962, Kennedy suffered a stroke that left him half paralyzed, wheelchair-bound and unable to speak. He became a prisoner in his own body, much as his daughter Rosemary was. His thoughts on the assassination of his son can only be imagined, and the similar fate that befell Robert Kennedy nearly five years later finished the father, who died on November 18, 1969, aged eighty-one.

Next to his love of his children, his most admirable quality was his appreciation of classical music. He was a congenial companion and a fine-looking, nattily dressed man. But he excelled only at financial speculation and administration. Apart from his talents as a sire and parental provider and motivator, he was an improbable person to earn the title of this book. And his family, as Marlene Dietrich's daughter said, all had "smiles that never ended." They scarcely seem to merit the crazed idolatry they have received. But, thanks to the patriarch, they were numerous, tremendously ambitious, wealthy and led eventful lives. It was really only a dynasty for the decade of the 1960s, a glamorous and tragic meteor of a family that fleetingly brightened the sky of America and then passed on. They were not brilliant exactly, but they were attractive and energetic and remarkable, though only JFK and his wife Jacqueline would qualify as classy. But the thought of what the Kennedys were and might have become lingers yet, and will for a long time. □

The Army's Role in Israeli Politics

By Steven Erlanger

Patrick Tyler, *Fortress Israel: The Inside Story of the Military Elite Who Run the Country—and Why They Can't Make Peace* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012), 576 pp., \$35.00.

As part of its negotiations with the United States, Israel promised to freeze "all settlement activity" (including natural growth of settlements), a pledge later enshrined in the "road map" agreed upon in 2003. Later, Israel argued that it had arranged a private deal with the Bush administration, in exchange for its withdrawal from Gaza, to allow settlement growth within the "construction line" of such settlements—in other words, to build up but not out.

Daniel C. Kurtzer, then the American ambassador to Israel, denies discussions between the United States and Israel resulted in what he called "an implementable understanding." But I have a vivid memory of a conversation with him in his ambassadorial office in which an exasperated Kurtzer complained that he had been

Steven Erlanger writes on foreign affairs and has been the Paris bureau chief for the *New York Times* since 2008. He was bureau chief in Jerusalem from 2004 to 2008.

unable to get any satellite photos or detailed maps from the Israeli government or army showing where these construction lines were.

Yet I had just spent a few nights watching Israeli troops patrol in the occupied West Bank. The Israeli commanders showed me their maps. Every building in that area of the West Bank had been photographed by satellite, mapped and given an identification code. Presumably, that was true for the entire West Bank. Yet somehow the Israelis could not come up with maps of their own settlements for Kurtzer and their closest allies, the Americans.

Another strong memory: With much fanfare, Condoleezza Rice traveled to Israel in the context of the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza to negotiate an agreement on travel and access for Palestinians and goods, not only through the Rafah crossing between Egypt and Gaza but also between the West Bank and Gaza. She pressed hard to get a deal that included a regular bus route to be run by the Israeli military between the two parts of the future Palestinian nation. It never happened. A senior Israeli commander in Gaza told me bluntly that “we never intended to arrange such a bus.”

Another: During the 2006 war in southern Lebanon, Rice visited Israel to try to negotiate a cease-fire. While she was there, on July 30, Israeli airstrikes on an apartment building killed twenty-eight civilians, half of them children, in Qana in southern Lebanon—the same town Israeli forces had shelled in the 1996 Lebanon conflict, killing more than one hundred civilians sheltered in a United Nations compound.

Rice, angry and embarrassed, gave a terse press conference after staying up most of the night to get an Israeli agreement for at least a forty-eight-hour halt to airstrikes. It was broken quickly, even before she landed at Ireland’s Shannon Airport to refuel. Finally home, she went straight to the White House to see President Bush. He said to her, Bush told Olmert, “Calm down, Condi.”

There are numerous examples of Israeli politicians shading the truth with even their best ally, the United States, and finding reasons to dilute or renege on their promises. And there are many instances in which the security mind-set in Israel, which always thinks of itself as embattled, overrules the willingness to take political or strategic risks.

“No one ever got demoted for being too careful,” a senior military-intelligence officer once told me. “Security is about reducing risks, not taking them.”

But it is a major leap from this reality to the assertion that a cohesive Israeli military elite not only runs the country but also has so distorted Israeli politics by its own aggressive view of the world as to make peace impossible. Yet that is the thesis of *Fortress Israel: The Inside Story of the Military Elite Who Run the Country—and Why They Can’t Make Peace* by journalist and historian Patrick Tyler. To his credit, even he doesn’t seem to believe it by the end of this historical inquiry, at least not with the crassness and simplicity of his own subtitle.

After all, Israel’s military and intelligence “elite” has been arguing, both privately and publicly, that an attack on Iran’s nuclear

facilities now would be either ineffective or counterproductive, even deeply damaging. This has infuriated the elected prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu. In this instance, the military elite seems dead set against war, certainly without American support.

Of course, Tyler is really talking about the Palestinians, but he both begins and ends his book with Iran.

The failure to reach a lasting Middle East peace cannot just be laid at Israel's door, let alone simply at the door of its military elite, and Tyler acknowledges this as his book rolls along. This is a text of the twenty-first century by an experienced reporter who clearly does not like what Israel has become or is becoming and who has an overriding sympathy for those whom he perceives as Israel's victims. In my view at least, the failure to reach a lasting solution to the conundrum of a modern, majority-Jewish state living at peace in the Middle East has many parents, including some living in the United States.

Though fascinating, Tyler's book is a bit odd. It suffers, in my view, from false advertising. It is less an investigation into "fortress Israel" and its supposed ruling military elite than a diligent and insightful history of Israel's leaders and their military engagements, some of them clandestine, since the establishment of the state.

Tyler, a former colleague of mine at the *New York Times*, has a terrific eye for telling detail. He is an assiduous gleaner of facts and tidbits better known in Israel, through Hebrew-language journalism and history

books, than in the West—and certainly than in America, which generally doesn't like its Israeli heroes to have too much clay in their feet.

There are interesting discussions of the deeply flawed personalities of numerous military and political figures, from David Ben-Gurion and Moshe Dayan to Yitzhak Rabin, Shimon Peres and, of course, Ariel Sharon, who in Tyler's eyes represents nearly everything wrong with today's Israel—aggressive, hotheaded, quick to shoot, dismissive of the Palestinians, and eager to seize and keep as much land as possible. They come across as men of mixed reputations and character, driven (like most people) by pettiness, envy, fear and arrogance.

Yet we really don't find out much about these men that hasn't already been published elsewhere. And to me there is a failure to comprehend—or, if comprehended, to acknowledge—the extraordinary nature of their collective achievement. Rabin, for instance, is a perfect example of a military man who took extraordinary risks for peace—and actually took a huge step toward permanent peace. Rabin also is a perfect contradiction of Tyler's thesis.

That Rabin was assassinated before he could go further toward a settlement with the Palestinians and the Arabs by an enraged, passionate settler driven by religious motives is also a fine example of one more of the many reasons why Israel has trouble making peace—because of deeply religious settlers who think God has given them all of Eretz Yisrael, some of whom will kill before they ever leave it.

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These settlers represent a significant cause for stalemate, along with the small, one-issue religious parties that cripple Israeli politics and the inescapable fact that Israel has very real enemies. All this is true, but none of it has much to do with a military elite, let alone with a "Spartan" mentality that Tyler thinks has arisen to massacre the supposedly pacific and "Athenian" vision of Israel's European-born founders.

Tyler often refers to the tragedy of Moshe Sharett, the Russian-born second prime minister of Israel, who was the country's first foreign minister under Ben-Gurion and was his heir—until Ben-Gurion returned to push him out of politics. Tyler sees him as the fallen angel of Israel's history, a man who opposed reprisal raids and wanted to live peacefully among the local Arabs. In Tyler's telling, he was outmaneuvered by the cynical Ben-Gurion, his devious civilian aide Shimon Peres and the generals of the young Israeli army, including Moshe Dayan.

Tyler writes:

This book seeks to explain with realism and fairness how the martial impulse in Israeli society and among its ruling elite has undermined opportunities for reconciliation, skewed politics toward an agenda of retribution and revenge, and fomented deliberate acts of provocation designed to disrupt international diplomatic efforts to find a formula for peace.

He adds that Sharett's "meticulous journals" demonstrate that "military ambition too often trumped moral aspiration, once the

cornerstone of Zionism, to build a homeland that devoted its energy and resources toward integration."

For Tyler, the complicated Ben-Gurion was the main obstacle to Sharett's vision of regional peace. Ben-Gurion, Tyler writes, "denounced Sharett's moderate approach to the Arabs as cowardly." He says that Sharett

had embraced the new international order of Eisenhower, John Foster Dulles, and the United Nations following the two most destructive wars in history. The new order stood for conflict resolution by means other than war; it stood for negotiation and compromise. Statehood, as far as Sharett was concerned, required Israel to align its policies with those of the great powers and with the new UN Charter, and central to the charter was the inadmissibility of conquest as a means to resolve disputes.

Ben-Gurion, on the other hand, Tyler writes, "believed in Zionist exceptionalism, and so he and the youthful sabra military establishment stood to fight."

This is the core of Tyler's thesis. He asserts, "Here was the essential tension in Israeli political culture: the clash between Sharett's impulse to engage the Arabs and the military establishment's demand to mobilize for continual war." He summarizes this way: "Early Zionist notions of integration and outreach were undermined by a mythology that Israel had no alternative but war."

But there is no real reason to believe that a combination of outreach, the UN Charter and the Eisenhower administration was going to resolve Israel's problems with



larger, mostly unstable neighbors led by military officers who were itching to take revenge for their defeat in the 1948 war. Nor was President Eisenhower, in those very different years, likely to come to the defense of Israel if it were being overrun. As Tyler himself writes, in 1956 Ben-Gurion told Eisenhower's secret representative, Robert B. Anderson, "I do not believe that you would go to war against Egypt if they attacked us."

Tyler simply puts too much weight on Sharett versus Ben-Gurion as the key to the formation of the Israeli mind-set and the supposed victory in modern Israel of Sparta over Athens, as Tyler would have it. There were not two equal roads diverging in the Israeli desert of the early 1950s, and a good case can be made that Ben-Gurion's aggressiveness kept Israel alive at a delicate time.

Sharett may have been the right man at the wrong time. But in many ways Sharett, a man of diplomacy, was a weak leader and a failure. He presided helplessly over the fallout from the scandalous Lavon Affair, in which Israeli secret agents in Egypt planned to blow up Egyptian, American and British

targets to make the Nasser regime seem unstable but about which he as prime minister was kept unaware. Later he proved unwilling to use this fiasco to confront his opponents.

Sharett was an inadequate leader who did not command the confidence either of the army or of his mentor Ben-Gurion; he was outmaneuvered and in some sense paralyzed by the new pan-Arab nationalism and the attraction of Nasser, which was clearly a danger to the new Jewish state.

Similarly, Tyler tries to draw a broad line between the country's military elite and the rest, and from time to time he seeks to draw a slightly more narrow distinction between a supposedly warlike "sabra" mentality of the native-born Israelis and the more dovish and ineffectual immigrants. But of course that's a distinction with very little value, since over time nearly everyone in the military is native born. The most numerous new immigrants are Russians, who are more Likud than Likud—more anti-Arab and more willing to fight it out than most of the native-born or sabra population.

The military in Israel is one of the most vital institutions of the state, to be sure, and certainly the best resourced and best organized; its arguments carry great weight. Given generally universal military service, subject to complicated exceptions for Israeli Arabs and ultra-Orthodox Jews, the period that young people spend in the army tends to shape them. Those experiences also produce friends and alliances that persist through life, providing contacts throughout the society.

Young Israelis trained in military intelligence and computer work are the backbone of the country's successful modern economy, founding companies that often get their start with military contracts. Soldiers in companies and brigades form fierce alliances, almost like tribes. The rivalry between the Givati and Golani brigades, for instance, shapes lives and friendships as well as political and business relationships. The paratroopers and the pilots of the air force have similar alliances.

And sometimes they go into politics, especially the generals, because they are among the best-educated, bravest and well-known figures in Israel. But of course they are not always very good politicians, especially in the political jungle that is the fractured Israeli system, where small parties devoted to single issues—religious education, for example, or ensuring that El Al does not fly on the Sabbath—make or break governments.

But while there is a military elite, it is hardly monolithic. There are generals on the Right and on the Left. There are heads of the intelligence services on the Right and on the Left. And in fact there are more generals, including intelligence chiefs, on the Left in Israel than on the Right. Indeed, it is the military elite, including former Mossad leaders Efraim Halevy and Meir Dagan, that has been most vocal in challenging Prime Minister Netanyahu on the wisdom of attacking Iran. But that has hardly stopped the decline of the Left in Israel.

Further, Israel's failure to produce a lasting peace treaty with the Palestinians is hardly the sole fault of the generals or of some

vague "military elite." It is first and foremost a failure of politics, of nerve and of timing.

After all, who actually achieved the various peace treaties that Israel has managed to negotiate? A former military commander and terrorist named Begin, a former general named Rabin and a former general named Barak. The same people had their failures at peace, too, but they were hardly against the idea when they judged that the national interest demanded it. Ariel Sharon, presented by Tyler as Israel's Mad Max, dripping with aggression and blood, may have had ulterior motives, as he certainly had strategic and political ones, but he did after all pull Israeli troops and settlers completely out of Gaza.

And when the Israeli military has had clear political orders, it has generally followed them. It dismantled the settlement of Yamit when Begin ordered it, pulled out of Sharm el-Sheikh and the Sinai, and dragged Israeli citizens and settlers out of their synagogues and homes in Gaza as well as four settlements in the West Bank—with much emotion but also with professionalism.

And of course if the political leadership orders the army to war against Iran, it will obey, however reluctantly.

Even Shimon Peres, who famously never served in the military and is considered a grand old man of the peace movement, was deeply involved in military planning as a defense aide, defense minister and prime minister. This same Peres, a contradictory and human figure, was vital to convincing France to give Israel the plutonium reactor at Dimona, vital to the beginning of the

settlement movement and vital to the Oslo peace process.

Despite the old phrase about defeat being an orphan, the failure to make peace has many parents. And certainly included among them are the failures of the fedayeen to get their act together under the British; the failures of the United Nations to enforce the 1948 agreement creating two states out of the British mandate; the failures of the Palestinian people—and they have become a people and deserve a nation—to seize opportunities when they arose; the failures of Palestinian leaders from Yasir Arafat to Mohammed Dahlan to Mahmoud Abbas to manage their own people and be truthful with them about what peace would require; and the failures of the Arab world to give much more than mere rhetoric to the Palestinians—especially to Abbas, when he had a legitimate democratic mandate and wanted to make peace. But the Arabs failed Arafat, too, who was loved by the Arab world when he was fighting Israel but not when he was negotiating with it.

Certainly the failures must include the Israeli settlement program, the government-supported effort to colonize what some Israelis regard as God's land grant to Abraham and thus create "facts on the ground." But this program was not initiated by the military; it was the product largely of the Left, including the chameleon Shimon Peres, and ignored by Israeli politicians who should have known better, such as Ehud Barak.

And among the greatest failures must be included indifferent, wavering and often

contradictory American policies—led by successive presidents reluctant to challenge the power of Congress and offend the fund-raising machine that is the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC). That reluctance continued even when Israeli leaders such as Rabin and later Barak had policies that were far more flexible than those of AIPAC and criticized the lobby for daring to oppose them.

What's striking about these American presidents is that they have not been willing to push Israel to live up to even its own freely given promises—pledges made not to the Palestinians or the United Nations but to those presidents themselves. For example, Sharon promised George W. Bush personally that he would remove all illegal outposts created by Israeli settlers after March 2001, when Sharon took office. The pledge was written into the road map of the international quartet (composed of the UN, United States, European Union and Russia), along with the language on a settlement freeze, including "natural growth." Sharon signed the road map. After Sharon's stroke, Ehud Olmert was elected as his successor and said he would stand by those promises.

Olmert dismantled exactly one such outpost, Amona, in early 2006. He chose to do so after considerable warnings to the settlers and during the daytime. The result was a predictable conflict between settlers and the police and army, which Olmert then used as a pretext to say that it was too politically difficult to dismantle any more. When I asked him if he had no sense of shame about breaking his promises to

his finest allies and lying to them as if the United States were the British rulers of mandatory Palestine, to be hustled and worked around, he bristled.

I asked him why he as prime minister chose not to enforce his country's own laws, and he bristled again.

I said that the Israeli army dismantled supposedly illegal Palestinian houses in occupied territory, and even in Jerusalem, at will. They could do so because they acted with no warning and operations took place before dawn. Olmert then looked at me like I was an idiot who could not understand the obvious fact that he could not treat Israelis the way he treated Palestinians. Olmert, it should be noted, did not serve in the military, except in an arranged journalist job so he could have the army on his résumé. Yet it was Olmert who pressed for the most recent wars in Gaza and Lebanon.

But where was Washington on the settlement issue? Even to me it was obvious that "natural growth" could not explain the explosion in the number of Israeli settlers living beyond the Green Line—and not just in the so-called major population centers in the West Bank such as Gush Etzion and Ma'ale Adumim. Even Kurtzer, who did not like it, admits that the Bush administration was largely silent in the face of these Israeli policies.

Political dysfunction—whether Israeli, Palestinian or American—has had as much to do with the failure to finally force through



a lasting two-state solution as any supposed Israeli military elitist cabal or groupthink.

A last memory. In October 2004, when Sharon was trying—yes, Sharon—to get political support for his decision to pull out of Gaza, he sent then defense minister and former military chief of staff Shaul Mofaz to meet with the religious sage of the Shas Party, Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, the former chief Sephardic rabbi of Israel. Rabbi Yosef is a kind of ayatollah-like supreme leader for the Shas Party, and his word is law.

So Mofaz spent much time with him, showing him maps of Gaza and humbly explaining the need to withdraw Israeli settlers there. I remember most vividly the rabbi's long white beard spread out over a map of Gaza, covering settlers and Palestinians alike with a wiry white fuzz, as Mofaz explained.

The rabbi condemned the withdrawal because it was done without concessions from the Palestinians. But the elected leader of Israel, the scion of the military elite, nonetheless carried out his plans, the first withdrawal of Israeli settlers from occupied land since Yamit. □



Gambling with the Fate of the World

By *H. W. Brands*

Evan Thomas, *Ike's Bluff: President Eisenhower's Secret Battle to Save the World* (New York: Little, Brown and Co., 2012), 496 pp., \$29.99.

Most historical questions have no more than modest relevance for current policy debates. Times and context change. The American economy grew rapidly under the protectionist regime of the late nineteenth century; would it thrive under a new protectionist regime? It's impossible to say, given the radically different nature of the modern world economy. The Vietnam War demonstrated the difficulty of defeating a committed insurgency aided by outside forces; is the American effort in Afghanistan similarly doomed? Maybe, but Afghans aren't Vietnamese, and the Taliban isn't communist.

Yet there is one historical question that has direct and overriding policy implications. It might be the most important historical question of the last century and must rank among the top handful of all time: Why has there been no

H. W. Brands has written various books on American history and foreign policy. His most recent title is *The Man Who Saved the Union: Ulysses Grant in War and Peace* (Doubleday, 2012).

World War III? To sharpen the question, in light of the answer many people reflexively supply: Did the existence of nuclear weapons prevent a third world war?

The question's significance is obvious, given the consequences of such a war. Its answer is less so, despite that reflexive response. Broadly speaking, there are two possible answers. One is that, yes, nuclear weapons prevented a third world war by pushing the cost of victory far beyond any achievable benefits. This answer presumes that the ideological competition between the United States and the Soviet Union would have escalated to war had the big bombs not scared the daylight out of everyone. The second answer is that, no, the nukes didn't prevent the war. Something else did. Perhaps war simply wasn't in the cards.

The first answer seemed reasonable during the quarter century after World War II. The salient model of international relations was the war-prone system of the period from 1914 to 1945. Great powers seemed fated to fight things out like characters in a Greek tragedy—unless some *deus ex machina* intervened to pull them back. Nukes were that device.

On the other hand, maybe the 1914–1945 model wasn't applicable to the postwar period. Perhaps the more instructive parallel was the century from 1815 to 1914, when no Europe-wide (let alone worldwide) conflict took place. Perhaps peace, not war, is the ground state of international affairs.

The policy implications of these alternative answers could not be more different. If nuclear weapons were indeed

essential to preventing World War III, then the United States and other countries ought to preserve and maintain their nuclear arsenals. It needn't follow that the nukes should proliferate—although one could reasonably ask whether, if deterrence works among superpowers, it would also work among regional powers. But at least the largest powers ought to keep their nuclear powder dry.

By contrast, if war was not otherwise ordained—if nuclear weapons were not the critical deterrent to war—then the policy implication is just the opposite. The nukes ought to be dismantled. Unnecessary and expensive, they are a horrible accident waiting to happen. The world has been very lucky not to experience nuclear destruction since 1945; such luck can't last forever.

Evan Thomas appears to subscribe to the first school of thought. It forms the premise for *Ike's Bluff*, the bluff being that Dwight Eisenhower would use nuclear weapons if the Soviet Union or China pushed too hard against the American sphere. The title is a bit misleading in that Thomas grants that he doesn't know if the bluff was in fact a bluff or not. "He had kept the peace by threatening all-out war," Thomas says in summarizing Eisenhower's eight years in office, adding that he judges it "likely" that Eisenhower had no intention of using nuclear weapons. But he then cites Robert Bowie, who worked with Eisenhower and subsequently studied the issue as a historian, to the opposite effect. "He was sure Ike would have been willing to use nuclear weapons

in a crisis (say, if Red China moved on Taiwan)," Thomas writes of Bowie.

We'll never know, if only because Eisenhower himself probably didn't know. The great strength of Thomas's engaging and insightful book is his portrayal of Eisenhower's ambivalence on some central questions of policy. Eisenhower was elected president in 1952 on the strength of his illustrious performance as supreme allied commander in Europe in World War II. At a time when Americans were more fearful than they had ever been in their national history—legitimately fearful of the Soviet Union's recently acquired nuclear capability, unduly fearful of communist infiltrators in the U.S. government—they looked to Eisenhower for reassurance. Eisenhower sealed his triumph over Adlai Stevenson by promising to go to Korea, where peace talks to end the war there had bogged down. He didn't say what he would do in Korea, but millions of Americans assumed that the man who had brought victory home from the greatest war in history could bring victory, or at least peace, home from the limited conflict in Korea.

Eisenhower went to Korea and looked around. Then he returned to America and pondered how to break the logjam in the peace talks. He and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles hinted that if the communists remained intransigent, the United States might use nuclear weapons against them. The logjam broke, although the death of Stalin and the doubt it cast over continued Soviet support for the North Koreans and Chinese probably had as much to do with the breaking as Eisenhower's saber rattling.

The “massive retaliation” policy, as it came to be called, was incredible on its face. Would the United States really launch a nuclear war over some peripheral interest? It strained belief.

Nonetheless, the episode propelled American diplomacy into the nuclear era. Harry Truman had dropped two atomic bombs on Japan, but after World War II he put the new weapons on the shelf. He didn't threaten to use them when the Soviets were slow to evacuate Iran in 1946. He didn't brandish them when the Russians blockaded Berlin in 1948. He didn't talk about employing them to rescue the Chinese Nationalists from the Chinese Communists in 1949. He conspicuously rejected the advice of Douglas MacArthur to use them in the Korean War in 1951, and he fired MacArthur after the general publicly pressed the matter.

Truman's seven years of refusing to engage in nuclear diplomacy were followed, within mere weeks, by Eisenhower's eager embrace of it. Yet Eisenhower's views on nuclear weapons were mixed, at times conflicted. Even as he suggested that nuclear weapons might be as usable as conventional weapons, he made clear he knew they were something quite different. Thomas deftly describes what many Eisenhower watchers considered the finest speech he ever gave: an April 1953 address to the American Society of Newspaper Editors in which he movingly explained what the arms race was costing America and the world. “The cost of one modern heavy bomber is this: a modern brick school in thirty cities,” Eisenhower said. He went on:

We pay for a single fighter plane with a half a million bushels of wheat. We pay for a new destroyer with new homes that could have housed more than eight thousand people. . . . This is

not a way of life at all, in any true sense. Under the cloud of threatening war, it is humanity hanging from a cross of iron.

Eisenhower's remarks were all the more noteworthy in that he was in physical agony while delivering them. Thomas devotes considerable space to Eisenhower's health, which was far worse than most Americans realized. At the moment of his speech to the editors, he was suffering from acute gastrointestinal distress of a sort that had plagued him his whole adult life. The pressure of work aggravated the condition; the only thing that reliably relieved it was escape from the demands of office. This was why Eisenhower spent so much time playing golf.

But he suffered a heart attack in 1955 and a stroke in 1957. He underwent surgery to remove an intestinal obstruction in 1956. His doctors and press spokesmen conspired to conceal the gravity and extent of his physical troubles. Some of their concern was simple care for Eisenhower's privacy. But no small part of it was connected to Eisenhower's reliance on nuclear weapons as a tool of diplomacy. Presumably, if the Soviets discovered that Eisenhower was incapacitated, they might try to jump Berlin or gain an advantage elsewhere. At the same time, Americans and others watching Eisenhower wanted to know that the man with his finger on the nuclear trigger was of sound mind and reasonably sound body.

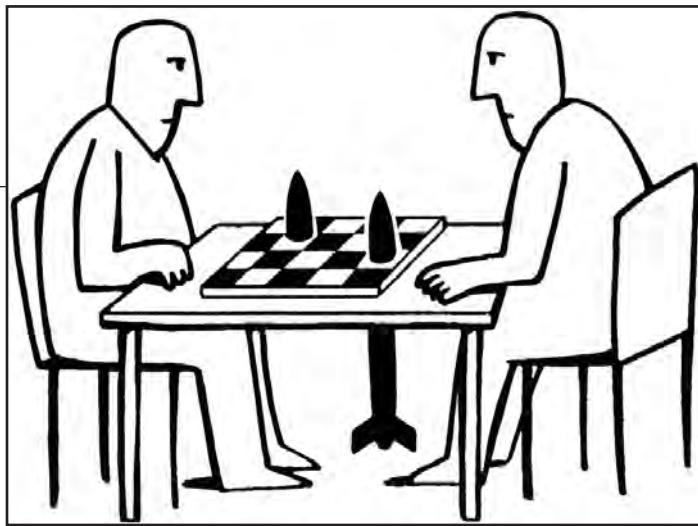
Thomas's treatment of Eisenhower's health is almost his only diversion from foreign policy. He spends a few pages defending

Eisenhower's civil-rights policy against the standard criticism that the Kansas-reared president only grudgingly enforced the Supreme Court's landmark anti-Jim Crow decision in the 1954 case of *Brown v. Board of Education*. Interestingly, given Thomas's emphasis on foreign policy, he neglects to note that in the speech Eisenhower gave explaining his reasons for sending federal troops to enforce desegregation in Little Rock, Arkansas, the president cited foreign-policy concerns. The world was watching, Eisenhower said, to see if people of color could get fair treatment in America. In a period when hundreds of millions of newly independent people of color in Asia and Africa were choosing between the American system and the Soviet system, this was a matter of gravest importance.

Nor does Thomas cover the waterfront of foreign policy. Africa gets scant mention and Latin America little beyond an account of the CIA's part in the 1954 overthrow of the Jacobo Arbenz regime in Guatemala. The Middle East is treated sporadically. Thomas discusses Iran and the restoration of the shah in 1953, the Suez War of 1956 and the landing of U.S. troops in Lebanon in 1958. This crisis-driven coverage is appropriate to Thomas's purpose, which is to examine Eisenhower's approach to the big issues of national security. But it leaves the reader wondering whether Eisenhower's responses always suited the stimuli. Mohammed Mossadegh had powerful enemies within Iran; his government might have fallen without the push from the United States. If it had, subsequent generations of Iranians would

have had a harder time making a villain out of America. Thomas quotes Eisenhower as asking, at a meeting of the National Security Council on Iran, why it wasn't possible "to get some of the people in these down-trodden countries to like us instead of hating us." He seemed honestly puzzled. Yet he signed off on an operation that increased the hatred for the United States. If the decision was necessary—if Iran and its oil were in imminent danger of a Soviet takeover—the anti-American sentiment Eisenhower's decision generated may have been a necessary cost of defending American security. But Thomas's tight focus on Eisenhower gives us the view from the Oval Office without allowing us to assess the accuracy of that view—and therefore the wisdom of Eisenhower's decisions.

The author recounts an intellectual exercise conducted at the beginning of Eisenhower's first term in which the policy of containment inherited from the Truman administration was revisited and critiqued. The participants in Project Solarium (named for the White House room where they met) examined alternatives to containment, most notably an aggressive policy designed to roll back Soviet control of Eastern Europe. The group concluded that the aggressive policy, which prominent Republicans such as John Foster Dulles had endorsed while in attack-Truman mode during the 1952 political campaign, was dangerously irresponsible. Yet the exercise underscored the principal deficiency of containment: its escalating and evidently unlimited expense. Eisenhower was a fiscal



conservative, and he feared that the United States might spend itself into oblivion manning the ramparts of the free world. His preoccupation became containing spending while containing communism. It inspired his adoption of the “New Look,” a strategic posture based on the expectation that nuclear weapons would be readily available to counter Soviet aggression.

Eisenhower approved the New Look, but he left its elaboration to others in the administration. Dulles took the lead, explaining to the Council on Foreign Relations in early 1954 that the United States would not allow America to be nibbled to death fighting brushfire wars in out-of-the-way places. Only months after the end of the war in Korea, a conflict that seemed to epitomize what Dulles was describing, the new approach appeared straightforward and resolute. “The basic decision was to depend primarily upon a great capacity to retaliate, instantly, by means and at places of our own choosing,” Dulles said. His audience and foreign-policy analysts interpreted him to mean that the United States might use nuclear weapons against the Soviet Union or China

should those countries allow or encourage their communist protégés to attack noncommunist regimes.

This was indeed what Dulles meant. But he couldn’t follow through because the “massive retaliation” policy, as it came to be called, was incredible on its face. Would the United States really launch a nuclear war over some peripheral interest? It strained belief. Eisenhower and Dulles had the opportunity to demonstrate their nuclear resolve—or lack of resolve—that spring when Vietnamese Communists besieged the French fortress of Dien Bien Phu. Some of Eisenhower’s top military advisers, including Arthur Radford, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, thought Dien Bien Phu provided the perfect opportunity to show the world that the administration was serious about making nuclear weapons part of its available arsenal. Eisenhower danced around the subject before deciding that Vietnam was a bad place for American intervention. “No military victory is possible in that kind of theater,” he wrote in his diary. Yet he pushed responsibility for America’s nonintervention onto Congress and onto the British, saying he would

Eisenhower wasn't out of his mind. But the policy structure over which he presided verged on the irrational.

deploy American force only with legislative approval and with allies. He knew neither would be forthcoming. Neither was.

Eisenhower later had an even better chance to show he was willing to use nuclear weapons. China claimed authority over Taiwan, to which the Nationalists had fled in 1949 after losing to the Communists on the mainland. But China lacked the amphibious ability to cross the hundred-mile Taiwan Strait, and so Beijing fulminated at the Nationalists from a distance. A couple of islands claimed by the Nationalists, however, lay within shelling distance of the mainland, and periodically the Chinese opened fire. The Eisenhower administration, in keeping with a partisan Republican fondness for the Nationalists, signed a mutual-defense pact with Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist government, making Washington indirectly responsible for the vulnerable islands.

To the Eisenhower administration, the islands became the Sudetenland of the Cold War: strategically insignificant but politically essential. Communism was on a roll in Asia, administration officials reasoned, and to lose the offshore islands would signal that America's guarantees were no better than those of Britain and France to Czechoslovakia in the 1930s. The islands were indefensible by conventional arms, which meant the United States would have to go nuclear if the Chinese assaulted them in force.

Again, some of the president's top advisers lobbied for a nuclear response. Chairman Radford contended that if

the United States didn't deliver at least a tactical nuclear riposte to China's blatant provocation, the world would conclude that the New Look and massive retaliation were a sham and the Americans would never go nuclear. Dulles told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that the United States needed to push back hard against China. "We have got to be prepared to take the risk of war with China, if we are going to stay in the Far East," Dulles said. "If we are not going to take that risk, all right, let's make that decision and we get out and we make our defenses in California."

Eisenhower appeared to agree. A reporter asked him if the United States would use nuclear weapons in the event of war with China. The president replied, "I see no reason why they shouldn't be used just exactly as you would use a bullet or anything else."

But then he backed away. Perhaps he thought he had made his point sufficiently. Perhaps he estimated that the war fever rising on the Republican Right was getting out of hand. In any event, he deliberately muddled the question of nuclear weapons at a subsequent news conference. His press secretary, James Hagerty, cautioned him against talking the administration into a corner. Eisenhower replied with a smile: "Don't worry, Jim, if that question comes up, I'll just confuse them."

So he did. "The only thing I know about war was two things," Eisenhower said, continuing:

The most changeable factor in war is human nature in its day-by-day manifestation; but the

only unchanging factor about war is human nature. And the next thing is that every war is going to astonish you in the way it occurred and the way it is carried out. So that for a man to predict, particularly if he had the responsibility for making the decision, to predict what he is going to use, how he is going to do it, would I think exhibit his ignorance of war; that is what I believe. So I think you just have to wait, and that is the kind of prayerful decision that may some day face a President.

Eisenhower was pleased with his obfuscation, but matters had gotten beyond his control. He had placed himself and the country in a position where the decision to initiate war—a war that would require a nuclear response from America—lay with the Chinese. And he couldn't say what the Chinese would do. In his diary, he remarked that war was "entirely possible." And it would be over some trivial bits of real estate. "Those damn little offshore islands," he muttered amid the crisis. "Sometimes I wish they'd sink."

The Chinese spared Eisenhower and the world a war. Continuing to denounce the Nationalists and the Americans, they settled for sporadic shelling of the islands rather than a concerted assault. Thomas gives Eisenhower more credit than he deserves for the outcome. Thomas concedes the president took a gamble, but he likens it to that of an experienced poker player. "Eisenhower was able to bluff without showing his hand," Thomas says, employing the metaphor of his title. "Such were the odds of the gambler."

Thomas's book breaks little ground

unfamiliar to Eisenhower specialists. The revision of Eisenhower's reputation as a divot-chopping dullard began three decades ago. Thomas cites the pertinent academic sources and the documents on which the revision was based. The masterful Ike he portrays has been a standard feature of the literature for some time. Thomas's treatment is valuable nonetheless for the verve of its telling and convenience of bringing disparate and specialized sources together.

Thomas also adeptly integrates recent research on Soviet leadership and decision making. A central challenge for Eisenhower during the fifties was figuring out who was in charge in Moscow, particularly after Stalin's death in 1953. Not until the 1955 summit meeting at Geneva, where Nikita Khrushchev overruled Nikolai Bulganin to nix Eisenhower's proposal to open the skies of each superpower to reconnaissance flights by the other (a rejection that cost the United States little, as the U-2 program was well under way), did American leaders perceive how the struggle was playing out. "I saw clearly then, for the first time, the identity of the real boss of the Soviet delegation," Eisenhower wrote in his memoirs.

Yet discerning Khrushchev's emergence afforded only modest guidance to American policy. Khrushchev was unpredictable, blustering one day, backtracking the next. Uncertainty about Khrushchev and his intentions was part of the grand imponderable facing American policy makers during the Cold War. And it necessarily affects any judgment of

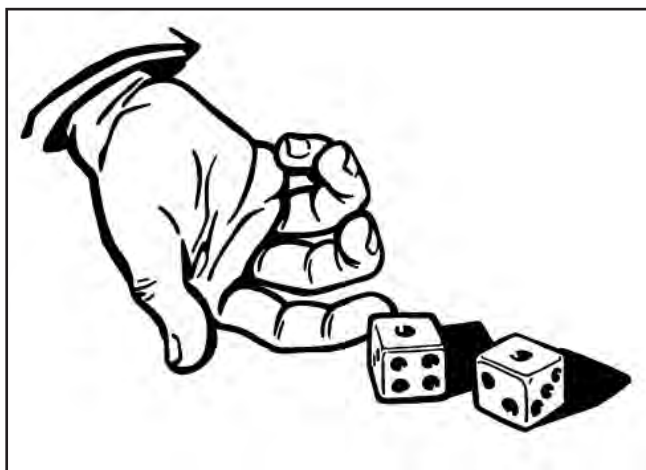
Eisenhower's presidential performance. A president may be decisive, bold, articulate and charismatic. Eisenhower was sometimes these and sometimes not. But the most basic question about a president is: Is he right? Does he accurately perceive the world? Does he understand the motives and intentions of his competitors and counterparts? Does he foresee the consequences of his actions?

American strategic planning and foreign policy during the Cold War were designed to deter or defeat an attack by the Soviet Union. The United States spent hundreds of billions of dollars to that end, and it engaged in wars in Korea and Vietnam that claimed nearly a hundred thousand American lives. Was the money well spent? Were the deaths necessary? Did the Soviet Union ever seriously contemplate attacking the United States?

Regarding the Eisenhower years, Thomas thinks not. "The fear of Soviet attack that gripped policy makers in the early 1950s seems exaggerated, even paranoid, from a post-Cold War perspective," he says. "It turns out that the Soviets were even more afraid of an attack than the West was." Thomas doesn't address the likelihood of a conventional attack in Europe, but on the subject that kept Americans awake at night he declares, "During Dwight Eisenhower's term of office, the chances of the Soviet

Union even trying to launch a nuclear attack on the United States were remote." Soviet nuclear capabilities were no match for those of the United States, and the Soviets knew it.

Eisenhower knew it too. Thus, Thomas wonders why the president let Americans think a Soviet attack was a genuine possibility, especially during the post-Sputnik period when fears of the apocalypse reached alarming proportions and eroded his standing with the American people. "It is puzzling that Eisenhower did



not do more to reassure his frightened countrymen," Thomas says. He suggests that this was part of Eisenhower's big bluff. "Perhaps he believed that for the American nuclear threat to be credible to the watching Russians, the Americans, too, had to believe that nuclear war was a real (if remote) possibility."

All this points to an inescapable conclusion: the angst Americans felt about nuclear war during the fifties was largely self-inflicted. The foremost threat to world peace in that era was not the Soviet Union or China but the United States. Soviet aggression consisted almost exclusively of ill treatment of those already in the Soviet sphere; Soviet foreign policy was marked by caution rather than adventurism. The Chinese sent troops to Korea after American troops approached the Yalu River, but otherwise they too stayed close to home. When Eisenhower and Dulles fretted about the need to go nuclear, they were responding not to threats to American security but to challenges to American credibility—to *their* credibility. And when that credibility was strained, the strain owed to such improbable guarantees as the one given to Chiang over the offshore islands.

Eisenhower wasn't cynical, but he recognized that cynicism—and narrow self-interest—drove much of American Cold War policy. The army and its political and industrial sponsors resented, resisted and ultimately defeated his emphasis on nuclear weapons. The New Look lost its way not only because Eisenhower was never willing to pull the nuclear trigger but also because Congress refused to unfund conventional forces. The result was the worst of both worlds: the high risk of reliance on nuclear weapons along with the high cost of procurement of conventional arms. Eisenhower was a proud man who didn't lightly admit defeat, but his farewell address, delivered in the weary tone of an old man finally showing his age, essentially

acknowledged that much of American national-security policy was being dictated by a “military-industrial complex” for purposes only tangentially related to American security.

The subtitle of Thomas's book—“President Eisenhower's Secret Battle to Save the World”—sounds like something the marketing department at Little, Brown and Co. cooked up. But to the extent that the subtitle captures the reality of Eisenhower's presidency, the reader is compelled to ask whom Eisenhower was saving the world from. He himself wouldn't have said he was saving the world, but he would have said he was guarding America and its allies against communism. And in defending his nuclear brinkmanship, he would have argued that strong measures were required to hold back the communist tide. Yet, as the crisis in the Taiwan Strait revealed, these strong measures entailed risks of nuclear war for which Eisenhower and the United States would have borne the blame. Arthur Radford wanted just such a war to demonstrate America's seriousness. But most of the world would have thought the Americans were out of their minds to launch a nuclear war over islands the Americans themselves judged inconsequential. And the ironic result doubtless would have been to win far more converts to communism.

Eisenhower wasn't out of his mind. But the policy structure over which he presided verged on the irrational. Eisenhower held back the irrationality, with difficulty. He saved America from itself—and in doing so, maybe he did save the world. □



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