THE NATIONAL INTEREST

www.nationalinterest.org

Number 124 • Mar/Apr 2013 • $8.95

LEGISLATIVE IRRELEVANCE

The Fading Role of Congress in Foreign-Policy Decision Making

by Jim Webb

Number 124 • March/April 2013

The Realist

Articles

THE NATIONAL INTEREST

Images AP Images*: page 74;* Corbis*: pages 27, 32, 63, 71, 77;* Getty*: pages 10, 13, 29, 35, 38, 42, 45, 60, 66, 80, 82, 87, 91, 94;* iStockPhoto*: pages 18, 21, 49, 52;* Veer*: page 55*

THE NATIONAL INTEREST

Published by
The Center for the National Interest

Editorial Office The National Interest, 1025 Connecticut Ave, nw, Suite 1200, Washington, dc 20036. Telephone: (202) 467-4884, Fax: (202) 467-0006, Email: editor@nationalinterest.org, Website: http://nationalinterest.org
Subscription Office Postmaster and subscribers please send address changes and subscription orders to: The National Interest, P.O. Box 1081, Selmer, tn 38375. Telephone: (856) 380-4130; (800) 344-7952 Rate: $39.95/yr. Please add $5/year for Canada and $20/year for other international deliveries.
The National Interest (ISSN 0884-9382) is published bimonthly by the Center for the National Interest. Articles are abstracted and indexed in *P.A.I.S., Historical Abstracts, International Political Science Abstracts, U.S. Political Science Documents, Political Science Abstracts* and *America: History and Life*; articles are available on microfilm from University Microfilms International, and archived on *Lexis-Nexis*. Periodicals postage is paid at Washington, dc, and at additional mailing offices.

The National Interest is printed by Fry Communications, Inc. It is distributed in the U.S. and Canada by Ingram Periodicals (18 Ingram Blvd., La Vergne, tn 37086; 615-793-5522) and Source Interlink Companies (27500 Riverview Center Blvd., Bonita Springs, fl 34134; 239-949-4450).

A Sadly Simplistic Afghan Debate

By Robert W. Merry

As the debate over America's Afghan troop withdrawal grinds on, it's time to consider the lesson of Richard Nixon, whose Watergate abasement obscures the reality that he has more to teach us on such matters than is generally recognized. The country could use some of Nixon's strategic acumen these days.

This is reflected in the foreign-policy discourse unfolding in response to the Obama administration's plans to speed up its exit from Afghanistan. It's essentially a binary debate, simplistic in its terms. Neither President Obama nor his critics look good in this face-off.

The discussion is focused on the simple question of how many troops should be brought home from that troubled land—and when. Obama, seeing little hope of a traditional military victory, wants them out as quickly as he can get them home smoothly and without serious harm to them in the process. His critics argue that this represents a military capitulation, foregoing a victory that would be achievable if the president had sufficient fortitude.

In such narrow terms, Obama has an edge in political and policy logic. But the problem is that he hasn't spelled out how he plans to execute the withdrawal in a purposeful fashion or how the exit would fit into a broader strategic framework.

True, the country is war-weary. Its volunteer troops are stretched beyond their psychological limit. The public fisc is a mess, in part because of war costs. Strains in the U.S.-Pakistani relationship have reached dangerous proportions. The civilizational tensions between Islam and the West have been heightened by America's continued presence on Islamic soil. And there's no reason to believe that Al Qaeda, which precipitated the war with its 9/11 attacks on America, now figures appreciably in the outcome of this war one way or the other.

Thus, Obama is wise to deflect opponents who can't accept that these realities negate prospects of the victory they foresee if the U.S. military effort were sufficiently robust and long lasting. As neoconservative commentator Gary Schmitt wrote in the *Weekly Standard*, "In short, the insurgent cancer was going into remission but the White House, irrationally, wants to stop treatment." But for Schmitt and his allies, there never seems to be any discernible turn of events that could end the treatment. Since the aim is to defeat and subdue Afghanistan's Taliban—and since the Taliban is an indigenous element of Afghan society that is never going away—the neocon approach leads inexorably to endless war.

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

By pulling together Asia's rising non-Communist states and bringing China into the world as a responsible player, Nixon began a process of bolstering regional stability.

That's why Obama's exit strategy, along the lines of his carefully calibrated military exit from Iraq, is necessary.

But where's the strategic context for such a policy? How can America reduce its Afghan footprint while continuing to exercise influence in the area through deft diplomacy backed up by offshore military capability? What nations could help us do that? What new developments are brewing in the region that could be exploited in the effort to maintain stability?

Perhaps such questions are weighing heavily on Obama as he proceeds with his exit strategy, but there's little evidence of it. Here's where we should consider the story of Richard Nixon and the Vietnam nightmare he inherited in 1969. His subsequent actions not only got his country out of a poisonous quagmire (and without defeat; that came later) but also transformed the geopolitical landscape of Asia in ways that stabilized the region for decades.

Upon entering the White House, Nixon made a stark calculation: the Vietnam War was not winnable at an acceptable cost. In military terms, this may have been debatable, given the devastation visited upon the Communist opposition during the 1968 Tet Offensive, which cost the Communists thirty-seven thousand men, compared to 2,500 Americans. Even a year later, at Nixon's inauguration, the Communist main force was still reeling from its 1968 decimation.

But the situation at home precluded any attempt to exploit this temporary enemy weakness militarily. The war was tearing apart a country already raw from recent assassinations of commanding political figures. Campus buildings were being burned and bombed. Urban race riots following the killing of Martin Luther King Jr. raised questions about the country's essential stability. Hundreds of thousands of antiwar demonstrators were flocking to Washington.

Accordingly, Nixon fashioned a militarily risky and politically dangerous strategy: He ordered a retreat from Vietnam, a slow, methodical withdrawal under enemy fire. He would use the military breathing room from the Communist devastation to bolster the South Vietnamese army so it could pick up the slack. Further, Nixon brought his combat troops home first, ahead of support personnel, in order to reduce casualties and calm the home front. In doing so, he left the remaining support troops vulnerable to the kind of Tet-like Communist offensive that had destroyed the presidency of his predecessor, Lyndon Johnson.

Thus, Nixon placed himself in a predicament of epic proportions. Militarily, he had to calibrate a risky maneuver in Vietnam, which could lead to disaster in the field and also result in political crisis at home. Politically, he had to manage an unstable domestic scene, which could engulf him at home and upset his military calibrations in Vietnam. Wending his way through this thicket, he got all U.S. troops home by the end of his first term.

And yet as this harrowing drama unfolded, Nixon viewed it as merely a sideshow, the necessary cleanup effort that enabled him to pursue simultaneously his broad Asian vision, as reflected in a *Foreign Affairs* article

he wrote in October 1967. Entitled "Asia After Viet Nam," it foreshadowed a new Cold War strategy based on significant developments in the geopolitics of Asia. These included the growing tensions between China and the Soviet Union; the rise of economically progressive nations in "non-communist Asia," notably Japan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan and South Korea; these nations' lingering concerns about the threat from China; and America's exhaustion from playing the role of global policeman.

All this posed an opportunity for America to work with these rising Asian nations to fashion a collective regional defense posture against a menacing China while also trying to lure China out of its "angry isolation." The rising tensions in Sino-Soviet relations provided a promising opening to this new policy. "Taking the long view," wrote Nixon, "we simply cannot afford to leave China forever outside the family of nations, there to nurture its fantasies, cherish its hates and threaten its neighbors." The aim, he said, should be to persuade China that it "cannot satisfy its imperial ambitions, and that its own national interest requires a turning away from foreign adventuring and a turning inward toward the solution of its own domestic problems."

Nixon's article presaged his later overture to China and also helped prepare China intellectually for that overture when it came. Meanwhile, he believed, it was crucial that he prevent a Communist victory in Vietnam. Otherwise, America's Asian presence would have been severely attenuated. And without a clear American commitment to the region, the rising non-Communist nations likely wouldn't have been emboldened to resist the Chinese giant, and China wouldn't have been emboldened to break decisively with the Soviet Union.

By pulling together Asia's rising non-Communist states and bringing China into the world as a responsible player, Nixon began a process of bolstering regional stability. He also diminished the prospect that America would be pulled into endless wars in the region. Further, in applying pressure on the Soviets he induced them to show more flexibility in their dealings with the United States. This was brilliant foreign policy with far-reaching, positive and long-lasting consequences.

This kind of strategic thinking is missing from today's foreign-policy discourse. Obama isn't pursuing it, and his critics aren't asking for it. So we get the binary debate focused on how many troops should be left in Afghanistan, and for how long. Obama says not many and not for long; his critics say it should be more, over a longer time span. This is essentially a meaningless debate when considered alongside the big strategic questions regarding the threat of Islamic fundamentalism and how the country can meet it effectively without kindling more anti-Western fervor throughout the world of Islam.

We need the kind of grand strategic vision that Nixon applied to a chaotic Asia four decades ago. It isn't enough to leave Afghanistan, just as it wasn't enough for Nixon to execute his harrowing Vietnam retreat. A chaotic world needs U.S. leadership that can take the country beyond simplistic binary debates. □

Congressional Abdication

By Jim Webb

In matters of foreign policy, Congress, and especially the Senate, was designed as a hedge against the abuses exhibited by overeager European monarchs who for centuries had whimsically entangled their countries in misguided adventures. America would not be such a place. The Constitution would protect our governmental process from the overreach of a single executive who might otherwise succumb to the impulsive temptation to unilaterally risk our country's blood, treasure and international prestige. Congress was given the power to declare war and appropriate funds, thus eliminating any resemblance to European-style monarchies when it came to the presidential war power.

Importantly and often forgotten these days, Article I, Section 8 of the Constitution was also carefully drawn to give Congress, not the president, certain powers over the structure and use of the military. True, the president would act as commander in chief, but only in the sense that he would be executing policies shepherded within the boundaries of legislative powers. In some cases his power is narrowed further by the requirement that he obtain the "Advice and Consent" of two-thirds of the Senate. Congress, not the president, would "raise and support Armies," with the Constitution limiting appropriations for such armies to no more than two years. This was a clear signal that in our new country there would be no standing army to be sent off on foreign adventures at the whim of a pseudomonarch. The United States would not engage in unchecked, perpetual military campaigns.

Congress would also "provide and maintain a Navy," with no time limit on such appropriations. This distinction between "raising" an army and "maintaining" a navy marked a recognition of the reality that our country would need to protect vital sea-lanes as a matter of commercial and national security, confront acts of piracy—the eighteenth-century equivalent of international terrorism—and act as a deterrent to large-scale war.

Practical circumstances have changed, but basic philosophical principles should not. We reluctantly became a global military power in the aftermath of World War II, despite our initial effort to follow historical patterns and demobilize. NATO was not established until 1949, and the 1950 invasion of South Korea surprised us. In the ensuing decades, the changing nature of modern warfare, the growth of the military-industrial complex and national-security policies in the wake of the Cold War all have contributed to a mammoth defense structure and an atrophied role for Congress that would not have been recognizable when the Constitution was written. And there is little

Jim Webb is a former U.S. senator from Virginia and served as secretary of the navy in the Reagan administration.

doubt that Dwight D. Eisenhower, who led the vast Allied armies on the battlefields of Europe in World War II and who later as president warned ominously of the growth of what he himself termed the "military-industrial complex," is now spinning in his tomb.

Perhaps the greatest changes in our defense posture and in the ever-decreasing role of Congress occurred in the years following the terrorist attacks on U.S. soil of September 11, 2001. Powers quickly shifted to the presidency as the call went up for centralized decision making in a traumatized nation where quick, decisive action was considered necessary. It was considered politically dangerous and even unpatriotic to question this shift, lest one be accused of impeding national safety during a time of war. Few dared to question the judgment of military leaders, many of whom were untested and almost all of whom followed the age-old axiom of continually asking for more troops, more money and more authority. Members of Congress fell all over themselves to prove they were behind the troops and behind the wars.

Hundreds of billions of dollars were voted for again and again in barely examined "emergency" supplemental appropriations for programs to support our ever-expanding military operations. At the same time, party loyalties over a range of contentious policy decisions became so strong that it often seemed we were mimicking the British parliamentary system, with members of Congress lining up behind the president as if he were a prime minister—first among Republicans with George W. Bush and then among Democrats with Barack Obama. And along the way, Congress lost its historic place at the table in the articulation and functioning of national-security policy.

This is not the same Congress that eventually asserted itself so strongly into the debate over the Vietnam War when I was serving on the battlefield of that war as a Marine infantry officer. It is not the Congress in which I served as a full committee counsel during the Carter administration and the early months following the election of Ronald Reagan. It is not the Congress, fiercely protective of its powers, that I dealt with regularly during the four years I spent as an assistant secretary of defense and as secretary of the navy under Reagan.

From long years of observation and participation it seems undeniable that the decline of congressional influence has affected our national policies in many ways, although obviously not everyone in Congress will agree with this conclusion. As in so many other areas where powers disappear through erosion rather than revolution, many members of Congress do not appreciate the power that they actually hold, while others have no objection to the ever-expanding authority of the presidency. Nonetheless, during my time in the Senate as a member of both the Armed Services and Foreign Relations committees, I repeatedly raised concerns about the growing assertion of executive power during the presidencies of both Bush and Obama as well as the lack of full accountability on a wide variety of fronts in the Department of Defense. These issues remain and still call for resolution.

When it comes to foreign policy, today's Americans are often a romantic and rather eager lot. Our country's continually changing, multicultural demographics and relatively short national history tend to free many strategic thinkers from the entangled sense of the distant past that haunts regions such as Europe and East Asia. The "splendid isolation" of the North American continent obviates the need to account for future challenges that otherwise would be

inherent due to geographic boundaries as with Germany, France and Russia in Europe, or China, Korea, Japan and Russia in East Asia.

And so when our security is threatened we tend to take a snapshot view of how to respond, based on the analytical data of the moment rather than the historical forces that might be unleashed by our actions down the road. This reliance on data-based solutions that emphasize the impact of short-term victories was Robert McNamara's great oversight as he designed our military policy in Vietnam during Lyndon Johnson's administration. It was also Donald Rumsfeld's strategic flaw as the George W. Bush administration planned and executed the "cakewalk" that soon became the predictable quagmire following the invasion of Iraq.

Resolving foreign-policy challenges depends not only on reacting to the issues of the day but also on understanding how history has shaped them and how our actions may have long-term consequences. This reality may seem obvious to people who devote their professional lives to foreign affairs, but many American political leaders tend to lose sight of it as the cameras roll and the ever-present microphones are thrust into their faces, putting one a mere five minutes away from a YouTube blast that might ruin his or her career. Politicians are expected to utter reasonably profound truths and to have at least talking points if not solutions, even if they are not intimately familiar with the historical trends that have provoked the crisis of the moment.

But in the aftermath of the analytically simpler challenges of the Cold War, present-day crises have become more complicated to explain with any expertise, even as the electoral process has become more obsessed with the necessities of fund-raising and as the political messages themselves have been reduced to blunt one-line phrases. As former House Speaker Thomas P. "Tip" O'Neill famously put it decades ago, most politics are local, and most politicians learn about the essentials of foreign policy only after they have been elected, if at all. This dichotomy explains the nearly total absence of any real foreign-policy debate in our electoral process, whether at the congressional or presidential level.

Nowhere is this truth more self-evident than in the national discussions that have emerged in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Despite more than ten years of ongoing combat operations, and despite the frequent congressional trips to places such as Iraq and Afghanistan (usually on highly structured visits lasting only a few hours, or at the most a day or two), Congress has become largely irrelevant

It is difficult to understand how any international agreement negotiated, signed and authorized only by our executive branch can be construed as legally binding in our constitutional system.

to the shaping, execution and future of our foreign policy. Detailed PowerPoint briefings may be given by colonels and generals in the "battle zones." Adversarial confrontations might mark certain congressional hearings. Reports might be demanded. Passionate speeches might be made on the floor of the House and the Senate. But on the issues of who should decide when and where to use force and for how long, and what our country's long-term relations should consist of in the aftermath, Congress is mostly tolerated and frequently ignored. The few exceptions come when certain members are adamant in their determination to stop something from happening, but even then they do not truly participate in the shaping of policy.

This is not an accusation or a condemnation; it is an observation. Consider a few relatively recent examples.

In December 2008, after more than a year of largely secret negotiations with the Iraqi government, the outgoing George W. Bush administration signed an ambitious, far-reaching document called the Strategic Framework Agreement (SFA). Not to be confused with the mundanely technical Status of Forces Agreement, a common document that with minor variations governs jurisdiction over U.S. forces serving in nearly ninety countries around the world, the SFA addressed a broad range of issues designed to shape the future relationship between the United States and Iraq. This was not quite a treaty, which would have required debate on the Senate floor and the approval of sixty-seven senators, but neither was it a typical executive-branch negotiation designed to implement current policy and law. Included in the SFA, as summarized in a 2008 document published by the Council on Foreign Relations, were provisions outlining "the U.S. role in defending Iraq from internal and external threats; U.S. support of political reconciliation; and U.S. efforts to confront terrorist groups," as well as measures "shaping future cooperation on cultural, energy, economic, environmental, and other issues of mutual interest."

Despite years of combat in Iraq, the expenditure of hundreds of billions of dollars of national treasure and deep divisions that remained in the American body politic regarding our future role in this tumultuous region, over the period of more than a year during which the Iraqi SFA was negotiated and finalized, Congress was not consulted in any meaningful way. Once the document was finalized, Congress was not given an opportunity to debate the merits of the agreement, which was specifically designed to shape the structure of our long-term relations in Iraq. Nor, importantly, did the congressional leadership even ask to do so.

Until finalized, the agreement was kept from public and media scrutiny, to minimize any debate that might have put it into jeopardy. From the overt and palpable body language of the executive branch, it was clear that opening up such an important and time-sensitive issue for congressional or public scrutiny would be counterproductive. When this writer asked to read the full document in the weeks before it was signed, I was required

to do so inside a soundproof room normally reserved for reviewing classified materials, even though the proposed agreement was not itself classified. And from the logbook I signed before being able to read (but not copy or take with me) the agreement, it appears that I was the only member of the Senate who at least at that point had actually read it.

Congress did not debate or vote on this agreement, which set U.S. policy toward an unstable regime in an unstable region of the world. By contrast, the Iraqi parliament voted on it twice.

A few years later the executive branch, headed by a new president, followed a similar pattern with respect to Afghanistan. In May 2012, after what was officially termed "a year and a half of negotiations," President Obama traveled overnight to Afghanistan in order to sign a strategic partnership agreement with Afghan president Hamid Karzai. The agreement was characterized by the White House as "a legally binding executive agreement, undertaken between two sovereign nations." Its purpose was to frame the structure of the future relationship between the United States and Afghanistan, including American commitments to that country's long-term security, social and economic development, as well as an anticipated American military presence that would continue after 2014, partially to address issues of overall regional security. To that end, Afghanistan was designated as a "Major Non-NATO Ally" in order to "provide a long-term framework for security and defense cooperation."

The Obama administration has proven itself to be acutely fond of executive orders designed to circumvent the legislative process in domestic politics. Thus, it is not surprising that this approach would be used also in foreign policy. The phrase "legally binding" as it pertains to executive agreements had come up earlier in the Obama administration. In November 2009, the administration announced that the president would return from a conference of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Copenhagen, Denmark, with a "binding commitment" for a nationwide emission-reduction program. On November 25, 2009, this writer sent a cautionary letter to the president, reminding him that "only specific legislation agreed upon in the Congress, or a treaty ratified by the Senate, could actually create such a commitment on behalf of our country."

It is difficult to understand how any international agreement negotiated, signed and authorized only by our executive branch of government can be construed as legally binding in our constitutional system. And, with respect to Afghanistan, one strains to find the rationale under which the president alone holds the power to commit our country to a long-term economic and security arrangement that far transcends his authority as commander in chief to oversee combat operations against international terrorism. If such an agreement were "legally binding," one must ask what law binds it and how, and against whom it would be enforced?

Unless Americans accept that we have by fiat devolved into a political system where the president has become a de facto prime minister, it is difficult to understand why Congress has remained so complacent when the executive branch has negotiated and signed agreements affecting long-term security and economic issues. Congress did not participate in the development of an agreement which, if not a security treaty, still could bind certain fiscal and security policies of our country through many ways, including pure financial inertia. Nor, again, did congressional leaders from either house or either political party even ask for

a debate, much less a vote, as to whether it should be approved.

As with the SFA in Iraq, the Afghan parliament did in fact vote on this agreement, even as our Congress was not formally consulted.

The failure of Congress to meet its historical obligations while the president unilaterally engaged in combat operations in Libya promises even deeper consequences for future crises. In many international situations the future promises a different kind of warfare, made possible (and politically more complex) by the use of special-operations forces, CIA operatives, drones and precision munitions, thus removing the average American from the consequences and even the direct knowledge of military actions that a president might undertake at his or her sole discretion. But to what extent should this "cleaner" way of war also remove Congress as an arbiter of when and where our nation should become involved in overseas hostilities?

The inherent right of self-defense allows the president, as commander in chief, to order strikes anywhere in the world against legitimate terrorist targets if the country in which they operate either cannot or will not take appropriate action itself. But this is a different concept than unilaterally commencing hostilities in situations that do not directly threaten our country. When we examine the conditions under which the president ordered our military into action in Libya, we are faced with the prospect of a very troubling, if not downright odd, historical precedent that has the potential to haunt us for decades.

The issue in play in Libya was not simply whether the president should ask Congress for a declaration of war. Nor was it wholly about whether Obama violated the edicts of the War Powers Act, which in this writer's view he clearly did. The issue that remains to be resolved is whether a president can unilaterally begin, and continue, a military campaign for reasons that he alone defines as meeting the demanding standards of a vital national interest worthy of risking American lives and expending billions of dollars of taxpayer money.

And what was the standard in this case?

The initial justification was that a dictator might retaliate against people who rebelled against him. No thinking person would make light of the potential tragedy involved in such a possibility in Libya (or, at present, in Syria). But it should be pointed out that there are a lot of dictators in the world and very few democracies in that particular region. This gives the Obama standard a pretty broad base if he

The failure of Congress to meet its historical obligations while the president unilaterally engaged in combat operations in Libya promises even deeper consequences for future crises.

or any future president should decide to use it again. And then, predictably, once military operations began, the operative phrase became "human suffering" and the stated goal became regime change, with combat dragging on for months.

In a world filled with cruelty, the question is not only how but whether a president should be allowed to pick and choose when and where to use military force on the basis of such a vague standard. Given our system of government, the fundamental question is: Who should decide? And even if a president should decide unilaterally on the basis of an overwhelming, vital national interest that requires immediate action, how long should that decision be honored, and to what lengths should our military go, before the matter comes under the proper scrutiny—and boundaries—of Congress?

As a measure for evaluating future crises, it is useful to review the bidding that led to our actions in Libya. What did it look like when President Obama ordered our military into action in that country, and what has happened since?

Was our country under attack, or under the threat of imminent attack? No. Was a clearly vital national interest at stake? No. Were we invoking the inherent right of self-defense as outlined in the UN Charter? No. Were we called upon by treaty commitments to come to the aid of an ally? No. Were we responding in kind to an attack on our forces elsewhere, as we did in the 1986 raids in Libya after American soldiers had been killed in a Berlin disco? No. Were we rescuing Americans in distress, as we did in Grenada in 1983? No.

The president followed no clear historical standard when he unilaterally decided to use force in Libya. Once this action continued beyond his original definition of "days, not weeks," into months and months, he did not seek the approval of Congress to continue military activities. And, while administration members may have discussed this matter with some members of Congress, the administration never formally conferred with the legislative branch as a coequal partner in our constitutional system.

Obviously, these points are not raised out of any lasting love for the late Libyan leader Muammar el-Qaddafi. But this is not about Qaddafi; it is about the manner in which our nation decides to use lethal military force abroad. This is a region rife with tribalism, fierce loyalties and brutal retaliation. Libya represented the extreme (at least so far) of executive action in the absence of the approval of Congress. We took military action against a regime that we continued to recognize diplomatically, on behalf of disparate groups of opposing forces whose only real point of agreement was that they wished to rid Libya of Qaddafi. This was not even a civil war. As then secretary of defense Robert Gates put it to this writer during a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing, it is not a civil war when there is no cohesive opposition facing a regime. The too frequently ignored end result of this process was not only the rampant lawlessness that possibly contributed to the assassination of our ambassador and three other U.S.

officials, but also the region-wide dispersion of thousands of weapons from Qaddafi's armories.

The inaction (some of it deliberate) of key congressional leaders during this period has ensured that the president's actions now constitute a troubling precedent. Under the objectively undefinable rubric of "humanitarian intervention," President Obama has arguably established the authority of the president to intervene militarily virtually anywhere without the consent or the approval of Congress, at his own discretion and for as long as he wishes. It is not hyperbole to say that the president himself can now bomb a country with which we maintain diplomatic relations, in support of loosely aligned opposition groups that do not represent any coalition that we actually recognize as an alternative. We know he can do it because he already has done it.

Few leaders in the legislative branch even asked for a formal debate over this exercise of unilateral presidential power, and in the Senate any legislation pertaining to the issue was prevented from reaching the floor. One can only wonder at what point these leaders or their successors might believe it is their constitutional duty to counter unchecked executive power exercised on behalf of overseas military action.

At bottom, what we have witnessed in these instances, as with many others, is a breakdown of our constitutional process. Opinions will surely vary as to the merits of the actual solution that was reached in each case, but this sort of disagreement, which in and of itself forms the basis of our form of government, is the precise reason why each one of these cases, and others, should have been properly debated and voted on by Congress. In none of these situations was the consideration of time or emergency so great as to have precluded congressional deliberation. In each, we can be certain that Congress was deliberately ignored or successfully circumvented, while being viewed by some members of the executive branch as more of a nuisance than an equal constitutional partner. And there is no doubt that some key congressional leaders were reluctant, at best, to assert the authority that forms the basis of our governmental structure.

When it comes to the long-term commitments that our country makes in the international arena, ours can be a complicated and sometimes frustrating process. But our Founding Fathers deliberately placed checks and counterchecks into our constitutional system for exactly that purpose. The congressional "nuisance factor" is supposed to act as a valuable tool to ensure that our leaders—and especially our commander in chief—do not succumb to the emotions of the moment or the persuasions of a very few. One hopes Congress—both Republicans and Democrats—can regain the wisdom to reassert the authority that was so wisely given to it so many years ago.

And as for the presidency, a final thought is worth pondering. From a political standpoint, it is far smarter to seek congressional approval on controversial matters of foreign policy, as was done in the October 2002 authorization to invade Iraq, than to attempt to circumvent the legislative branch. At home, Congress and the presidency will then share accountability. Abroad, the international community will know that America is united and not acting merely at the discretion of one individual. □

Syria's Crisis of Transition

By Chester Crocker

The Syrian conundrum exemplifies the policy challenges that arise when regimes face political crises and violent transitions under opposition pressures. Syria is not the first such case nor will it be the last. So it may be useful to recall how similar past scenarios have unfolded—and sometimes been managed—in order to draw lessons for Syria and future crises.

One can imagine a range of outcomes in Syria. Most pose considerable risks for the United States, Europe, Russia and Syria's immediate neighbors. But Syrians themselves are paying the price of this violent transition and ultimately are shaping its course. Still, what the United States does or decides not to do can make a significant difference while the clay of political change is still moist. So it is useful to look at some of the available tools of influence and the considerations that should guide those who use them.

A starting place is to examine the range of possible outcomes from such cases. At least seven can be identified. They include:

(i) a "revolution" in which a more or less coherent new order sweeps away the old as a result of violent struggle (Ethiopia, 1974; Uganda, 1986; Russia, 1917);

(ii) a "velvet" revolution in which the regime collapses amid a mixture of street power, external pressure and leadership splits (the Philippines, 1986; Egypt and Tunisia, 2011; the Soviet Union, 1991);

(iii) bloody, broken-back regime change following prolonged strife as regime elements defect and leaders arrange their exit or are killed (Yemen, 2011; Libya, 2011; Ethiopia, 1991);

(iv) successful repression using scorched-earth tools so that the opposition is defeated (Peru, 1992–; Sri Lanka, 2009; Zimbabwe, 2000–);

(v) drawn-out political stalemate followed by "negotiated revolution" (South Africa, 1992–1994; Burma, 2010–);

(vi) prolonged bloody strife that prompts coercive external intervention and an imposed peace (Bosnia, 1995); and

(vii) prolonged strife that prompts powerfully backed, externally led negotiations leading to an internationally monitored transition and elections (Namibia, 1988–1991; Liberia, 2003–2005; Mozambique, 1990–1994; El Salvador, 1992–1994).

These outcomes may only be stage one of a longer transition process. They do not tell us what comes next. Prolonged stalemate could evolve into a de facto partition of the state into ethnic, regional or confessional rump enclaves as the regime arms its core supporters and the central state loses control of much of its territory (Somalia, Democratic Republic of the Congo). The Egyptian example suggests that velvet revolutions can morph into directions that remain unpredictable for some time, while

Chester Crocker is the James R. Schlesinger Professor of Strategic Studies at Georgetown University's Walsh School of Foreign Service.

bloody regime change in Libya has been followed by ambiguous but still hopeful incoherence. Successful negotiation, on the other hand, could produce autonomy arrangements that partially decentralize power while the now more constrained state remains intact (as in Aceh in Indonesia or Mindanao in the Philippines).

If outside states attempt to freeze power relations or entrench political-military groups in open-ended power-sharing structures, they likely will sow seeds of future conflict and distort the chances for organic political development (Lebanon and Bosnia). Powerful local actors—the men with the guns—will often try to game the arrangements that flow from negotiated peace deals and use the trappings of democracy to seize and hold on to power, as in Cambodia, Sudan/South Sudan and Angola. Too often, such negotiations simply reflect the balance of coercive forces on the ground at the time they take place, and unarmed civilians become marginalized.

Therefore, much depends not only on local power balances but also on the timing and priorities of outside powers when deals are done. A "peace at any price" approach might respond to immediate humanitarian imperatives, but it also could entrench the wrong actors, prolonging rather than resolving society's problems. Above all, the impact of external intervention—both military and political—will depend on the level of commitment that outsiders bring to the follow-on implementation phase after the immediate transition takes place.

As of this writing, one can make a few tentative comments on Syria's trajectory in comparison with these varied scenarios. First, successful repression by the Assad regime appears to have failed. Second, a scenario of de facto—let alone de jure—partition of the country would compound the turmoil already facing the region and thus would find little favor in Turkey, Iran or Iraq. Third, an outright victory by opposition forces that effectively blows away the regime is highly unlikely. Fourth, there is little chance of decisive external combat intervention on behalf of the opposition. Syrian mayhem appears unlikely to prompt a repetition of the kind of NATO/UN military action seen in the Balkans, and Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad knows it.

One implication of these observations is that Syria's best chance lies in the possibility of an internationally led, negotiated transition that is subject to some measure of external monitoring or peacekeeping (UN/Arab League). The key to such an outcome would hinge on American and Russian negotiators with the assistance of UN–Arab League special envoy Lakhdar Brahimi, the veteran Algerian mediator. To be sure, none of the above scenarios will be an exact "fit" for Syria. Something approaching scenario (vii) may be the best hope.

But hope is not a strategy, and simply declaring that Assad must go is not a policy. Lining up the tools and resources to support something like scenario (vii) requires facing some fundamental choices. One central challenge lies in deciding how much of the Syrian state apparatus can serve as the institutional base for the transition and future governance. Another question concerns the fate of people associated with the government during the decades of rule by the Assads. A further challenge lies in the timing of U.S. engagement with Russian leaders, without whom it is difficult to imagine a negotiated transition to a new Syria. The task here is to mesh the American quest for as much of the right kind of change as possible with the Russian quest for a measure of continuity to protect Russian interests. As pressures mount on the regime, Russian impatience for some sort of arrangement will grow. As casualties mount and Brahimi's dire warnings about

the rising humanitarian toll come to pass, American and Western leaders will be under growing pressure to take further steps. While Syria is not "ripe" for negotiation today, the scenario could ripen usefully. There is also the risk that Syria may not ripen at all, but merely rot on the vine.

The test of statesmanship in such violent transitions is to define the least bad outcome and to select a mixture of diplomatic, economic and coercive tools appropriate to the specific case. This requires a very careful assessment of local and regional players. The bad guys may be evident, but good guys could be hard to find. If so, it will be best to help foster a credible process rather than trying to select winners.

Transitional diplomacy requires leverage, and leverage comes from power, in one form or another. Direct military intervention may be the least flexible option in such situations, for several reasons. First, to paraphrase Colin Powell in the Iraq context, if we break it we may end up owning the result. This is a particular dilemma for the United States because of its vast—if stretched—power resources. Analyzing the so-called values cases of the 1990s—Haiti, Somalia, Bosnia, Rwanda—Richard Betts made a persuasive case that "impartial" intervention is a delusion. As he put it, to intervene militarily is to decide who rules the target state—a reality both when we arrive and when we leave. But nonintervention could simply deliver the society to those who are best armed and organized; in other words, it is another way to decide who rules. We have seen the first principle at work in Afghanistan since 2001 and the second principle in the Great Lakes region of Africa since 1994. Neither example gives confidence that military instruments can be effective when employed in isolation from other policy tools.

Clearly, there has been no appetite for direct, boots-on-the-ground military intervention in Syria. One reason is war fatigue, but another is that U.S. decision makers are not sure who (if anyone) warrants support. Beyond that, U.S. leaders have been wary of assuming responsibility for another regime change in the Arab world. U.S. direct combat intervention is not highly correlated with "success" in the transition cases referenced above.

But the United States and its allies nonetheless hold other tools of leverage and influence. One is economic sanctions designed to wear down and isolate the target regime. But this is an extremely blunt instrument that hurts civilians first and foremost. Another tool is humanitarian aid and lethal

assistance provided to opposition forces. Whether supplied through proxies or directly, overtly or covertly, such external aid serves two purposes: it sends a signal to the regime's backers, and it helps level the playing field. Over time, these tools are part of a strategy of "ripening" the conflict by bleeding the regime.

But such tools by themselves are unlikely to produce a successful outcome. Thus, the answer lies partly in finding sources of borrowed leverage and credibility. Neighboring states, regional hegemons and major powers associated with the regime are the most obvious sources of the needed leverage. Close behind them are regional organizations, alliances and the UN. A few examples illustrate the argument:

U.S. negotiators found leverage by engaging with the backers of all factions in the complex Cambodia diplomacy of the early 1990s. It worked because of broader geopolitical dynamics and the ability to exploit the appetite for exit in the key "patron" capitals.

In Liberia in 2003, U.S. officials brought minimal military presence (mainly offshore) to bear, but the main action was to catalyze the military and diplomatic support of Nigeria, Ghana and the Economic Community of West African States (and then the UN secretariat) to shape a two-year transition plan that removed Charles Taylor from office, set up a transitional regime and paved the way for elections.

The United States acquired leverage (as well as some less welcome initiatives) from UN mediators and Central American leaders in the diplomacy preceding the 1992 El Salvador settlement, snatching success from the jaws of a domestically controversial quagmire.

UN credibility and professional skill provided the backdrop to sustained U.S. efforts that ultimately succeeded in a 1988 agreement ending the colonial regime in Namibia and the major Cuban military presence in Angola with the help of leverage borrowed from neighbors, allies, the Cubans and the Soviets.

And finally, French and UN forces, along with rhetorical support from the African Union, enabled Washington to play a quiet but firm backseat role in removing a stubborn tyrant from office in Ivory Coast in 2011.

In Syria, U.S. diplomacy has focused on mobilizing a wide circle of roughly one hundred states in the Friends of Syria ad hoc group, which meets periodically outside the UN context to evade Russian and Chinese vetoes. In parallel, U.S. diplomats have elicited the help of Arab states in birthing the Syrian National Coalition in hopes of unifying diverse opposition forces and getting them widespread international recognition. Unifying the opposition camp is essential to gain and hold the strategic initiative. This is a form of leverage.

But the ultimate and most important source of potential leverage remains Moscow. Washington pursues this target by unifying and recognizing the opposition; engaging on the UN track, which provides Moscow (and many others) with some face-saving; backing broad economic sanctions against the Assad regime and providing nonlethal assistance to the opposition; and working behind the scenes to screen and channel third-party lethal aid. These efforts—properly understood—serve to bleed Moscow's client while offering the Russians the possibility of a way out. This would consist of their pulling the plug on Assad (while denying they were doing so, of course) while playing a key role in shaping the next phase of a transition endorsed by the Arab League and the UN. Official Washington will need a sober realism to pull something like this off. If Moscow is being asked to join in birthing a "new

If Moscow is being asked to join in birthing a "new Syria," it will want to know what kind of baby is being conceived.

Syria," it will want to know what kind of baby is being conceived.

Borrowing leverage is the essence of good diplomacy. But it is not the only diplomatic tool in the arsenal. If the troubled regime is a friendly one at some level (e.g., the Philippines under Ferdinand Marcos), Washington has the option of withdrawing or reducing its support. If the target is a rogue warlord or an unfriendly regime, U.S. diplomacy can facilitate a leader's exile by speaking to those who might accept him, as Washington did successfully in Liberia in 2003. An unheralded but brilliant example of arranging a soft landing occurred in Ethiopia in 1991, when rebel forces were on the outskirts of Addis Ababa. The Soviet-backed thug Mengistu Haile Mariam and his immediate coterie escaped to Zimbabwean exile just before the Tigrayan rebel chieftain Meles Zenawi entered the city. That diplomacy was conducted by U.S. officials using one of the most powerful modern diplomatic weapons: a cell phone. In Syria, tasks like this are more likely to fall to the Russians or the Iranians.

Another conundrum in transitional diplomacy is to be found in relationships with opposition movements, both armed and civilian-led. Washington needs to define its real purpose and motivations as it reaches out to Syrian groups (or refuses to) and considers including them in meetings and providing them tangible assistance. Are we trying to help them win, to warn them against certain kinds of behavior, to curry favor with them in case they come out on top, to send a message to the regime's backers, or simply to have a seat at the table and keep options open as events unfold? Are we aiming at regime collapse or a brokered transition? What lessons have we learned about such choices from earlier examples that might be relevant today?

While many precedents suggest answers to such questions, there has been a lack of conceptual clarity in U.S. decision making and public commentary. The most important choices involve when to reach out to local opposition parties as a regime begins to run into trouble; whether and how to engage with armed actors, including those that may engage in acts of terror or other forms of criminal activity; and what roles armed opposition movements should be allowed to play in negotiating the transition.

The political context shapes much of the answer. In the case of a previously friendly regime that finds itself sliding into political crisis—for example, Iran under the shah, the Philippines under Marcos or Egypt under Hosni Mubarak—the act of engaging opposition groups inevitably sends a powerful signal of distancing and hedging. That, in fact, may be its primary initial purpose. Diplomatic support and institution-building aid may follow. But even in relatively peaceful settings where the goal is to hedge and broaden contacts in the society, engaging with opposition movements should not be viewed as a gift to them. Engagement of this kind is not making nice; it is a test that merely opens the door to a possible roadmap for relations. It may also be undertaken to protect future equities and avoid estrangement from a future leadership. In any event, it should

be done early in the process, ideally before political conflict ripens into crisis.

The picture gets more complicated when the crisis facing a previously friendly regime crosses the line toward violence. One reason is that state institutions, and the people running them, may be at risk. Hence, it is important to assess the pros and cons of working toward a relatively soft landing versus sweeping away the old order. As regime brutality converts protesters into rebels (often the result of provocations aimed at precisely this result), we need to know much more about the armed groups that emerge. They may be led by patriots or warlords. The leadership may be pragmatic or ideologically rigid. Its agenda may be homegrown or shaped by those who arm and fund it; that agenda may be driven by principle or by the raw quest for power. The armed opposition may be cohesive or destined for future internal strife when the old order crumbles. Armed groups may or may not respect the rights of innocent civilians.

A deep dive is required to get some answers. And again, that requires early engagement, not as an act of solidarity with future "good guys" but in order to send warnings, clarify positions and interests, ask tough questions and obtain information. As the old regime goes down (assuming the United States lets that happen or cannot prevent it), it becomes increasingly important to avoid rose-colored glasses in viewing likely successors: there are no Nelson Mandelas in most scenarios, especially violent ones.

Engagement with armed groups entails risks and requires clarity about objectives. Groups that get on the U.S., UN or EU lists of proscribed entities because of terrorist acts pose particular problems. Officials may be deterred by potential controversy or legally prohibited from contact with them in the absence of special waivers—a relatively recent development that severely complicates peacemaking in conflict zones. Since the June 2010 Supreme Court decision in *Holder v. Humanitarian Law Project*, nonofficial organizations have been directly constrained in their dealings with armed groups that are on U.S. terrorism lists. This prohibition can be interpreted as criminalizing mere training, advising on political solutions or providing humanitarian aid. U.S. legislation, court decisions and executive regulations severely undercut U.S. diplomatic reach and represent a form of unilateral diplomatic disarmament. The net effect is to require communication through private non-American intermediaries, resulting in excessive reliance on intelligence channels or on other friendly third parties that are free from such self-defeating inhibitions.

These recent legal and legislative developments compound an already-complex environment for engaging armed actors. Contact with armed groups operating in friendly states such as Spain, Colombia, the Philippines, Yemen or Northern Ireland is highly sensitive politically. Key exchanges typically take

place in the utmost secrecy, often conducted by nonofficial bodies. It is essential that policy makers and citizens regain the flexibility to deal with potential future players emerging during violent transitions, and the earlier the better. After all, in places such as Spain, South Africa, El Salvador, Kashmir, the Palestinian territories, Nepal and Afghanistan, it is hard to imagine how the United States and other outside powers could have exerted influence for constructive change without engaging the men with the guns—even those you would not bring home for dinner.

There may be plenty of people like that operating in Syria. So it behooves U.S. officials to recall the core purposes of engaging armed actors. One is to support moderate voices and undercut rabid extremists and the greediest warlords. Another is to make clear the limits of what can be achieved by the gun and to encourage a return to politics. By debating, arguing from experience elsewhere and asking awkward questions, it is possible to open the eyes of blinkered militants—a classic tool of good diplomacy. A third goal is to split the leadership or entice it to think and act politically so a negotiated transition can have a chance. The most basic message is this: terrorism and armed struggle cannot get you what you say you want, but politics can. It is this approach that has eventually prevailed as successive British governments and international mediators grasped the Northern Ireland nettle. This is also the approach pursued almost invisibly by various third parties that have successfully pushed the paramilitary group ETA to abandon the violent pursuit of Basque national aspirations.

This logic applies equally to violent transitions that threaten regimes we do *not* like. Policy toward such places as Cambodia, Zimbabwe, Burma, Angola, Sudan and Kosovo required a similar calculus about how much and what kinds of support to offer opposition groups. In Cambodia and Angola, U.S. officials had few illusions about the character and conduct of the Khmer Rouge and Unita, respectively, and they did not entertain ideas of their achieving an outright military "win." Where they faced both armed and nonviolent groups, as in Kosovo, an effort was made to walk a fine line—recognizing the critical role played by the men with the guns while also taking steps to include those employing peaceful and nonviolent methods. There are important lessons for Syria here. Trying to avoid relations with armed groups actually marginalizes us more than them, a point that applies even to the more radical elements of any opposition movement.

On the other hand, it matters what roles armed groups are permitted to play in an eventual negotiation process. Unless they are somehow defeated or marginalized by civilian leadership, armed groups will assert their right to be at the table on matters affecting security, cease-fires, external military monitoring, future force configurations and disarmament. These are topics on which armed groups have a direct "professional" stake and on which their buy-in is essential. Furthermore, they are unlikely to cooperate unless they get credible answers on their priority security concerns: Who will guarantee an agreement and assure that others respect their commitments? What remedies will be available to one faction if others cheat? Libya illustrates what can happen when there is no authoritative, binding understanding about the intricate process by which a successor regime achieves a monopoly on the use of armed force.

Having recognized their role in the negotiation of security issues, however, it is imperative that armed groups *not* be allowed to dominate other items on the

As the old regime goes down, it becomes increasingly important to avoid rose-colored glasses in viewing likely successors: there are no Nelson Mandelas in most scenarios, especially violent ones.

agenda of a negotiated transition. Issues such as election monitoring, refugee return, freedom of assembly and speech, economic reconstruction and the administration of justice are rightly in the purview of civil-society actors and political parties at the negotiating table. This is easier said than done, however, as long as groups of contending armed men are in a position to intimidate or coerce other players.

The point is that negotiation is a process in which issues need to be sequenced. Giving militarized groups—especially ones organized along regional or sectarian lines—a direct role in shaping the terms of political change and writing a new constitution is a dangerous approach. It encourages armed actors to entrench their positions permanently and block the emergence of a civil order. The experience of Bosnia after Dayton illustrates the pitfalls of guaranteeing sectarian or nationalist militants a power base from which to make political demands. The lesson here is to detach the immediate transition arrangements, in which power is inevitably shared, from the next phase, in which political roles are defined constitutionally. The negotiation of peace in Syria must be distinct from the negotiation of its first post-Assad constitution.

As Dirk Vandewalle argued recently in *Foreign Affairs*, Libya's new elites are benefiting from the fact that Muammar el-Qaddafi destroyed any institutions he inherited and essentially built none that were left behind after he was murdered. Syria, however, has a variety of important civic institutions, including its administrative apparatus and its "deep state," along with the personnel who staff them. These will be important subjects in the coming negotiation. Some observers critical of U.S. restraint in supporting the armed opposition imagine a scenario of outright rebel military victory and complete regime collapse. Under this line of thinking, the opposition is winning and ought not to have "victory" snatched away by some form of diplomatic intervention.

But there is a difference between battlefield success and the creation of a positive transition to a post-Assad era. Syrians themselves witnessed Iraq following the U.S. invasion and probably do not want to see Assad's defeat translate into a similar chaotic vacuum of contending factional militias. It is for the emerging Syrian leadership to determine which agencies and institutions should be retained to assure continuity of governance and what sort of lustration process should be established to vet Assad-era personnel. If a chaotic vacuum or the outright breakup of the country is to be avoided, those issues will need to be negotiated with representatives of the state. Thus, the role of externally led diplomacy is to seize the window of opportunity created by the changed military balance and to support a negotiated transition. Diplomacy and military power must work hand in glove—they are not opposites or alternatives.

Assad and his coterie *will* be defeated and depart the political arena—under house arrest, in exile or horizontally. Brahimi is right to come out publicly to clarify that Assad's contribution to peace

must be to depart the scene. That is because he and those through whom he wages war on his people have forfeited any claim to power, however modified or limited. They will be fortunate indeed if they manage to avoid Qaddafi's fate or a trial at the International Criminal Court. Such scenarios—and others like them when leaders flee, as in Haiti, Ethiopia, Liberia or the Philippines—illustrate one part of the spectrum of regime transitions. At the other end of the spectrum are Burma and South Africa, where open warfare was preempted by farsighted leaders capable of negotiating and managing change. It is probably too late for a Syrian equivalent of Thein Sein to come forward and reach out to opposition forces. And, just as there are no Mandelas in most violent scenarios, there also are few F. W. de Klerks capable of seeing the long-term interests of their core constituency.

Viewed in this light, a negotiated transition settlement is not an alternative to battlefield victory. It is the way to exploit and follow up on military success and the creation of a coherent political opposition. To be sure, negotiations do not always succeed, and their successes are often short-lived. It will be difficult to integrate the various neighbors, the UN–Arab League process and the U.S.-Russian track into a framework that supports talks between the Syrian National Coalition leaders and elements of the state administration. It will be ambitious to devise credible external guarantees or peacekeeping monitors to provide necessary assurances as the transition unfolds.

Clearly, we are not there yet. This is a time for pre-negotiation and ripening the situation diplomatically—through assistance and sanctions pressures, by investing in our knowledge of the parties and by keeping alive a possible framework for negotiation when the time comes. Both the regime and the opposition have serious problems, and neither is in a position to deliver a knockout punch. But things could change quite suddenly. Finding the right moment to accept or solicit Russian support for a transition package will call for skilled statecraft. Such diplomacy entails risks. But diplomatic experience suggests that this way of thinking is more realistic, in the best sense of the term, than the alternatives: letting nature take its course or trying to pick a winner from within the sectarian bouillabaisse and hoping for the best. □

When Kerry Stormed D.C.

By Marvin Kalb

During the Vietnam War, there were many memorable hearings at the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, but none resonated with the raw power and eloquence of John Kerry's on April 22, 1971. It was a time of crisis in America—a war seemingly without end for a goal still without clarity, in a country split not only on the war but also on a host of emotional political, cultural and social issues.

When Kerry entered room 4221 of what is now called the Dirksen Senate Office Building, its impressive walls covered with maps and books and with nineteen senators seated behind a huge U-shaped table, he did more than add instant credibility to the dovish cry for Congress finally to do something about ending the war, even going so far as to advocate cutting off funding; he personalized the war that for so many others still seemed a puzzling, costly embarrassment in an unfamiliar corner of the world.

Kerry was a 1966 Yale graduate who had volunteered for duty in Vietnam, where he served honorably, winning two medals for courage and three Purple Hearts. "I believed very strongly in the code of service to one's country," he said. By that time, 56,193 Americans had died in and around Vietnam, and campuses were ablaze with antiwar rallies. Many students escaped military service by joining the National Guard or fleeing to Canada.

Dressed in green army fatigues, with four rows of ribbons over his left pocket, the twenty-seven-year-old survivor of dangerous Swift Boat missions leveled a blistering attack on American policy in Vietnam, his New England accent adding a dimension of authenticity to the sharpness of his critique. When he finished his testimony an hour later, he had become, in the words of one supporter, an "instant celebrity . . . with major national recognition."

Speaking on behalf of more than a hundred veterans jammed into the Senate chamber and more than a thousand others camped outside to demonstrate against the war, Kerry demanded an "immediate withdrawal from South Vietnam." He came to Congress, and not the president, he said, because "this body can be responsive to the will of the people, and . . . the will of the people says that we should be out of Vietnam now."

If Kerry had simply expressed this demand, and not amplified it with reports of American atrocities, he likely would have avoided the devastating criticism that hounded him throughout his political

---

Marvin Kalb is a guest scholar at the Brookings Institution and Edward R. Murrow Professor Emeritus at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. Over his thirty-year broadcast career, he served as CBS's and NBC's chief diplomatic correspondent, Moscow bureau chief and moderator of *Meet the Press*. His most recent book is *The Road to War: Presidential Commitments, Honored and Betrayed* (Brookings, 2013), from which this article is adapted.

career—criticism that eventually morphed into charges of treason and treachery, deception and lies, cowardice and even more lies, undercutting his presidential drive in 2004.

Kerry told the committee that in Detroit a few months earlier, 150 "honorably discharged . . . veterans" launched what they called the "Winter Soldier Investigation." In 1776, the pamphleteer Thomas Paine had written about the "sunshine patriot," who had deserted at Valley Forge "because the going was rough." Now, Kerry continued, the going was rough again, and the veterans who opposed the war felt that they had to speak out against the "crimes which we are committing."

Kerry emphasized the word "crimes," and most of the senators and all of the journalists leaned forward in their seats. A hush fell over the room. I was among the reporters covering Kerry's testimony. During the 1960s and early 1970s, when, as diplomatic correspondent for CBS News, I reported on a number of important foreign-policy deliberations at the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, I generally stood with my camera crew in the back of the room. Rarely was it crowded. Most of the radio, newspaper and magazine reporters gathered around a large rectangular table near the tall windows. A second large table was on the other side of the room. Between the two and directly behind the witness table were rows of chairs for aides, guests and tourists.

On this very special day, however, the seating rules were suspended. I arrived early, but even so most of the seats were already taken. The veterans squeezed into the back of the room, most standing, very few seated. I spotted one empty chair in the front row and ran for it, beating out a network competitor by half a step. I was lucky; I had a great seat, no more than six feet from where this young antiwar leader was to deliver testimony that yielded the immediate advantage of dominating the news that day. Kerry hoped this would be the case, but it also carried the unintended consequence of providing ammunition to his political opponents to prove he was unworthy of higher office.

Kerry started with his most explosive charge. He quoted the "very highly decorated veterans" who had unburdened themselves in Detroit, saying:

> They told the stories at times that they had personally raped, cut off ears, cut off heads, taped wires from portable telephones to human genitals and turned up the power, cut off limbs, blown up bodies, randomly shot at civilians, razed villages in fashion reminiscent of Genghis Khan, shot cattle and dogs for fun, poisoned food stocks, and generally ravaged the countryside of South Vietnam.

Kerry continued, "The country doesn't know it yet, but it has created a monster, a monster in the form of millions of men who have been taught to deal and to trade in violence." He was describing his buddies, the Vietnam veterans on the Washington Mall, and many others, the "quadriplegics and amputees" who lay "forgotten in Veterans' Administration hospitals." They weren't "really wanted" in a country of widespread "indifference," where there were no jobs, where the veterans constituted "the largest corps of unemployed in this country," and where 57 percent of hospitalized veterans considered suicide.

I suspect most of us in room 4221 were shocked by Kerry's description of the veterans just back from the Vietnam War. I had always thought of the American soldier as a brave, patriotic and honorable warrior—that had been my personal experience in the U.S. Army—not as a "monster . . . taught to deal and to trade

in violence" who "personally raped, cut off ears, cut off heads," comparable to the rampaging legions of Genghis Khan in the thirteenth century. Kerry's words evoked images totally foreign to the American experience, certainly to me. I wondered: Could Kerry be right? After all, he had fought in Vietnam. I hadn't.

We were by then familiar with the so-called credibility gap, the "five o'clock follies" in Saigon, and White House briefings pumped up with artificial optimism and more than an occasional fib. And if Kerry was right, how could the senators have been so wrong, so gullible? How could we Washington journalists, who had covered so many other hearings, speeches and backgrounders, have been so misled? More pointedly, how could we have allowed ourselves to be so misled? Could Kerry's portrait of the American veteran actually be a portrait of Dorian Gray in khaki?

Listening to this decorated veteran, a Yale graduate with an old-fashioned sense of service and patriotism, I thought of the political scientist Richard Neustadt's emphasis on the importance of "speaking truth to power." I had the feeling that this veteran was speaking truth to Congress and to the American people, though with a flair for hyperbole that he was later to regret. Often, during his testimony, I found myself in a state of semi-hypnosis, pen in hand but not taking notes, absorbed by the boldness—and relevance—of his criticism. The massacre at My Lai was in the air. Army lieutenant William L. Calley had been on the cover of *Time*. If a lieutenant could burn down a village with a Zippo lighter, was it not possible that another lieutenant could be high on drugs—and then rape and kill? Could Kerry be right? I had once been a hawk on the Vietnam War—I had thought that stopping Communism in Southeast Asia was as sound a strategy as stopping it in Europe. But after the Tet Offensive in early 1968, and after General William Westmoreland's stunning request for an additional 206,000 troops, to be added to the 543,000 troops already in theater (a request fortunately rejected by the new secretary of defense Clark Clifford), I began to change my mind not only about the strategy but also about the very purpose of the war. That day, Kerry pushed me (and many other Americans) over the brink. I began to think that the

United States had made a terrible mistake in Southeast Asia and that it was time to admit it and take the appropriate action.

Indeed, every now and then, a question crystallizes a national dilemma. Kerry asked: "How do you ask a man to be the last man to die in Vietnam? How do you ask a man to be the last man to die for a mistake?" If the war was a mistake, then why pursue it? One reason was that President Richard Nixon did not want to be, as he put it, "the first President to lose a war," even though he knew that Vietnam was an "unwinnable proposition." And then Kerry asked another question of equal pertinence: "Where are the leaders of our country?" Much to my surprise, as he listed his candidates for ignominy, he did not include Nixon or Henry Kissinger. "We are here to ask where are McNamara, Rostow, Bundy, Gilpatric," he continued:

> These are commanders who have deserted their troops, and there is no more serious crime in the law of war. The Army says they never leave their wounded. The Marines say they never leave even their dead. These men have left all the casualties and retreated behind a pious shield of public rectitude.

The senators did not move. The reporters tried to look unmoved. The room was very silent. Only the cameras hummed politely as they recorded Kerry's testimony for later broadcast to the nation.

In conclusion, Kerry accused "this administration" of paying the veterans the "ultimate dishonor." He said, "They have attempted to disown us and the sacrifice we made for this country. In their blindness and fear they have tried to deny that we are veterans or that we served in Nam. We do not need their testimony. Our own scars and stumps of limbs are witnesses enough for others and for ourselves."

And then, more in sadness than artificial pomp, though maybe a bit of both, since Kerry was an accomplished orator, he finished with these words:

> We wish that a merciful God could wipe away our own memories of that service as easily as this administration has wiped their memories of us. But all that they have done and all that they can do by this denial is to make more clear than ever our own determination to undertake one last mission, to search out and destroy the last vestige of this barbaric war, to pacify our own hearts, to conquer the hate and the fear that have driven this country these last 10 years and more, and so when, in 30 years from now, our brothers go down the street without a leg, without an arm, or a face, and small boys ask why, we will be able to say "Vietnam" and not mean a desert, not a filthy obscene memory but mean instead the place where America finally turned and where soldiers like us helped it in the turning.

The room, which had been still, erupted in applause and cheers. The Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW), the organization Kerry was representing, had finally been heard, not just on Capitol Hill but in time across the nation. Outside, among the veterans gathered on the Washington Mall, small groups formed around transistor radios, listening to Kerry's critique. Many got down on one knee, raising their right fists to the sky. American flags were unfurled. One could even see a number of Vietcong banners. On the fringes, there were other flags: "Quakers for Peace" and "Hard Hats Against the War." One veteran, who had lost both legs, sat in a wheelchair—he too raised his fist to the sky. He had fought his last war.

Chairman J. William Fulbright, a Democrat from Arkansas, who had helped steer the Tonkin Gulf resolution through Congress in August 1964, providing the

"legal" authority for American military action in Vietnam, but who later became an active critic of the war, praised Kerry for his eloquence and his message and asked whether he was familiar with the antiwar resolutions then under discussion and debate in Congress. Fulbright said that a number of committee members had advanced resolutions to end the war, "seeking the most practical way that we can find and, I believe, to do it at the earliest opportunity that we can." Kerry responded that his veterans would like to end the war "immediately and unilaterally." Based on his talks with the North Vietnamese in Paris, Kerry believed, naively as it turned out, that if the United States "set a date . . . the earliest possible date" for its withdrawal from Vietnam, the North Vietnamese would then release American prisoners of war. What we later learned was that the North Vietnamese had other plans. Kerry added that he didn't "mean to sound pessimistic," but he really didn't think "this Congress" would end the war by legislation.

Senators known for their volubility sat speechless.

"You have a Silver Star; have you not?" injected Senator Stuart Symington of Missouri. A Silver Star was the army's third-highest award for valor.

"Yes, I do," Kerry responded.

"You have a Purple Heart?" Symington continued.

"Yes, I do."

"How many clusters on it?"

"Two clusters."

"You were wounded three times?"

"Yes, sir."

"I have no further questions," Symington concluded.

Other senators asked other questions, but they were mostly in the form of compliments and congratulations—they were not probing for substantive information.

Fulbright and Kerry were obviously reading from the same sheet of antiwar music. The two had met at a reception honoring the VVAW held at the home of Senator Phil Hart of Michigan, and Fulbright liked Kerry's style. He was, according to historian Douglas Brinkley, "very impressed by Kerry's polite . . . demeanor. He was not a screamer. He didn't look disheveled." The next morning a Fulbright staffer called Kerry. "We want you to testify," he said. Happily, Kerry agreed, even though he knew he did not have enough time to prepare properly. With Adam Walinsky, a former aide to both John and Robert Kennedy, at his side, Kerry spent the whole night writing and rewriting his testimony, while balancing other responsibilities as one of the principal coordinators of the five-day demonstration.

Around 9:30 a.m., Thursday, April 22, 1971, a friend, reporter Tom Oliphant of the *Boston Globe*, found Kerry at a meeting

Both Nixon and Haldeman were impressed by Kerry's performance, and both realized that it only made their job harder.

at a demonstration on the Hill. "Do you realize what time it is?" he asked. "Shouldn't we get going?" Kerry checked his watch. "Oh, my God," he said. "Let's go." With Oliphant, he set off at a brisk pace down Independence Avenue toward the Dirksen Senate Office Building. As they passed the Supreme Court, Kerry noticed an angry group of veterans on the top steps of the building. He then did what he had been doing all week. "Up he went, and once again, you know, the hand on the arm, the talking them down." Oliphant heard Kerry say: "We don't want any sideshows. Please help." Kerry always worried about image—about whether the veterans, many of them looking like Woodstock hippies, were making a positive impression on the American people.

By then, it was "six or seven minutes" to the start of the hearing. "Uh, John," Oliphant said, pulling on his sleeve, "you might want to go testify before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee." Kerry broke away from the protesting veterans. The two rushed off to room 4221. "We got to the door, and I actually opened it," Oliphant remembered, "and he started to go towards it, at which point he pulled back like somebody had punched him, just went back like this, and said, 'Oh shit!'" Kerry had just caught his first glimpse of the crowded, noisy conference room. He suddenly realized he was entering the big leagues of national politics.

Oliphant continued:

> The room was completely jammed. There was a full spread of television cameras, completely filled press tables, the most prestigious committee in the entire United States Congress, to see a twenty-seven-year-old in combat fatigues make a statement about the Vietnam War. The response, not just inside the hearing room, but nationally—it was electric, and it was immediate. This person and that message had gone national in the blink of an eye.

At the White House, which had anxiously observed the antiwar demonstration all week and done everything in its power to contain and downplay it, President Nixon met with his chief of staff, H. R. Haldeman, to consider other steps they could take against the antiwar veterans. Neither could ignore the impact of Kerry's testimony. They had decided early on that the Nixon administration would have no contact with these veterans. No official would be allowed to talk to them or to receive them at the White House, the Pentagon or the State Department. They had even refused to grant permission to five "Gold Star Mothers" to enter Arlington National Cemetery to lay two wreaths at gravesites for Asian and American soldiers. The next morning, seeing the negative play in the media, they changed their minds and allowed a few of the "Mothers" to enter. The administration also withheld permission for the veterans to camp on the Washington Mall, but three remarkable things then happened: the courts imposed a ban on Mall camping, the veterans simply ignored it and the Washington police did nothing to enforce it.

Before both Nixon and Haldeman were reports of media coverage of Kerry and

the veterans, which was extensive and for the most part favorable. According to the official audiotape of their conversation, both were impressed by Kerry's performance, and both realized that it only made their job harder. They were still responsible for prosecuting a war and for running a country that was quickly losing confidence in their leadership.

Nixon: "Apparently, this fellow, uh, that they put in the front row, is, that you say, the front, according to [White House aide Patrick] Buchanan . . . 'the real star was Kerry.'"

Haldeman: "He is, he did a hell of a job."

Nixon: "He said he was very effective."

Haldeman: "I think he did a superb job at the Foreign Relations Committee yesterday. . . . A Kennedy type—he looks like a, looks like a Kennedy and talks exactly like a Kennedy."

Kerry had hit the White House with the force of an unwelcome guest. He demanded an end to the war. Impossible, for Nixon. He demanded access to an administration official. Denied. He demanded a total change in policy. No way. "Disgraceful!" Kerry later told reporters. "We had men here with no legs, men with no arms, men who got nine Purple Hearts, and they ignored that simply because of the politics." Ironically, Kerry had impressed Nixon so much that the president decided to take even stronger action against the demonstrating veterans.

David Thorne, once Kerry's brother-in-law and now a close friend and adviser, told me that "the White House was sending out guys to start fights and to try anything they could do to discredit vets on the Mall. . . . We heard that Nixon was nuts about this. He was doing things in the dirty tricks department." Brinkley said that the administration created a "get John Kerry campaign." The exact words of a memo from White House special counsel Chuck Colson were: "I think we have Kerry on the run . . . but let's not let up, let's destroy this young demagogue before he becomes another Ralph Nader.'" Columnist Joe Klein, who covered Kerry at the time, reported: "They were investigating John Kerry up and down and Colson said to me, 'We couldn't find anything. There wasn't anything we could find.'" Colson concocted the crazy idea of finding another John Kerry to destroy the real John Kerry. "We found this guy John O'Neill to run a group that would counter the Vietnam Veterans Against the War." O'Neill was also a Swift Boat veteran, but he believed in the war and hated Kerry. They called the new group "The Vietnam Veterans for a Just Peace." Just as O'Neill was central to derailing Kerry's 2004 run for the presidency, so too was he central to Nixon's effort to undermine Kerry in 1971. O'Neill met with administration leaders, including the president. "Give it to him," Nixon urged. "Give it to him. And you can do it because you have a—a pleasant manner. And I think it's a great service to the country." Colson helped O'Neill organize media interviews around the country.

More White House audiotape shows Colson trying to buck up Nixon's sagging spirit:

Colson: "And this boy O'Neill, who is, God, you'd just be proud of him. These young fellows, we've had some luck getting them placed."

Nixon: "Have you?"

Colson: "Yes, sir."

Nixon: "Good."

Colson: "And they'll be on. We'll start seeing more of them. They would give you the greatest lift."

The White House was obviously concerned that Kerry was becoming too much of a television star, spreading his antiwar message from one program to another. The White House was also

concerned that the VVAW was generating too much sympathy and support. The war was still in progress, yet here were veterans demonstrating against it. They had come from all over the country, many in khaki, bearded, wearing headbands and sporting antiwar slogans on their T-shirts. Several were on crutches, a few in wheelchairs. On occasion, because there was no violence, they looked like respectable hippies promoting an antiwar message, some armed with nothing more lethal than a guitar. They marched through Washington, past the Lincoln Memorial, past the State Department, past the White House. Once, according to CBS correspondent Bruce Morton, who covered the week-long demonstration, "They passed some smiling members of the Daughters of the American

Revolution, and a woman said: 'This will be bad for the troops' morale,' and someone answered, 'These are the troops.'" A national poll at the time revealed that one in three Americans approved of the VVAW's demonstration, hardly an overwhelming number, but still encouraging to the VVAW's leadership, including Kerry, who knew they had started from nowhere and now found themselves at 32 percent. Not bad for one week's work. Forty-two percent disapproved. With the nation at war, the White House had expected a higher level of disapproval.

On Friday, April 23, the last day of the Washington demonstration, a hundred or so veterans threw their medals over a hastily built fence near the Capitol in a show of anger and disgust. Kerry threw ribbons, not medals. One veteran, making no distinction, said: "I got a Silver Star, a Purple Heart . . . eight air medals, and the rest of this garbage. It doesn't mean a thing."

If it didn't "mean a thing" to this veteran, it did to many White House supporters, who, fearing their popular support dwindling, quickly denounced this display of anger as disrespectful to both the country and to the troops still fighting in Vietnam. Senate Minority Leader Hugh Scott, a Pennsylvania Republican, dismissively described these veterans as only "a minority of one-tenth of one percent of our veterans. I'm probably doing more to get us out of the war than these marchers." Commander Herbert B. Rainwater of the Veterans of Foreign Wars chimed in with a double put-down: the antiwar veterans were too small a group to generate so much news, and besides they were not representative of the average veteran. Conservative columnist William F. Buckley Jr. trashed Kerry as "an ignorant young man," who had crystallized "an assault upon America which has been fostered over the years by an intellectual class given over to self-doubt and self-

From 1972, when he ran unsuccessfully for Congress, until 2004, when he ran unsuccessfully for president of the United States, Kerry's world was intimately entangled with Vietnam.

hatred, driven by a cultural disgust with the uses to which so many people put their freedom."

Nixon appreciated these measured expressions of support. With the war on the front burner of popular concern, sparking one Washington demonstration after another (one day after the VVAW's protests, known as Dewey Canyon III, ended, a huge peace march arrived in the nation's capital), Nixon yearned for good news, for the joys of a long weekend at Key Biscayne, but could find little in those days that could be defined as good. And Dewey Canyon III reminded him of a recurring nightmare that, though he tried, he could not escape. He worried that some Vietnam veterans might be returning not as the "monster" Kerry described, but as drug addicts. In his splendid biography of Nixon, journalist Richard Reeves wrote that the president's worry was political. Reeves explained:

> What worried him most was the effect on Middle American support for the war if clean-cut young men were coming back to their mothers and their hometowns as junkies. Suddenly drug use was a national security crisis. "This is our problem," wrote Nixon on a news summary report of a *Washington Post* story that quoted the mayor of Galesburg, Illinois, saying that almost everyone in that conservative town wanted their sons out of Vietnam.

NBC News reported that half of a contingent of 120 soldiers returning to Boston had drug problems. The *San Francisco Chronicle* reported that each day 250 soldiers were returning with duffel bags full of drugs—as Reeves put it, "for their own use or to sell when they got back home."

"As Common as Chewing Gum" was the way *Time* headlined a story about drug use by the troops. A GOP congressman, Robert W. Steele of Connecticut, told the White House that, based on his recent visit to Vietnam, he estimated that as many as forty thousand troops were already addicts. In some units, he said, one in four soldiers was a drug user. By May 16, the problem worsened, and the *New York Times* headlined its story "G.I. Heroin Addiction Epidemic in Vietnam."

On the Washington Mall, however, it was not drugs that disturbed Nixon; it was the immediate problem of the antiwar message that Kerry and the veterans were pushing. Day after day, they dominated the evening newscasts and the morning headlines, and Congress—ever sensitive to media swings—felt emboldened to press forward with legislation to end America's involvement in Vietnam. It would take another two years for Congress to achieve that goal, and another four years for the United States finally to leave Vietnam, its tail between its legs. But Kerry felt that the continuing VVAW effort was paying big dividends. During the Detroit conference, which he attended, and during Dewey Canyon III, which he helped lead, Kerry felt that the whole country was moving toward a historic decision to end the war. Since that was his goal, he was pleased. But he was soon to learn, as was the entire nation, that ending a war in defeat, or what was widely perceived to be a defeat, would prove to have a profoundly disruptive effect on a proud people who had never

before experienced the trauma of losing a war. The French had lost wars, as had the Russians, Germans and Japanese, but never the Americans, not until they bumped into Vietnam.

When Kerry returned to Boston a few days later, after the Washington demonstrations, he was in high spirits. His testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and his frequent appearances on television news and interview programs had propelled him into the national limelight and rekindled his political ambitions, which were never far from the surface in any event. He embarked on a nonstop speaking tour from one end of the country to the other, sparked by frequent TV debates with John O'Neill. One, on the Dick Cavett Show, attracted particular attention. O'Neill was strident, Kerry scholarly, clearly more adept at using television to fashion an image and project a message. "We knew that when he left the set," Cavett recalled the occasion years later, "it wasn't the last we were going to hear from him." Kerry kept popping up on one program after another, selling himself as much as his antiwar theme. In a typical week, which happened to be the first week of October, Kerry spoke in Washington, DC, Kansas, Colorado, Nevada, California, Illinois and Massachusetts.

Throughout his whirlwind speaking tour, though, Kerry had one lingering problem, to which he returned time and again. He worried that the VVAW leadership was swinging too far leftward. If it continued to talk and act radical, it would lose the American people. Once during Dewey Canyon III he spotted a placard calling for "revolution." Often he found himself arguing with other demonstration leaders about tactics. A few advocated violence; one even wanted to assassinate prowar senators rather than simply throw medals over a fence. Kerry, according to Randy Barnes, another key player, "constantly gave an impassioned plea to be nonviolent, work within the system."

This problem came to a head at two VVAW meetings—in St. Louis in June and in Kansas City in November. Kerry attended the St. Louis meeting, and he may have attended the Kansas City meeting, too. (Some veterans remember him being there, while others swear he wasn't.) What is indisputable is that Kerry left the St. Louis meeting, which was marked by hot arguments about the future direction of the VVAW, convinced that he had failed to persuade the leadership of this antiwar movement of veterans to stay "nonviolent" and to "work within the system." A number of radical veterans wanted to initiate what the FBI later termed a "vastly more militant posture." Kerry believed that there was a clear line separating antiwar sentiment from anti-American actions—these veterans, he thought, were moving dangerously close to that line. Kerry decided to resign from the executive committee of the VVAW, citing "personality conflicts and differences in political philosophy."

From 1972, when he ran unsuccessfully for Congress, until 2004, when he ran unsuccessfully for president of the United States, Kerry's world was intimately entangled with Vietnam. The seat for the Fifth Congressional District of Massachusetts opened when Republican F. Bradford Morse accepted the post of undersecretary-general of the United Nations. Morse promoted Paul Cronin, his legislative assistant, as the Republican candidate, and Kerry, sensing a superb opportunity to capitalize on his antiwar popularity, leaped into the fight as the Democratic candidate. Independent Roger Durkin, an investment banker, also entered the race. He ran ads sharply critical of Kerry's liberal, antiwar positions, saying it was "important to defeat the dangerous radicalism that

John Kerry represents." He went further, actually questioning Kerry's patriotism. Cronin watched from the sidelines, but the *Sun*, an archly conservative newspaper in Lowell, got behind Durkin's attacks. An editorial blasted *The New Soldier*, a book Kerry had written about Dewey Canyon III. The book's cover showed six veterans, bearded, with mustachios and headbands, looking like Castro warriors, holding up an American flag. The editorial, noting that the flag was being "carried upside down in a gesture of contempt," angrily stated: "These people sit on the flag, they burn the flag . . . they all but wipe their noses with it." Kerry tried to explain that an upside-down flag was a distress signal in international communications, not a sign of disrespect or contempt, but his explanation fell on deaf ears. Variations on this editorial ran in the *Sun* almost every day. Kerry fumed: "They were trying to paint a picture of me as some wild-assed, irresponsible, un-American youth. It was infuriating." Kerry was to read similar editorials many more times over the years.

Then came the surprise that turned the election from a likely Kerry victory to a disheartening defeat. At the last minute, Durkin withdrew, throwing his support to Cronin, who gratefully accepted it. Kerry had been leading in the polls, but Durkin's last-minute switch upset all political calculations. Cronin won; Kerry lost. The *Boston Globe* reported the next morning that Nixon, when told that Kerry had been beaten, slept like a baby.

In 2004, it was not Durkin the man who resurfaced to defeat Kerry—it was his message, transmitted through the media by a well-financed veterans group called "The Swift Boat Veterans for Truth," that undercut Kerry and destroyed his presidential prospects. The group was led by none other than John O'Neill. His hard-edged message, never wavering, echoed through time: Kerry was unpatriotic, he betrayed the nation and the veterans, he collaborated with the enemy and he was a traitor. And why? Because he used the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in April 1971 as a platform for criticizing American policy in Vietnam and, worse, for trashing the American warrior there as a brutal rapist who cut off ears and heads, shot at civilians, razed villages, and

shot cattle and dogs for fun—all "in fashion reminiscent of Genghis Khan." O'Neill and company had not forgotten Kerry's testimony in room 4221.

From Nixon to Bush, conservatives used this line of attack against Kerry's sharp critique of the Vietnam War, often questioning his patriotism and loyalty. Initially, Kerry and his friends considered it a sick joke. David Thorne recalled: "We both laughed at the fact that the President of the United States was after John." Government agents shadowed

Kerry at rallies and speeches. "It was just unbelievable," Thorne told me. "He was as patriotic a guy as Yale University and the U.S. Navy ever produced. . . . I had come from a Republican family. Patriotism was in my veins. So we just thought because the war should end didn't mean we deserved to have our basic rights infringed upon." After a while, the joke was not funny. Kerry had raised a profound question—"How do you ask a man to be the last man to die for a mistake?" If the Vietnam War was a mistake, as Kerry believed, then there was no point in wasting additional lives. Let the "last man" really be the last man to die for a mistake. Nixon as president could not answer the question without either denying that the war was a mistake or admitting that it was. Denying meant, in effect, a continuation of the war; admitting meant an end to the war. He chose to do neither. Like an old political fighter, Nixon was content to engage, defeat and destroy Kerry, and he pulled no punches in this determined effort. Dissent was translated as opposition not only to his policy but to the nation and its destiny. Nixon was convinced he was right.

Kerry approached the argument from a different perspective. He believed his dissent on Vietnam was borne of his bloody experience there—it was not an academic exercise. He also believed that his dissent was in a noble American tradition. As Paul Revere and John Adams had objected to the king's rule, so Kerry was objecting to the president's policy. It was a moral obligation of the patriot to help his country face and correct a terrible mistake. His criticism was not intended to offend his countrymen but rather to help them emerge from the darkness of this blunder in Southeast Asia into the bright light of a better policy, consistent with the noble principles of American freedom.

What we saw emerging in the troubled year of 1971 was a new set of battle lines around two old issues—a definition of patriotism that fit the times and the changing value of military service as an asset for presidential leadership. On patriotism, dueling definitions were angrily debated without resolution but with a deepening bitterness that reflected the divide in the nation's politics. On the value of military service, the pain of Vietnam shattered the old, comfortable conviction that service in uniform, under fire in the nation's defense, strongly enhanced a candidate's image of presidential authority and leadership. □

Japan's Daunting Challenge

By Daniel Sneider

The return to power of Japan's conservatives has once again spurred hope that the country can restore its role as an economic powerhouse and the northern anchor of a rebalanced American presence in East Asia. A revitalized Japan could act as a weighty counter to China's apparent determination to assert itself as the new regional hegemon. The newly installed government, under the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) banner, offers prospects for more stable and competent governance after years of turbulence and lack of leadership.

But there are grounds also for a high degree of caution, not only about the advent of stable leadership but also about where Japan is headed. The new government of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe embraces contradictory national impulses. In the realm of economics, Abe's cabinet includes supporters of a return to old-style pork-barrel spending and export-led growth policies. But it also includes reformers who favor deregulation and open markets to force Japan to compete more efficiently in the global economy. In foreign policy, the cabinet encompasses pragmatic realists who want to expand Japan's security role in close coordination with the United States as well as revisionist nationalists who hanker for a face-off with China and express provocatively unrepentant views about Japan's wartime record.

It is unclear how Abe will resolve these conflicting pulls, especially under the pressure of forthcoming upper-house elections. It isn't even clear just where he personally stands on such matters.

Americans may dream of a pragmatically conservative Japan that restores its economic health through freer trade and offers a reliable security partner for a policy of engaging China while constraining its aggressive expansionism in East Asia. But they could get a nightmare instead—a fortress Japan, isolated within Asia by its nationalism, protecting an economy beset by public debt and an aging populace.

The choices facing Japan today must be set against the backdrop of two decades of stagnation and often-faltering reform efforts. The Japan of the late 1980s, its system praised in business-management books and its arrival as the new global superpower trumpeted on the cover of weekly newsmagazines, seems like a distant memory. The early 1990s punctured the confidence, even arrogance, that had swelled the heads of Japanese policy makers. The state-directed and export-led economy ground to a halt amid the wreckage of the asset bubbles created by the 1985 revaluation of the yen. Persistent stagnation also upended a political system of single-

Daniel Sneider is the associate director for research at the Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Research Center at Stanford University. A former foreign correspondent, he is the author of a study of Japan's foreign policy under the Democratic Party of Japan and codirects a project on the formation of wartime memory in Asia.

party rule and bureaucrat-led governance. The crisis occurred in tandem with the end of the Cold War, which called into question postwar Japan's foreign-policy anchor, its security alliance with the United States.

In 1993, Japan entered a period of political change, beginning with the emergence of its first, short-lived non-LDP government. Less than a year later, the LDP returned to power, first in coalition with the Socialist Party and then with the Buddhist New Komei Party. Then, in the late 1990s, the opposition coalesced into the newly formed, center-left Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ). This represented a serious challenge to the LDP, although its decline was obscured by the unusual, five-year rule (2001–2006) of the personally popular Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, based on a policy of economic reform coupled with an assault on his own party's axis with bureaucrats and agricultural-industry lobbies.

The LDP returned to its old ways, however, under a trio of short-lived premiers, starting with Koizumi's chosen successor, Abe. Ironically, Abe brought back into the party those who had been ousted for opposing Koizumi's pet project, the breakup and privatization of Japan's public-banking and insurance oligopoly run under the aegis of the postal system. With the LDP disavowing Koizumi's reformism, the door was opened for the DPJ, whose 2009 victory was hailed as the birth of a new era of two-party politics in Japan.

The DPJ came to power with an ambitious reform agenda. It advocated breaking up mandarin rule—"people not concrete"—in the allocation of government funds, pursuing global competition and looking for sources of growth in new industries. After the massive earthquake and tsunami of March 11, 2011, the DPJ government also embraced an anti-nuclear-power agenda and assailed the "nuclear village"—the cozy ties among bureaucrats, construction firms and regional power monopolies that the LDP had fostered. But the party's inconsistency and incompetence led to its ignominious defeat in the December 2012 elections, with little of its agenda accomplished.

The greatest legacy of the DPJ's three-year rule was the reemergence of a long-standing debate about Japan's foreign policy. Its intellectual roots go back to the prewar period, but it continued in subdued form during the long LDP rule and intensified with the end of the Cold War. During much of the postwar period, Japanese foreign policy was a contest between pro-American, anti-Communist conservatives and the Japanese Left, led by the Socialist Party, which rejected the U.S.-Japanese security treaty and called for a pacifist vision of "unarmed neutrality." The doctrine of Japan's pro-American and pro-British postwar leader Shigeru Yoshida

became the consensus: Japan would focus on economic reconstruction by relying on the United States for its defense—and pay for it by giving America access to its soil for strategic bases.

The Yoshida Doctrine retains an iconic status in Japan. But below the surface, many Japanese of all political stripes were never comfortable with a strategy of reflexive dependence on the United States. On one side, Yoshida faced stiff opposition from nationalist conservatives who accepted the necessity of the alliance in the name of anti-Communism but fundamentally rejected the postwar settlement enforced by the American occupation. From the first days following the 1952 restoration of Japanese sovereignty, these nationalists sought to roll back the keystones of that American legacy: the American-authored revision of the Japanese constitution, particularly Article 9, which renounced war as an instrument of national policy; the judgments of Japanese war criminality imposed by the Tokyo war-crimes tribunal; and the educational reforms imposed by the occupation and enforced by the left-wing teachers union. Many of these nationalists had served in the wartime regime and were allowed to return to politics only by America's Cold War decision to rally anti-Communist forces in Japan against the Left; prominent among those anti-Yoshida conservatives was Nobusuke Kishi, who served as prime minister from 1957–1960 and is beloved by Abe, his grandson.

These divisions have their roots in a historic Japanese debate about identity that goes back well before World War II. One camp represents what can be broadly called Asianism, a belief that Japan's identity and strategic interests lie in Asia. Conversely, others have argued that Japan, as an offshore maritime nation ready to adapt Western technology and ideas, should ally with the Western powers. Faced with the threat of Western imperialism, and noting disdainfully the failure of China and Korea to reform themselves to meet that threat, Yukichi Fukuzawa, the intellectual leader of Japan's nineteenth-century Meiji transformation into a modern state, famously argued in 1885: "We do not have time to wait for the enlightenment of our neighbors so that we can work together toward the development of Asia. It is better for us to leave the ranks of Asian nations and cast our lot with civilized nations of the West."

Japan's Asianists were themselves divided. The "greater Asianism" camp advocated imperial advance on the Asian mainland, with Japan as the self-proclaimed liberator and protector of Asia from Western colonialism. Its victory over pro-Western liberals led to the tragedy of World War II in Asia. But there was also a small camp of anti-imperial Asianists led by the prewar journalist Tanzan Ishibashi, who opposed territorial expansion while expressing sympathy for the Asian nationalism of Sun Yat-sen and others. Those debates continued among conservatives, though now reflecting postwar realities, throughout the latter decades of the U.S. partnership.

Meanwhile, the end of the Cold War cast the Japanese adrift. Most people in the country finally accepted the legitimacy and necessity of the U.S.-Japanese security treaty and a limited role for Japan's military. In doing so, they also reinvigorated the debate among conservatives about the need for Japan to act more forcefully—and for some more independently—in its foreign and security role. Some conservatives began questioning the need to maintain Cold War levels of U.S. troop deployments, not only in Japan but also in Europe. That debate intensified after several American servicemen raped a Japanese preteen in Okinawa in 1995.

The DPJ founders represented both liberal and conservative advocates of greater self-

reliance, a kind of Japanese Gaullism. Some talked of an "alliance without bases," in which Japanese forces would be responsible for self-defense and U.S. forces would use bases and storage facilities in emergencies such as a conflict on the Korean Peninsula. Despite the Taiwan Strait crisis of 1995–1996, in which the People's Republic of China fired a series of test missiles into the Taiwan Strait as a warning to Taiwan about pursuing an overt two-China policy, the DPJ founders optimistically hoped that the region was headed toward resolving the legacy of the Cold War, both in Korea and with China. A key part of this "new Asianism," as I have termed it elsewhere, was the advocacy of East Asian regionalism and the creation of an East Asian community based on the model of the European Union.

The most profound difference between Japan's major parties was the DPJ's readiness to address Japan's history in Asia, whereas the LDP's ranks included many outright defenders of Japan's colonial and wartime expansionism of the 1930s and 1940s. The DPJ led the rebuke of former air force chief of staff Toshio Tamogami for publishing an essay defending Japan's wartime aggression, including the attack on Pearl Harbor. After Koizumi paid homage to Japan's war dead at the Shinto Yasukuni shrine, the DPJ called for easing tensions with China and Korea by creating a secular national cemetery and removing the names of Japanese war criminals from the list of enshrined souls at Yasukuni.

Such disagreements about how to treat the past actually represented a debate over Japan's future direction. But mainstream Japanese policy remained anchored in the Yoshida Doctrine. Partly in response to American encouragement, Japan tried to become a Great Britain of Asia, an offshore balancer whose naval and other forces could more actively supplement American power. Following severe criticism of Japan's decision not to extend military support to the UN coalition against Iraq in the first Gulf War, Japanese leaders incrementally removed some long-standing postwar barriers to the use of Japanese force beyond the constitutionally circumscribed mission of self-defense. Beginning with the 1992 dispatch of Japanese peacekeeping forces to Cambodia, Japan's military has been used in limited missions overseas—a flotilla sent to the Indian Ocean to refuel international naval operations off Afghanistan; a small contingent to Iraq; and antipiracy operations in the Gulf of Aden. In all cases, the ban on collective self-defense did not allow Japanese forces to come to the aid of U.S. forces beyond the narrow defense of Japanese home territory, though they could serve abroad in logistical and peacekeeping roles. But the LDP is determined to reinterpret the constitution, as suggested by an advisory panel organized under Abe's first premiership, to allow for the right to collective self-defense.

This "mission creep" outlook acquired significant momentum from the growing perception that China represented a gathering threat. This was compounded by North Korea's nuclear program and missile tests beginning in 1998. Japan's official support for the Iraq War was motivated more by a desire to cement American backing than by any particular enthusiasm for the war itself. That was particularly the case from 2002–2005, when Sino-Japanese relations took a nosedive.

Many Japanese political and opinion leaders, including prominent conservatives, began to question this policy and the singular reliance on the U.S. alliance. During the George W. Bush years, Japanese policy makers increasingly feared that they would cede Asian leadership to China by overemphasizing the bilateral security relationship with the United States. While Washington focused on the Middle East

Below the surface, many Japanese of all political stripes were never comfortable with a strategy of reflexive dependence on the United States.

and Southwest Asia after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, China moved with diplomatic skill to assert itself in the region. It improved ties with South Korea and Southeast Asian nations, reached free-trade agreements and reaped the benefits of its emergence as East Asia's driver of economic growth.

Anti-Japanese riots in China in 2005 reflected the deterioration in Sino-Japanese relations. Japanese leaders worried that the Sino-Japanese rivalry could lead to serious conflict, including clashes over oil and gas rights in the East China Sea and over the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu islands. The prospect alarmed the business community, with its deep investments in China and growing dependence on trade with China. American officials also worried that these tensions might threaten regional stability.

In the fevered anti-Chinese rhetoric of the nationalist Right, China supplanted the Soviet Union in a renewed Cold War–style containment strategy that anticipated an expanded Japanese security role in South and Southeast Asia and closer ties to India, Indonesia, Vietnam and Australia. This policy overlapped in part with the more classical Yoshida Doctrine role. But it is crucially different in its willingness to confront China and embrace a revisionist historical worldview that pits Japan against China and also South Korea, for whom the wartime resistance to Japanese colonialism remains an essential source of identity and a neuralgic issue in domestic politics.

Yet despite the rhetoric, an open containment strategy focused on China isn't really feasible given the two countries' economic interdependence. Indeed, some Japanese policy makers increasingly began to worry that the United States would abandon them in favor of China, a fear that grew in the last two years of the Bush administration. Japan did not want to be the anchor of an American hedging strategy toward China, only to be left in the lurch. Some Japanese officials feared a reprise of the "Nixon shock," when Henry Kissinger made a surprise visit to Beijing just as Washington was warning Tokyo against normalizing relations with China. Japanese policy makers opted to hedge against both American abandonment and the rise of China, maintaining the security alliance while drawing China into regional and global economic and security structures.

Japan's growing economic interdependence with China was manifest in Abe's surprising visit to South Korea and China, his first overseas trip after taking office in 2006. Abe not only moved rapidly to improve diplomatic relations but also softened talk about historical revisionism and constitutional change. He even created a joint Sino-Japanese commission to discuss historical issues. Relations with South Korea benefited from Pyongyang's alarming nuclear test in October 2006 and Abe's willingness to put historical issues aside.

The succeeding DPJ governments under Yukio Hatoyama, Naoto Kan and Yoshihiko Noda largely followed in these footsteps, although with a greater readiness to deal with wartime issues. Kan issued a new statement of apology on the one hundredth anniversary of Japan's annexation of Korea, returned seized Korean artifacts and made

other gestures intended to cement closer cooperation. Japan also actively courted India, Vietnam and others in East Asia, establishing military-to-military contacts, holding joint exercises and discussing security coordination.

The DPJ harbored a more benign view of the Chinese "threat" and believed, perhaps naively, that Japan's more forthright approach to wartime historical issues would change the dynamic of the relationship. "There are issues between Japan and China that need to be resolved through frank discussion: the historical issue and the territorial issue," then DPJ leader Ichiro Ozawa told me in 2009.

Such talk fed an American perception that Japan under the DPJ was veering into a "pro-China" tilt, ready to couple the security alliance with a strategic partnership with China. The wrangle over Okinawa bases, combined with Hatoyama's gauzy vision of an East Asian community based on "fraternity," cemented that view. In reality, that vision flowed from a long-standing Japanese interest in East Asian regional integration, going back at least to the 1970s, when Japanese and Australian academics first promoted the concept. During the boom days of Japan's economy, Japanese talked confidently about the formation of an Asian "yen zone" led by Japan. While Japanese confidence has dimmed amid its own economic stagnation and China's rise, these ideas retain resonance.

Even in the past decade, LDP leaders have promoted this goal. In a 2002 address in Singapore, Koizumi envisioned a community formed by the ten members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, together with Japan, China, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand—what later became the East Asian Summit with the addition of India. Six years later, Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda inaugurated an annual triangular summit with China and South Korea.

American officials have viewed any form of Asian regionalism excluding Washington as a threat to create closed systems. DPJ administrations thus embraced an American-led trade grouping, the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), as a means of assuaging American concerns while responding to Chinese assertiveness. But due largely to opposition from within its own ranks and from powerful domestic interests, the DPJ was unable to fully join the ongoing multilateral negotiations on the pact.

These Asianist hopes foundered on American opposition and China's assertive defense of territorial claims in the South and East China Seas. China's backing of Pyongyang after its military attacks on South Korea beginning in the spring of 2010 also alarmed Japanese leaders. For Japan, the turning point was China's response to the 2010 arrest of a Chinese fishing-boat captain who had rammed Japanese Coast Guard vessels in the waters around the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands. Chinese leaders took the arrest as an unprecedented assertion of Japan's territorial claim; past Japanese governments had

carefully expelled Chinese activists and fishermen who trespassed. DPJ leaders, who expected the matter would be settled quickly, were stunned by the escalatory behavior that followed, including boycotts of Japanese goods, demonstrations and other forms of economic pressure.

Suddenly, talk of moving beyond the confines of the U.S.-Japanese security alliance subsided. "Problems that arise between Japan and the United States can, in the end, be resolved within the framework of the alliance," wrote former *Asahi Shimbun* editor Yoichi Funabashi, an important voice in DPJ foreign-policy circles. "The alliance is the ballast. However, that cannot be said of the Japan-China relationship." The 2010 national-defense policy, prepared under the DPJ, warned of the Chinese military buildup and proposed beefing up the defenses of southwestern Japan, the area of territorial tensions with China.

Still, important voices in the DPJ argued against a retreat from the Asianist vision. "What is more important than anything is that government officials in charge should be careful not to arouse narrow-minded, extreme nationalism in Japan, China and other countries," Yoshito Sengoku, chief cabinet secretary at the time, told reporters following the fishing-boat incident. He stressed the importance of good ties between Asia's two biggest economies: "We want to use all possible channels not to escalate the issue and to solve it for the sake of development in East Asia and the Asia-Pacific region."

But attitudes toward China hardened within the DPJ, mirroring the broader society, and Noda captured this growing sentiment even before taking office. While acknowledging China's market role and economic significance in Asia, he pointed to the country's military buildup and "high-handed" posture in the South China Sea. Upon taking office, Noda sidelined any talk of an East Asian community, expressing undiminished allegiance to the U.S. security alliance and pushing a tough response to Chinese actions.

Not surprisingly, relations between the two countries deteriorated during Noda's premiership. Tensions over the disputed islands flared ominously following Noda's 2012 decision to nationalize several of the privately owned islets. The Japanese government portrayed this as a step to ease conflict by preempting a bid from the nationalist governor of Tokyo to buy the islands and put facilities on them. But the action triggered an orchestrated wave of anti-Japanese demonstrations in China and terse diplomatic exchanges.

The simultaneous rise of tensions with South Korea disturbed American policy makers who were pushing for closer security ties between Seoul and Tokyo as a key element of America's "rebalancing" in East Asia. But wartime history once again interfered with strategic logic. Pushed by a high-court ruling, the South Korean government had sought quietly to get Japan to compensate Korean women—the so-called comfort women—coerced into providing sexual services to the Imperial Japanese Army. But this diplomatic effort fell apart at a December 2011 summit meeting between South Korean president Lee Myung-bak and Noda. In May 2012, a delegation of LDP Diet members, with the support of the Japanese foreign ministry, visited a small New Jersey town in a crude attempt to pressure local officials to remove a monument to the comfort women erected at the behest of the local Korean American community. Lee, pressured to respond and angered by what he saw as Noda's personal snub, made a provocative visit in August to Korean-held islets that are claimed by Japan and postponed the signing of a minor bilateral agreement to share security intelligence.

Most Japanese and many Americans placed the onus for this flare-up on the Koreans, seen as overly emotional and too fixated on the past. But it's important to note that Noda's stance on wartime issues was closer to the LDP's conservative nationalists than to his own party. The son of an army officer, Noda held a conviction that the Class A Japanese war criminals convicted by the Allies in the Tokyo war-crimes tribunals should not be considered criminals under Japanese law and hence their enshrinement in Yasukuni was acceptable. He also argued that there was no clear proof that Korean women had been subject to official coercion.

The rise in tensions between Japan and its two Northeast Asian neighbors rang alarm bells in Washington. American policy makers were happy to see the DPJ discard its Asianist dreams in favor of a more conventional Yoshida Doctrine realism. But the twinning of that realism with the darker overtones of conservative nationalism created the specter of unwanted and potentially destabilizing conflict.

American officials quickly expressed chagrin when Abe reiterated his long-held revisionist agenda to roll back the 1993 Kono statement of apology to comfort women and the statement by Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama on the fiftieth anniversary of the war apologizing for Japan's colonial rule and acknowledging Japan as the war's "aggressor." Obama administration officials also used the emergence of new governments in Seoul and Tokyo to push for repairing fences and resuming security-coordination talks.

Early evidence suggests that Abe and his colleagues got the message. Envoys were dispatched to China and South Korea, and the historical revisionism has been pushed to the background, at least until after this summer's upper-house vote. But Abe signaled toughness toward Beijing by dispatching air and naval forces to respond to Chinese deployments in the East China Sea and visiting Southeast Asian nations eager to have Japanese backing in their territorial disputes with China. Still, the pragmatism that prevailed early in Abe's first premiership is visible once again. The Japanese leader emphasizes the primacy of the security alliance, something he will no doubt display during a planned visit to Washington. He can't afford signs of distance between Tokyo and Washington over crisis management in the region.

Another impetus for restraint by Abe may be the coming upper-house elections in July. The prime minister is firmly mindful of 2007, when the LDP lost control of parliament's upper house after running on an unpopular platform of constitutional revision and educational reform designed to infuse patriotism. The DPJ, under Ozawa's leadership, made huge inroads into the LDP's rural base by promising to protect retirement pensions and preserve household income. That defeat led to Abe's resignation after just a year in office and to the DPJ's triumph two years later.

Abe, seemingly determined to avoid that mistake, has focused on the economy this time. He is eyeing quick returns from a large public-works stimulus program and an effort to drive down the value of the yen through monetary easing. The LDP knows that while it gained a clear majority in the lower house last December, this was attributable mainly to popular dissatisfaction with the DPJ and a splintered vote shared among an array of new parties.

Hopes for stable governance in Japan may rest on the ability of Abe and the LDP to concentrate on economics and downplay the nationalist agenda. But the cabinet reflects an uneasy balance between pro-Western liberals and more radical nationalists. In education policy, for example, the party's election manifesto

called for reform of the textbook-screening process to promote greater "pride in Japanese traditions and cultures," language associated with right-wing critiques of textbooks' antiwar themes. The manifesto advocated removal of the requirement that textbooks focus on Japan's relations with its neighbors, which was imposed in 1982 after a controversial attempt to rewrite textbooks to remove references to Japan's wartime "aggression."

The manifesto was drafted at the direction of the new education minister, Hakubun Shimomura, who has declared that the years since World War II "have been a history of Japan's destruction. Now is our only chance to remake the country." That agenda, he explained, would begin with reducing the requirement for a two-thirds vote of parliament to put constitutional amendments up for a popular vote, opening the door to easier changes in the constitution.

Even if he keeps his government's focus on the economy, Abe's policy prescriptions could pose problems. The LDP's ranks are filled with opponents of open markets who favor a return to Japan's old formula of export-led growth and protection of traditional industries. Many of those industries, such as agriculture, construction, medical associations, and the postal-savings and insurance lobbies, oppose the TPP trade agreement for fear that it will expose them to foreign competition. Some 160 LDP Diet members, more than half the total lower-house delegation, were elected with the endorsement of the agricultural cooperatives association on a platform of opposing the TPP. Support for the TPP in the LDP rests more on its anti-China intent and to appease Americans than on its implications for the economy. Even if Abe seeks to join the TPP after an upper-house victory, which seems possible, the government will be pressed to oppose measures that would truly push the Japanese economy in a more reformist, deregulated direction.

Further, a policy of driving down the value of the yen to help ailing Japanese automobile and electronic firms is likely to trigger competitive devaluations by South Korea and China. Increased competition with Korean firms, already moving to take advantage of Japanese woes in China, could push Korea closer to China.

In Washington, the focus of policy makers on narrow security matters often obscures these important economic realities. The Japanese decision to raise defense spending for the first time in a dozen years and to expand Japan's limited role in assisting the defense forces of countries such as Vietnam and the Philippines is widely praised, for example. But given Japan's own "fiscal cliff"—accumulated debt is estimated to reach 245 percent of GDP this year—it is unlikely to sustain significant increases in defense spending.

More seriously, if Japan slides into a deeper confrontation with China, the impact on Japan's economy, and the global

The United States would be well served by a revitalized Japan, but not one that confuses the past with the future.

economy, could be disastrous. Few in Asia, even those sympathetic to Tokyo, are likely to follow Japan's lead in confronting China.

Japan's leadership in Asia does not rest on the dispatch of a few patrol vessels to the Philippines. But the country can offer a clear alternative to China's self-serving mercantilism and authoritarian rule. Japanese firms should assert their role once again as innovators able to generate breakthrough technologies. That kind of Japan emerged out of the collapse of World War II. Such forces still exist within the country—a new Japan of younger entrepreneurs and innovative firms working in cutting-edge industries and service sectors—but they are unlikely to gain their rightful role in a Japan obsessed with the past.

The United States would be well served by a revitalized Japan, but not one that confuses the past with the future. There are clear limits to what Americans can do about the thorny issues of wartime history, especially given the U.S. role in that war. And China's leaders certainly will continue to use historical issues cynically for their own political purposes, at home and abroad. But American policy makers need to strengthen the hand of Japan's pro-Western forces in their contest with revisionist nationalists by making clear U.S. intolerance for a rollback of the postwar regime that America constructed.

Ultimately, much hinges on whether the promise of political reforms begun two decades ago will be realized. An innovative and growing Japan must rest on the foundation of a truly competitive political system in which the interests and voices of a globalized Japan, not just those seeking protection from competition, are represented. That requires a balance between the LDP and a realigned opposition incorporating the diminished DPJ and emergent forces that gained ground in this last election and tend to favor a more reformist domestic agenda.

The debate over Japan's role in Asia—and the globe—will continue as long as the challenge from China remains. The Asianists are not wrong to want to move beyond the idea of Japan as an offshore balancer, distanced from the rest of Asia. But the pursuit of Gaullist pseudoindependence is a failed strategy. Japan's best path is not to be the Britain or the France of Asia but rather, however ironic it might appear, the Germany of Asia. Like postwar Germany in Europe, Japan's leadership in Asia rests on its economic prowess, its role as the leading center of high-tech manufacturing and its willingness to play a security role beyond its borders within the framework of collective security, no longer restrained by outdated ideas of pacifism. But Japan, again like Germany, can assume that mantle of leadership only if it abandons a morally repugnant defense of its wartime criminality and settles concerns about its wartime past in a dramatic and repentant fashion.

The United States should assist Japan, as it did postwar Germany, down this path. Abe could, if he chooses, be Japan's Konrad Adenauer or even its Willy Brandt. Only time will tell whether he is willing, or able, to do so. □

Delusions of Indispensability

By Ted Galen Carpenter

One striking feature of foreign-policy discussions in the United States is the widespread assumption that this country is the "indispensable nation" in the international system. Historian James Chace and Clinton presidential aide Sidney Blumenthal apparently coined the term in 1996 to capture the essence of Bill Clinton's liberal-internationalist vision of the post–Cold War world, but it is a term that conservatives and moderates as well as liberals have used frequently since then. In his 2012 State of the Union address, Barack Obama asserted that "America remains the one indispensable nation in world affairs—and as long as I'm President, I intend to keep it that way."

Only a handful of iconoclasts in the foreign-policy community—and even fewer mavericks in the political arena—dare to challenge the conventional wisdom. That is unfortunate, because the notion of the United States as the indispensable nation is not only dubious, but it also entrenches a counterproductive security strategy. It is a blueprint for strategic overextension and, ultimately, a failed paradigm.

The term "leadership" itself is often a euphemism for those who see the United States as the indispensable nation. They usually mean America as the de facto global hegemon, and some are occasionally candid enough to use that word. Mitt Romney succinctly expressed the concept when he asserted that "America is not destined to be one of several equally balanced global powers." Discussing the U.S. role in East Asia, American Enterprise Institute scholar Daniel Blumenthal warned of dire consequences if the United States no longer played "the role of benign hegemon in Asia."

Although some pundits and policy experts suggest that U.S. leaders should encourage other "cooperative" countries to have a greater voice and play a larger role in collaborative enterprises, even such proponents of multilateralism tend to become anxious if the United States is not clearly in charge on important matters. The neoconservative faction in the U.S. policy community does not even pretend to favor genuine multilateralism. Their preferred strategy is one in which the United States either acts unilaterally—often with a tinge of contempt for the views of other countries—or acts as the undisputed leader of a coalition, as during the Iraq War.

Proponents of the indispensable-nation thesis all agree that it would be calamitous for Washington to step back from its current global role. Such a move, in their view, would damage crucial U.S. interests, as well as the overall peace and prosperity of the world. They differ among

Ted Galen Carpenter, a senior fellow at the Cato Institute and a contributing editor to *The National Interest*, is the author of nine books on international affairs, including *Smart Power: Toward a Prudent Foreign Policy for America* (Cato Institute, 2008).

themselves, though, on just what form that calamity would take.

For most, the primary danger they foresee is that chaos would ensue if the United States did not exercise robust global leadership. Writing in 2000, William Kristol, founder and editor of the *Weekly Standard,* and Robert Kagan, at the time a scholar at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, warned that the greatest danger in the twenty-first century was that the United States, "the world's dominant power on whom the maintenance of international peace and the support of liberal democratic principles depends," would "shrink its responsibilities and—in a fit of absentmindedness, or parsimony, or indifference—allow the international order that it created and sustains to collapse." Blumenthal agrees that such a terrible fate would certainly befall Asia, insisting that without U.S. hegemony, "chaos would ensue. No one would lead efforts to further build upon an economically vital region, stem proliferation, or keep great power peace."

Stuart Gottlieb, a former foreign-policy adviser to two senior Democratic senators, insists that history confirms that point on a global basis. He argues:

> Over the past century, each of America's attempts to reduce its role in the world was met by rising global threats, eventually requiring a major U.S. re-engagement. . . . In each case, hopes were soon dashed by global challengers who took advantage of America's effort to draw back from the world stage—Germany and Japan in the 1930s, the Soviet Union in the immediate post-World War II period and the Soviet Union again after Vietnam. In each case, the United States was forced back into a paramount global leadership role.

Although most proponents of continued U.S. dominance argue that global chaos would be the inescapable consequence, there is another concern, especially among hawkish conservatives. While they do fret about the possibility of planetary anarchy, their primary worry is somewhat different. Orthodox believers in America's indispensability assume that no other nation or combination of nations could fill the void Washington's retrenchment would create. But some advocates of U.S. preeminence disagree, believing that other major nations would move to fill such a leadership vacuum. And they fear that the most likely replacements are nations whose values and policies are hostile to America's interests.

When not writing pieces with the apocalyptic Kristol, Kagan hedges his bets between the two unsavory aftermaths of U.S. withdrawal:

> The present world order—characterized by an unprecedented number of democratic nations; a greater global prosperity, even with the current crisis, than the world has ever known; and a long peace among great powers—reflects American principles and preferences, and was built and preserved by American power in all its political, economic, and military dimensions. If American power declines, this world order will decline with it. It will be replaced by some other kind of order, reflecting the desires and the qualities of other world powers. Or perhaps it will simply collapse, as the European world order collapsed in the first half of the twentieth century.

Kagan's one certainty is that a world without U.S. dominance would be an unpleasant place. As he writes, "The belief, held by many, that even with diminished American power 'the underlying foundations of the liberal international order will survive and thrive,' as the political scientist G. John Ikenberry has argued, is a pleasant illusion."

Not surprisingly, most of the suspicion about potential new hegemons is directed at two major powers that are not liberal democracies: Russia and China. The jaundiced American view of Moscow has diminished, given the demise of the Soviet Union and the decline of Russian political and military clout since the end of the Cold War. But that change is more modest than one might expect. Russophobes may not hate and fear Vladimir Putin as much as they did the likes of Stalin, Khrushchev and Brezhnev, but an undercurrent of hostility remains. The shrill reactions of Bush and Obama administration officials (and many pundits) to Russia's reluctance to endorse harsher sanctions against Iran—and more recently, against Syria—is one manifestation. Staunch proponents of NATO suggest privately, and sometimes even publicly, that Moscow might again seek to dominate Eastern and Central Europe in the absence of a robust, U.S.-led NATO.

The principal suspicions, though, are directed against a rising China. Princeton University's Aaron Friedberg, one of the more sensible and moderate neoconservatives, argues that China is already determined to displace the United States as East Asia's hegemon. His latest book, *A Contest for Supremacy*, presents that thesis emphatically. Cambridge University's Stefan Halper, a former official in both the Nixon and Reagan administrations, believes that trend is not confined to Asia. In his recent book *The Beijing Consensus*, Halper contends that China is presenting itself as a rival global model (one of authoritarian capitalism) to the democratic-capitalist model (the "Washington Consensus") that the United States guards and sustains. He argues further that Beijing has made considerable inroads in recent years.

It would be a mistake, though, to assume that devotees of the indispensable-nation thesis only fear that hostile, undemocratic nations would move to fill a regional or global leadership vacuum. U.S. policy makers in both the Clinton and George W. Bush administrations were also noticeably unenthusiastic about even another democratic nation—or a combination of democratic nations—supplanting Washington's leadership role. During the 1990s, two editions of the Pentagon's policy-planning guidance document for East Asia made veiled warnings that another nation might step forward—and not in a way consistent with American interests. Given China's modest economic capabilities and military weakness at the time, the Pentagon's concerns did not seem directed primarily at that country. Both the language in those documents and the strategic context suggested that the principal worry of the Department of Defense planners was

A prominent feature of the indispensable-nation thesis is that its adherents adopt the "light-switch model" of U.S. engagement. In that version, there are only two positions: on and off.

that Japan might remilitarize and eventually eclipse U.S. power and influence in the region.

The U.S. attitude toward a greater—and especially a more independent—security role for the European Union and its leading members has not been much friendlier. Time and again, the Clinton and Bush administrations discouraged their European allies from being more assertive and proactive about the Continent's security needs. Members of the U.S. policy community viewed with uneasiness and suspicion any move that threatened the preeminence of NATO as Europe's primary security institution. This was not surprising. Washington not only has a chair at NATO's table, it occupies the chair at the head of the table. Conversely, there is no U.S. seat when the EU makes decisions. For Americans who relish Washington's dominance in transatlantic affairs, that absence of an official U.S. role is troubling enough on important economic issues. They deem such a development on security issues even more worrisome.

Another prominent feature of the indispensable-nation thesis is that its adherents adopt the "light-switch model" of U.S. engagement. In that version, there are only two positions: on and off. Many, seemingly most, proponents of U.S. preeminence do not recognize the existence of options between the current policy of promiscuous global interventionism and "isolationism." Following President Obama's second inaugural address, *Wall Street Journal* columnist Bret Stephens was most unhappy with the sections on foreign policy. The title of his column, "Obama's You're-On-Your-Own World," conveyed his thesis in a stark manner. Obama's worldview, Stephens asserted, constituted a species of isolationism. Such an indictment of Barack Obama—the leader who escalated the war in Afghanistan, involved the United States in the Libyan civil war, led the charge for harsher sanctions against Iran, Syria and North Korea, and is pursuing a strategic pivot toward East Asia in large part to contain China's power—would seem to strain credulity. But for the more zealous proponents of U.S. dominance such as Stephens, even rhetorical hints of modest retrenchment in portions of the world are reasons for alarm.

Adherence to the light-switch model reflects either intellectual rigidity or an effort to stifle discussion about a range of alternatives to the status quo. Even in the security realm there are numerous options between the United States as the global policeman—or what it has become over the past two decades, the global armed social worker—and refusing to take any action unless U.S. territory is under direct military assault. It is extraordinarily simplistic to imply that if Washington does not involve itself in civil wars in the Balkans, Central Asia or North Africa, that it would therefore automatically be unwilling or unable to respond to aggressive actions in arenas that are more important strategically and economically to genuine American interests. Indifference about what faction becomes dominant in Bosnia or Mali does not automatically signify indifference if China attempted to coerce Japan.

Selectivity is not merely an option when it comes to embarking on military interventions. It is imperative for a major power that wishes to preserve its strategic solvency. Otherwise, overextension and national exhaustion become increasing dangers. Over the past two decades, the United States has not suffered from a tendency to intervene in too few cases. Quite the contrary, it has shown a tendency to intervene in far too many conflicts. But many of the opinion leaders who stress the need for constant U.S. global leadership advocate even more frequent and far-ranging U.S. actions. *Washington Post* columnist Richard Cohen takes President Obama to task for not being more proactive against the Syrian government. Cohen argues further that a "furious sense of moral indignation" must return to U.S. foreign policy. Indeed, it should be "the centerpiece" of that policy.

His comments illustrate a worrisome absence of selectivity regarding military interventions among members of the indispensable-nation faction. There is always an abundance of brutal crackdowns, bloody insurrections and nasty civil wars around the world. If a sense of moral indignation, instead of a calculating assessment of the national interest, governs U.S. foreign policy, the United States will become involved in even more murky conflicts in which few if any tangible American interests are at stake. That is a blueprint for endless entanglements, a needless expenditure of national blood and treasure, and bitter, debilitating divisions among the American people. A country that has already sacrificed roughly 6,500 American lives and nearly $1.5 trillion in just the past decade pursuing nation-building chimeras in Iraq and Afghanistan should not be looking to launch similar crusades elsewhere.

Not only do disciples of the indispensable-nation doctrine seem to regard engagement as a binary light switch, they fail to distinguish between its various manifestations. The thesis that engagement can take different forms (diplomatic, military, economic and cultural) and that U.S. involvement in each form does not have to be at the same level of intensity is apparently a revolutionary notion bordering on apostasy. To those disciples, the security aspect dominates everything else. Mitt Romney warned that America must lead the world or the world will become a more dangerous place, "and liberty and prosperity would surely be among the first casualties." Among the dangers Kagan projects is "an unraveling of the international economic order," because, among other reasons, "trade routes and waterways ceased to be as secure, because the U.S. Navy was no longer able to defend them."

Proponents of an expansive U.S. posture repeatedly assert that a peaceful international system, which is the also the foundation of global prosperity, requires a hegemon. They most frequently cite Britain in the nineteenth century and the United States from the end of World War II to the present, although some even point to the Roman Empire as evidence for their thesis. In his book *The Case for Goliath*, Johns Hopkins University's Michael Mandelbaum even asserts that the United States performs many of the benevolent stabilizing functions that a world government would perform. That, in his view, has been enormously beneficial both for the United States and for the world.

Leaving aside the ultimate fate of the Roman Empire, or even the milder but still painful decline of Britain—which were in part consequences of the economic and security burdens those powers bore—the hegemonic model is hardly the only possible framework for a relatively stable and peaceful international system.

There are constructive alternatives to the stifling orthodoxy of the United States as the indispensable nation. That is especially true in the twenty-first century. Not only are there multiple major powers, but a majority of those powers share the democratic-capitalist values of the United States and are capable of defending and promoting those values. Moreover, even those great powers that represent a more authoritarian capitalist model, such as Russia and China, benefit heavily from the current system characterized by open trade and an absence of armed conflict among major powers. They are not likely to become aggressively revisionist states seeking to overturn the international order, nor are they likely to stand by idly while lesser powers in their respective regions create dangerous disruptions.

The most practical and appealing model is a consortium of powerful regional actors, with the United States serving as a first among equals. The opportunity for Washington to off-load some of its security responsibilities is most evident in Europe. Making the change to a more detached security strategy there would offer important benefits to the United States at a low level of risk. It made a reasonable amount of sense for Washington to assume primary responsibility for the security of democratic Europe in the aftermath of World War II. Western Europe was the most important strategic and economic prize of that era, and a powerful, expansionist Soviet Union eyed that prize. The Western European powers, traumatized and exhausted by World War II, were not in a good position to resist Moscow's power and blandishments. U.S. leadership was nearly inescapable, and it was warranted to protect and promote important American interests.

But even during the final decades of the Cold War, the U.S. security blanket unfortunately caused an excessive and unhealthy dependence on the part of democratic Europe. And with the demise of the Soviet Union, a policy based on U.S. dominance now reeks of obsolescence. Despite its recent financial struggles, the European Union collectively has both a population and an economy larger than those of the United States. And Russia, if it poses a threat at all, is a far less serious menace than was the Soviet Union. Yet U.S. leaders act as though the EU nations are inherently incapable of managing Europe's security affairs. And for their part, the European allies are content to continue free riding on Washington's exertions, keeping their defense budgets at minimal levels and letting the United States take primary responsibility for security issues that affect Europe far more than America.

Even a modest increase in defense spending by the principal European powers would enable the EU to handle any

If moral indignation, instead of a calculating assessment of the national interest, governs U.S. foreign policy, Washington will become involved in murky conflicts in which few if any tangible interests are at stake.

security problems that are likely to arise in the region. In that sense, Washington's dominant role in dealing with the Balkan conflicts in the 1990s was not evidence of the continuing need for U.S. leadership, but rather underscored the negative consequences of having encouraged Europe's security dependence on the United States for so many decades. The reality is that the threat environment in Europe is quite benign. There are few plausible security threats, and the ones that might arise are on the scale of the Balkan spats—problems that the European powers should be able to handle without undue exertion. Washington can safely off-load responsibility for European security and stability to the countries directly involved. The United States is most certainly not indispensable to the Continent's security any longer.

Prospects in other regions are less definite, but there are still opportunities for Washington to reduce its military exposure and risks. The most important region to the United States, East Asia, presents a less encouraging picture than does Europe for off-loading security obligations, since there is no cohesive, multilateral organization comparable to the EU to undertake those responsibilities. Yet even in East Asia there are alternatives to U.S. hegemony, which has been in place since 1945.

Washington's dominance was born in an era in which there were no credible challengers. Although the USSR had some ambitions in the western Pacific, its primary goals were elsewhere, largely in Eastern Europe and the emerging states of the Third World. China after the Chinese Revolution in 1949 was belligerent, but also weak and poor. Japan, utterly defeated in World War II and worried about Soviet and Chinese intentions, was content to maintain a pacifist image and rely heavily on the United States for defense. The rest of the region consisted of new, weak states arising out of rapidly decaying European colonial empires.

As in Europe, the situation today is totally different. Japan has the world's third-largest economy, China is an emerging great power, and East Asia has an assortment of other significant economic and political players. It will be increasingly difficult for the United States, a nation thousands of miles away, to dominate a region with an ever-expanding roster of major powers.

Instead of frantically trying to prop up a slipping hegemony, U.S. policy makers must focus on helping to shape a new security environment. Among other steps, Washington should wean its principal allies in the region—especially Japan, South Korea and Australia—from their overreliance on U.S. defense guarantees. Not only should U.S. leaders make it clear that the United States intends to reduce its military presence, but they should emphasize that those allies now must take far greater responsibility for their own defense and the overall stability of the region.

The most likely outcome of such a policy shift would be the emergence of an approximate balance of power in East Asia. China would be the single strongest country, but if Japan, South Korea, and

other actors such as Vietnam and Indonesia take the actions necessary to protect their own interests, Beijing will fall far short of having enough power to become the new hegemon. A balance-of-power system would be somewhat less stable than the current arrangement, but it would likely be sufficient to protect crucial American interests. And it may be Washington's only realistic option over the medium and long term. Clinging to an increasingly unsustainable hegemony is not a realistic strategy.

Off-loading security responsibilities in other regions needs to be assessed on a case-by-case basis. In most instances, adverse developments in those regions affect other major powers more than they do the United States. It is a bit bizarre, for example, that Washington should take more responsibility for developments in the Middle East than do such NATO allies as Germany, France, Italy and Turkey. Or that Washington is more concerned about troubles in South and Southeast Asia than are major powers such as India and Indonesia. But other relevant actors have not had to step forward to deal with unpleasant developments that might undermine regional stability, because the self-proclaimed indispensable nation has usually taken on the responsibility. That is not sustainable.

In the all-too-rare instances in which the United States did not seek to take care of problems that mattered more to other powers, those countries did not inevitably sit back and watch the situation deteriorate. One example occurred when conflict broke out between rival factions in Albania in the late 1990s and Washington declined to lead yet another intervention in the Balkans. Faced with the U.S. refusal, Italy and Greece organized and led an ad hoc European military coalition that restored order before the turmoil could intensify and spread beyond Albania's borders.

Various foreign-policy experts have presented detailed cases for options that would reduce the extent—and hence the costs and risks—of America's security role. Boston University's Andrew Bacevich, Texas A & M's Christopher Layne and the Cato Institute's Christopher Preble are just some of the more prominent analysts who chart a course between the extremes of the current policy and Fortress America. All of them, to one extent or another, make the case for off-loading at least some of Washington's security commitments onto other capable powers and adopting a new, more restrained posture of "offshore balancing."

The notion that the United States is the indispensable nation is a conceit bordering on narcissism. It had some validity during an era of stark bipolarity when a weak, demoralized democratic West had to depend on American power to protect the liberty and prosperity of the non-Communist world from Soviet coercion. But the world has been multipolar economically for decades, and it has become increasingly multipolar diplomatically and politically in recent years. Yet so much of the American political and foreign-policy communities embrace a security role—and an overall leadership role—for the United States that was born in the era of bipolarity and perpetuated during what Charles Krauthammer described as the "unipolar moment" following the collapse of the Soviet empire.

That moment is gone, and that is not the world we live in today. The United States needs a security strategy appropriate for a world of ever-increasing multipolarity. Very few critics of U.S. hegemony advocate an abandonment of all of America's security commitments. But an aggressive pruning of those commitments is overdue. It is well past time for the EU to assume primary responsibility for Europe's security and

for Japan to emerge as a normal great power with appropriate ambitions and responsibilities in East Asia. It is also past time for smaller U.S. allies, such as South Korea and Australia, to increase their defense spending and take more responsibility for their own defense. While the off-loading of Washington's obligations needs to be a gradual process, it also needs to begin immediately and to proceed at a brisk pace. And Washington ought to make it clear to all parties concerned that it is entirely out of the business of nation building.

Those who desperately try to preserve a status quo with America as the indispensable nation risk an unpleasant outcome. A country with America's financial woes will find it increasingly onerous to carry out its vast global-security commitments. That raises the prospect of a sudden, wrenching adjustment at some point when the United States simply cannot bear those burdens any longer. That is what happened to Britain after World War II, when London had no choice but to abandon most of its obligations in Africa, Asia and the Mediterranean. The speed and extent of the British move created or exacerbated numerous power vacuums. It is far better for the United States to preside over an orderly transition to an international system in which Washington plays the role of first among equals, rather than clinging to a slipping hegemony until it is forced to give way. □

The Mythical Liberal Order

By Naazneen Barma, Ely Ratner and Steven Weber

After a year and a half of violence and tens of thousands of deaths in Syria, the UN Security Council convened in July 2012 to consider exerting additional international pressure on President Bashar al-Assad. And for the third time in nine months, Russia and China vetoed any moves toward multilateral intervention. Less than two weeks later, Kofi Annan resigned as the joint UN–Arab League special envoy for Syria, lamenting, "I can't want peace more than the protagonists, more than the Security Council or the international community for that matter."

Not only have we seen this movie before, but it seems to be on repeat. Instead of a gradual trend toward global problem solving punctuated by isolated failures, we have seen over the last several years essentially the opposite: stunningly few instances of international cooperation on significant issues. Global governance is in a serious drought—palpable across the full range of crucial, mounting international challenges that include nuclear proliferation, climate change, international development and the global financial crisis.

Naazneen Barma is an assistant professor of national-security affairs at the Naval Postgraduate School. **Ely Ratner** is a fellow at the Center for a New American Security. **Steven Weber** is a professor of political science and at the School of Information at the University of California, Berkeley. The views in this essay are their own.

Where exactly is the liberal world order that so many Western observers talk about? Today we have an international political landscape that is neither orderly nor liberal.

It wasn't supposed to be this way. In the envisaged liberal world order, the "rise of the rest" should have been a boost to global governance. A rebalancing of power and influence should have made international politics more democratic and multilateral action more legitimate, while bringing additional resources to bear. Economic integration and security-community enlargement should have started to envelop key players as the system built on itself through network effects—by making the benefits of joining the order (and the costs of opposing it) just a little bit greater for each new decision. Instead, the world has no meaningful deal on climate change; no progress on a decade-old global-trade round and no inclination toward a new one; no coherent response to major security issues around North Korea, Iran and the South China Sea; and no significant coordinated effort to capitalize on what is possibly the best opportunity in a generation for liberal progress—the Arab Spring.

It's not particularly controversial to observe that global governance has gone missing. What matters is why. The standard view is that we're seeing an international liberal order under siege, with emerging and established powers caught in a contest for the future of the global system that is blocking progress on global governance.

That mental map identifies the central challenge of American foreign policy in the twenty-first century as figuring out how the United States and its allies can best integrate rising powers like China into the prevailing order while bolstering and reinforcing its foundations.

But this narrative and mental map are wrong. The liberal order can't be under siege in any meaningful way (or prepped to integrate rising powers) because it never attained the breadth or depth required to elicit that kind of agenda. The liberal order is today still largely an aspiration, not a description of how states actually behave or how global governance actually works. The rise of a configuration of states that six years ago we called a "World Without the West" is not so much challenging a prevailing order as it is exposing the inherent frailty of the existing framework.

This might sound like bad news for American foreign policy and even worse news for the pursuit of global liberalism, but it doesn't have to be so. Advancing a normative liberal agenda in the twenty-first century is possible but will require a new approach. Once strategists acknowledge that the liberal order is more or less a myth, they can let go of the anxious notion that some countries are attacking or challenging it, and the United States can be liberated from the burden of a supposed obligation to defend it. We can instead focus on the necessary task of building a liberal order from the ground up.

Loyalists are quick to defend the concept of a robust liberal order by falling back on outdated metrics of success. The original de minimis aims of the postwar order achieved what now should be considered a low bar: preventing a third world war and a race-to-the-bottom closure of the global-trade regime. Beyond that, the last seventy years have certainly seen movement toward globalization of trade and capital as well as some progress on human rights—but less clearly as a consequence of anything like a liberal world order than as a consequence of national power and interest.

What would a meaningful liberal world order actually look like if it were operating in practice? Consider an objective-based definition: a world in which most countries most of the time follow rules that contribute to progressively more collective security, shared economic gains and individual human rights. States would gradually downplay the virtues of relative advantage and self-reliance. Most states would recognize that foreign-policy choices are constrained (to their aggregate benefit) by multilateral institutions, global norms and nonstate actors. They would cede meaningful bits of sovereign authority in exchange for proactive collaboration on universal challenges. And they would accept that economic growth is best pursued through integration, not mercantilism, and is in turn the most reliable source of national capacity, advancement and influence. With those ingredients in place, we would expect to see the gradual, steady evolution of something resembling an "international community" bound by rights and responsibilities to protect core liberal values of individual rights and freedoms.

No wonder proponents of the liberal-world-order perspective hesitate to offer precise definitions of it. Few of these components can reasonably be said to have been present for any length of time at a global level in the post–World War II world. There may be islands of liberal order, but they are floating in a sea of something quite different. Moreover, the vectors today are mostly pointing away from the direction of a liberal world order.

How did we get here? Consider two founding myths of liberal internationalism. The first is that expressions of

International cooperation on security matters has been relegated to things like second-tier peacekeeping operations and efforts to ward off pirates equipped with machine guns and speedboats.

post–World War II American power and leadership were synonymous with the maturation of a liberal order. The narrative should sound familiar: The United States wins World War II and controls half of global GDP. The United States constructs an international architecture aimed at promoting an open economic system and a semi-institutionalized approach to fostering cooperation on security and political affairs. And the United States provides the essential global public goods—an extended security deterrent and the global reserve currency—to make cooperation work. Some essential elements of the system survive in a posthegemony era because the advantages to other significant powers of sustained institutionalized cooperation exceed the costs and risks of trying to change the game.

In the 1990s the narrative gets more interesting, controversial and relevant. This is when the second foundational myth of the liberal world order—that it has an inexorable magnetic attraction—comes to the fore. The end of the Cold War and the attendant rejection of Communism is supposed to benefit the liberal world order in breadth and depth: on the internal front, new capitalist democracies should converge on individuals' market-based economic choice and election-based political choice; on the external front, the relationships among states should become increasingly governed by a set of liberal international norms that privilege and protect the civic and political freedoms that capitalist democracies promise. The liberal order's geography should then expand to encompass the non-Western world. Its multilateral rules, institutions and norms should increase in density across economic, political and security domains. As positive network effects kick in, the system should evolve to be much less dependent on American power. It's supposedly easier—and more beneficial—to join the liberal world order than it is to oppose it (or even to try to modify it substantially). A choice to live outside the system becomes progressively less realistic: few countries can imagine taking on the contradictions of modern governance by themselves, particularly in the face of expanding multilateral free trade and interdependent security institutions.

The story culminates in a kind of magnetic liberalism, where countries and foreign-policy decisions are attracted to the liberal world order like iron filings to a magnet. With few exceptions, U.S. foreign policy over the last two decades has been predicated on the assumption that the magnetic field is strong and getting stronger. It's a seductive idea, but it should not be confused with reality. In practice, the magnetic field is notable mainly for its weakness. It is simply not the case today that nations feel equally a part of, answerable to or constrained by a liberal order. And nearly a quarter century after 1989, it has become disingenuous to argue that the liberal world order is simply slow in getting off the ground—as if the next gust of democratic transitions or multilateral breakthroughs will offer the needed push to revive those triumphalist moments brought on by the end of World War II and the fall of the Berlin Wall. To the contrary, the

aspirational liberal end state is receding into the horizon.

The picture half a century ago looked more promising, with the initial rounds of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade and the successful establishment of NATO setting expectations about what multilateral governance could achieve. But international institutions picked off the low-hanging fruit of global cooperation decades ago and have since stalled in their attempts to respond to pressing international challenges. The 1990s served up the best possible set of conditions to advance global liberalism, but subsequent moves toward political and economic liberalization that came with the end of the Cold War were either surprisingly shallow or fragile and short-lived.

Ask yourself this: Have developing countries felt and manifested over time the increasing magnetic pull of the liberal world order? A number of vulnerable developing and post-Communist transitional countries adopted a "Washington Consensus" package of liberal economic policies—freer trade, marketization and privatization of state assets—in the 1980s and 1990s. But these adjustments mostly arrived under the shadow of coercive power. They generally placed the burden of adjustment disproportionately on the most disempowered members of society. And, with few exceptions, they left developing countries more, not less, vulnerable to global economic volatility. The structural-adjustment policies imposed in the midst of the Latin American debt crisis and the region's subsequent "lost decade" of the 1980s bear witness to each of these shortcomings, as do the failed voucher-privatization program and consequent asset stripping and oligarchic wealth concentration experienced by Russians in the 1990s.

If these were the gains that were supposed to emerge from a liberal world order, it's no surprise that liberalism came to have a tarnished brand in much of the developing world. The perception that economic neoliberalism fails to deliver on its trickle-down growth pledge is strong and deep. In contrast, state capitalism and resource nationalism—vulnerable to a different set of contradictions, of course—have for the moment delivered tangible gains for many emerging powers and look like promising alternative development paths. Episodic signs of pushback against some of the excesses of that model, such as anti-Chinese protests in Angola or Zambia, should not be confused with a yearning for a return to liberal prescriptions. And comparative economic performance in the wake of the global financial crisis has done nothing to burnish liberalism's economic image, certainly not in the minds of those who saw the U.S. investment banking–led model of capital allocation as attractive, and not in the minds of those who held a vision of EU-style, social-welfare capitalism as the next evolutionary stage of liberalism.

There's just as little evidence of sustained liberal magnetism operating in the politics of the developing world, where entrenched autocrats guarding their legitimacy frequently caricature democracy promotion as a not-very-surreptitious strategy to replace existing regimes with either self-serving instability or more servile allies of the West. In practice, the liberal order's formula for democratic freedom has been mostly diluted down to observing electoral procedures. The results have been almost uniformly disappointing, as the legacy of post–Cold War international interventions from Cambodia to Iraq attests. Even the more organic "color revolutions" of Eastern Europe and Central Asia at the beginning of the twenty-first century have stalled into equilibria Freedom House identifies as only

"partly free"—in reality affording average citizens little access to political or economic opportunities. Only two years past the initial euphoria of the Arab Spring a similar disillusionment has set in across the Middle East, where evidence for the magnetic pull of a liberal world order is extremely hard to find.

Contemporary developments in Southeast Asia illustrate where the most important magnetic forces of change actually come from. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has successfully coordinated moves toward trade liberalization in the region, but this has not been underpinned by a set of liberal principles or collective norms. Instead, the goals have been instrumental—to protect the region from international economic volatility and to cement together some counterweight to the Chinese economy. And ASEAN is explicitly not a force for individual political and economic freedom. Indeed, it acts more like a bulwark against "interference" in internal affairs. The aspirations one occasionally hears for the organization to implement collective-governance measures come from Western observers much more frequently than from the people and states that comprise the group itself.

Global governistas will protest that the response to the global financial crisis proves that international economic cooperation is more robust than we acknowledge. In this view, multilateral financial institutions passed the stress test and prevented the world from descending into the economic chaos of beggar-thy-neighbor trade policies and retaliatory currency arbitrage and capital controls. The swift recovery of global trade and capital flows is often cited as proof of the relative success of economic cooperation. The problem with this thesis is that very real fears about how the system could collapse, including the worry that states would retreat behind a mercantilist shell, are no different from what they were a hundred years ago. It's not especially indicative of liberal progress to be having the same conversation about global economic governance that the world was having at the end of the gold-standard era and the onset of the Great Depression. Global economic governance may have helped to prevent a repeat downward spiral into self-defeating behaviors, but surely in a world order focused on liberal progress the objectives of global economic governance should have moved on by now. And the final chapter here has yet to be written. From the perspective of many outside the United States, the Federal Reserve's unprecedented "quantitative easing" policies are not far off from monetary warfare on the exchange and inflation rates of others.

The ease with which emerging powers route around liberal rules and institutions is perhaps the most conclusive evidence that the liberal order is a myth.

Astute analysts have observed that as banks have operated more nationalistically and cautiously, the free flow of capital across borders has declined. A global climate that is at serious risk of breeding currency and trade wars is hardly conducive to the health and expansion of any liberal world order.

On matters of war and peace, the international community is fighting similar battles and for the most part experiencing similar failures to provide a system of collective security. In Africa's Great Lakes region, more than five million people have died directly and indirectly from fifteen years of civil war and conflict. Just to the north, the international community stood by and watched a genocide in Sudan. In places more strategically important to leading nations, the outcome—as showcased in Syria—is geopolitical gridlock.

The last time the Security Council managed to agree on what seemed like serious collective action was over Libya, but both China and Russia now believe they were intentionally misled and that what was sold as a limited humanitarian mission was really a regime-change operation illegitimately authorized by the UN. This burst of multilateralism has actually made global-security governance down the road less likely. Meanwhile, international cooperation on security matters has been relegated to things like second-tier peacekeeping operations and efforts to ward off pirates equipped with machine guns and speedboats. These are worthy causes but will not move the needle on the issues that dominate the international-security agenda. And on the emerging issues most in need of forward-looking global governance—cybersecurity and unmanned aerial vehicles, for example—there are no rules and institutions in place at all, nor legitimate and credible mechanisms to devise them.

Assessed against its ability to solve global problems, the current system is falling progressively further behind on the most important challenges, including financial stability, the "responsibility to protect," and coordinated action on climate change, nuclear proliferation, cyberwarfare and maritime security. The authority, legitimacy and capacity of multilateral institutions dissolve when the going gets tough—when member countries have meaningfully different interests (as in currency manipulations), when the distribution of costs is large enough to matter (as in humanitarian crises in sub-Saharan Africa) or when the shadow of future uncertainties looms large (as in carbon reduction). Like a sports team that perfects exquisite plays during practice but fails to execute against an actual opponent, global-governance institutions have sputtered precisely when their supposed skills and multilateral capital are needed most.

Why has this happened? The hopeful liberal notion that these failures of global governance are merely reflections of organizational dysfunction that can be fixed by reforming or "reengineering" the institutions themselves, as if this were a job for management consultants fiddling with organization charts, is a costly distraction from the real challenge. A decade-long

effort to revive the dead-on-arrival Doha Development Round in international trade is the sharpest example of the cost of such a tinkering-around-the-edges approach and its ultimate futility. Equally distracting and wrong is the notion held by neoconservatives and others that global governance is inherently a bad idea and that its institutions are ineffective and undesirable simply by virtue of being supranational.

The root cause of stalled global governance is simpler and more straightforward. "Multipolarization" has come faster and more forcefully than expected. Relatively authoritarian and postcolonial emerging powers have become leading voices that undermine anything approaching international consensus and, with that, multilateral institutions. It's not just the reasonable demand for more seats at the table. That might have caused something of a decline in effectiveness but also an increase in legitimacy that on balance could have rendered it a net positive.

Instead, global governance has gotten the worst of both worlds: a decline in both effectiveness and legitimacy. The problem is not one of a few rogue states acting badly in an otherwise coherent system. There has been no real breakdown per se. There just wasn't all that much liberal world order to break down in the first place. The new voices are more than just numerous and powerful. They are truly distinct from the voices of an old era, and they approach the global system in a meaningfully different way.

Six years ago in this magazine we wrote about the development of a new configuration in international politics that we called a "World Without the West." We argued that an important group of emerging states was neither assimilating into the Western order (as optimists hoped) nor attacking it (as pessimists feared). Instead, they were finding ways to bypass it and "route around" it by enhancing their own interconnectivity at a rate faster than global interconnectivity as a whole was increasing. This in turn made the Western order progressively less relevant.

Though this was a controversial idea when first proposed, it has now become mainstream to note its foundational claim: that deepening interconnectivity in the non-Western world is outstripping both global and North-South integration. But many who have come to accept this basic notion still discount its significance. They fall into the mind-set traps that we anticipated: either doubting the sustainability and resilience of these emerging linkages or ignoring their increasingly profound impact on the way international politics works.

To be clear: "Routing around" is not a high-concept description of an alternative world-order system. And, like "balancing," "bandwagoning" and similar concepts that analysts use to categorize state behaviors, routing around doesn't necessarily imply some deep intentionality or master plan for international politics. Rather, the phrase simply describes a set of strategic choices that share driving forces and results.

The drivers come from the specific histories, economies and interests of today's emerging powers. Postcolonial legacies combine with weak and unstable polities to oppose international intervention in domestic affairs. State-fueled manufacturing and large agrarian populations repress support for open and free trade. And the intense need for energy and other resources shapes external priorities throughout the world. Strategic behavior emerges from these self-interested priorities and objectives as well as the mind-sets they engender.

The ease with which emerging powers route around liberal rules and institutions is perhaps the most conclusive evi-

dence that the liberal order is a myth. Their greatest opportunities to act strategically arise because the actual liberal world order, weak and patchy as it is, bears little resemblance to the beliefs and aspirations of its defenders and promoters, who want badly to believe it is much stronger and more vibrant than in reality. Arbitraging against these wishful thoughts has become the best way to diminish further the influence of the liberal world order.

Consider regulatory arbitrage in the financial sector as a vivid example of routing around the weak structures of liberal interdependence. Recently, a number of China's biggest state-owned banks began moving sizable pieces of their European portfolios to Luxembourg in a clear bid to bypass London's tougher regulations. Several Russian banks—including the large parastatal Gazprombank—serve openly as conduits for Syrian oil sales and other financial transactions, collecting enormous fees made possible by the deviant economics of sanctions. Since these banks don't operate in London or New York, they are impervious to Western sanctions and can instead arbitrage against banks that play by the rules of the liberal world order.

The expanding heft of state-driven capitalist practices is another example. Sovereign wealth funds and other vehicles for state-directed finance are not new, but the volume of money sloshing around the emerging economies is unprecedented. And this government-directed finance is largely unregulated. The export-financing volume of the Export-Import Bank of China is estimated at more than that of the G-7 combined. While the Export-Import Bank of the United States is governed by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's strict competitiveness and transparency rules and a tightly circumscribed congressional mandate, state financing elsewhere in the world need not play by the same rules. Why should it, when genuine integration into a liberal world order is so restrictive and costly, and when free riding on it is so beneficial?

Trade is typically thought to be the one international issue on which all agree in principle on the universal gains from liberal interdependence. But even here a number of emerging powers have routed around the existing system and charted their own course. We have demonstrated, using a gravity model of trade, that key emerging economies are preferentially trading more and more with each other, and shifting the

Solving global challenges requires a hardheaded assessment of which players really matter in getting to an acceptable answer and a process of bargaining to get them aligned.

globe's economic center of gravity. When the BRICS—Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa—held their fourth annual summit in New Delhi in March 2012, they agreed on new measures to further deepen trade ties within the bloc. They also agreed on a deal to bypass the dollar—the linchpin of the liberal economic system—by extending credit facilities to each other in BRICS currencies. This follows on the heels of a growing network of bilateral currency swaps and agreements to settle trade accounts in nondollar currencies and commodities—between China and Russia; India and Iran; and China and Brazil, among others. On aggregate, the size of these currency-swap systems makes them harder to dismiss as a vanity play. These countries have yet to agree on how to set up a BRICS development bank to bypass the Bretton Woods institutions, but they have opened up talks on the matter.

It has now been more than a decade since China joined the World Trade Organization—more than enough time for liberal magnetism to have had a significant effect. Instead, China has used dispute-resolution procedures against others much more aggressively than it has liberalized its own practices. The rare-earths and alternative-energy sectors illustrate how China manages to advance its own strategic interests while pushing against the rules to see just how much give there is—playing to the letter of the law rather than to its spirit. This runs directly counter to the hopes of liberal internationalists that China would play a leadership role in breaking the decade-plus Doha deadlock.

Consider, too, efforts to strengthen the role of rules and institutions in the South China Sea, where the likelihood of near-term military conflict in East Asia is arguably the greatest. Based on a narrow reading of the challenge, the liberal solution is to pressure and prod China and other regional states to advance their claims in accordance with international maritime law. This strategy hinges on the application of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, which outgoing secretary of defense Leon Panetta has described as "the bedrock legal instrument underpinning public order across the maritime domain." But the United States is not party to the convention. Even if it were, the agreement is silent on land-based sovereignty disputes, has no binding enforcement procedures and provides members with ample ways to opt out of participation in dispute-resolution mechanisms. The code of conduct being discussed between ASEAN and China would be no stronger in terms of providing hard rules and enforcement processes with teeth. The fundamental problem in the South China Sea is not China seeking to overturn some existing order or that China is refusing to integrate. It is that the prevailing order is so thin and weak as to be meaningless.

Routing around or arbitraging against the idea of the liberal world order has been an effective strategy for emerging powers seeking various objectives. Sometimes they simply want different outcomes from global governance. Brazil, China, India and South Africa brokered the deal they wanted with the United States at the Copenhagen

climate summit in 2009, successfully avoiding commitments to emissions caps. Sometimes key states are seeking simply to oppose Western freedom of action. (Russia has made an art of this.) And other times, they desire to break global-governance institutions so that they can ultimately reconfigure them in their own interests. In some cases, rather than arguing about their rules versus old rules, emerging powers prefer no rules at all. Routing around can be a combination, in mixed proportions, of all of these objectives—as illustrated by China and Russia vetoing multilateral action on Syria at the UN Security Council in July 2012.

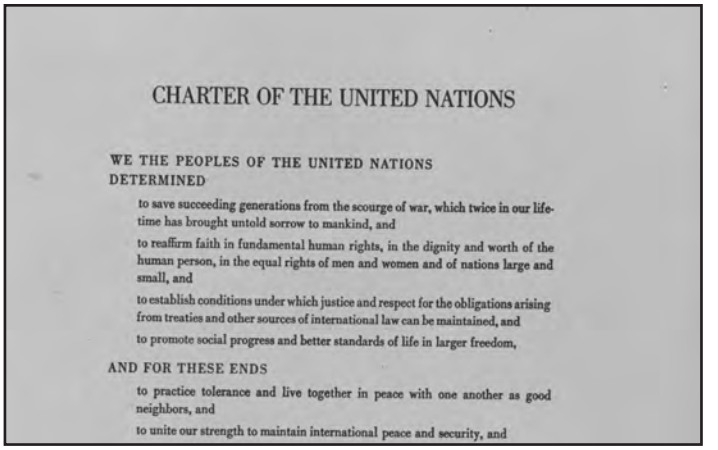
What does this look like from a systemic perspective? Not what many Western analysts are looking for—that is, a cogent, coherent and comprehensive alternative order that does everything the liberal world order was supposed to do and one day snaps into place as a replacement package. We've never expected that, because in our view the nature of contemporary global competition is not about one order fighting to replace another, like the two mobile operating systems—Android and iOS—fighting it out for market dominance. A better understanding is to view the World Without the West's strategies and choices as little bits of software code, partially completed beta-style apps, that countries mix and match, use and discard, upgrade and replace. Competition is not head-on, but indirect and oblique, and innovation is disruptive, not linear. Although the ordering principles of international politics in the developing world may not compute with the sophisticated "consumers" that espouse a liberal world order, they do appeal to, and provide tangible benefits for, a different and less developed constituency.

Disruptive innovation works when newcomers enter what looks like the low end of the market and then outpace the current leader. This is the game being played now in international politics, and the fallout from the global financial crisis has quickened the pace and raised the stakes. Five years after the initial meltdown, the United States is mired in partisan gridlock that renders Washington unable to make a plausible commitment to address its unprecedented public-finance crater. The EU's signature project of the last twenty years—the single currency—is at real risk of dissolution. By contrast, core players in the developing world have been the engine of growth for the world as Western economies wait for an elusive recovery. Consider as an obvious thought experiment what this landscape looks like to swing states in the developing world. Should a new post–Arab Spring regime clamor to join the liberal world order or look elsewhere as it constructs its new economy and state-society compact?

The real threat of disruptive innovation is the gradual siphoning of power, influence, resources and confidence from the West. This is in some sense a more insidious challenge because, in its subtlety, it is harder for leaders of liberal political systems to understand and deal with strategically. It fails to fit neatly into familiar solution categories for American foreign policy. The practical questions become how can and should the West respond.

The project of advancing liberal values is what matters, and it is too important to be yoked to a set of weakening, almost inert institutions. The obsession with world order is not helping the United States formulate foreign-policy objectives. We should stop trying to shore up an order that has failed to deliver on its promises and will only continue to disappoint.

Widening the reach of liberalism in human lives around the world deserves an approach that is oriented toward solving



CHARTER OF THE UNITED NATIONS

WE THE PEOPLES OF THE UNITED NATIONS
DETERMINED

to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind, and

to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small, and

to establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained, and

to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom,

AND FOR THESE ENDS

to practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbors, and

to unite our strength to maintain international peace and security, and

real problems and seeks to build liberal order from the ground up. Instead of defending the remit of universal multilateral institutions on the basis of chimerical advancements, let them give way, for the time being, to smaller coalitions that address specific challenges. The process of cobbling together coalitions and hammering out shared objectives—what we call "bargaining toward liberalism"—can provide a much more coherent source of collective action on international challenges and lay the foundations for a multigenerational liberal project.

Liberal internationalists like to say that "global problems require global solutions," but that's just not true. On most of the issues that matter, a solution worthy of the effort is possible through the cooperation of only a few countries, generally fewer than ten. The world doesn't need big institutions to support that kind of bargaining. And foreign-policy makers don't need concepts like a "concert of democracies" that constrain the bargaining game on the basis of regime type, or anything else.

Solving global challenges requires a hardheaded assessment of which players really matter in getting to an acceptable answer and a process of bargaining to get them aligned. And, on different issues, different countries will matter more than others.

In some and perhaps many instances, this "coalition of the relevant" will need to find ways of legitimating the bargaining outcome to others. This can be tricky, but one thing is for sure—today's big, multilateral global-governance institutions are not the right place to try to do that, since they are just not good at it anymore (if they ever were). It may be that performance and effective problem solving themselves serve as sufficient legitimation for a younger generation, outside the United States in particular, that is all too ready to jettison the irrelevant baggage of the postwar international system as it used to be and as only aging Americans and Europeans could be nostalgic about.

The core policy challenge within this new approach will probably be less about legitimation and more about how to minimize the losses, costs and damage done by countries that cheat and free ride, because some certainly will. Part of the answer is that the process of bargaining will factor this into the equation, so that any gains worthy of a consensus will have to outweigh the costs of free riding. We simply must let go of the dysfunctional assumption that mostly everyone has to be

on board to make a solution work and stick. That mind-set gives spoilers more leverage than they deserve. Instead, we should build the coalitions that demonstrate results and effectiveness, entice the reluctant to sign up for selective benefits and let them go if they won't.

The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade agreement is a reasonable example of what bargaining toward liberalism looks like in practice. The pact, albeit a work in progress, has brought together nearly a dozen countries to devise a "gold standard" trade agreement for the twenty-first century. It is open to all who are willing to commit to a series of liberal economic and trade principles, and it holds the best promise for advancing a liberal trade agenda.

The TPP should stand not just as a model for future trade agreements but more broadly as a model for partial global governance. The relevant question for U.S. foreign-policy makers now is: Where can similar coalitions be constructed across the full spectrum of foreign-policy challenges, whether they are designed to address human rights, maritime safety, development or nonproliferation? Piecing together issue-by-issue solutions from the bottom up is a practical means by which committed partners can make visible progress on global challenges. Short-term but palpable results are needed now and in some instances can be leveraged to tackle more difficult issues and possibly build broader coalitions. For example, nontraditional security threats such as natural disasters, trafficking in persons, counternarcotics and illegal fishing are ripe for delivering tangible benefits to participants and practicing the habits of collective action.

This, we believe, is the most effective way to advance liberal objectives and values at present. Can it work with America's domestic politics? We think so, because an ad hoc, problem-solving approach to global governance does not have to be postideological. Instead, it aims to deliver upon the goals that liberalism seeks to realize and to meet its aspirations through the pursuit of tangible results, not the pursuit of institutions or world-order solutions.

In this alternative framework, getting to a solution drives the form of collaboration rather than the other way around. We are advocating the pursuit of a multigenerational liberal project that can and should be advanced without the anxiety of trying to lock in interim gains through global institutions. Let's focus instead on laying the material foundations for a future liberal order—let the ideology follow, and the institutions after that. □

Mo Yan's Delicate Balancing Act

By Sabina Knight

Twenty years ago, on my first day in a PhD program, my mentor Joseph Lau gave me a stack of ten novels. When I expressed doubts about fitting in this leisure reading on top of my coursework, he held up Mo Yan's *Republic of Wine* and shook the book at me. "This writer is going to win the Nobel Prize," he said. Such was the impact of Mo Yan's writing on those familiar with it long before he won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2012. Yet, since winning the prize, Mo Yan has become a scapegoat for the sins of the regime in which he must survive. Mo's literary range and philosophical depth have received little attention in the recent flurry of press coverage, which has concentrated on his apparent acquiescence to the Chinese government's repression of dissidents. Secure in the comfort of Western freedoms, myriad writers have lambasted Mo for his public statements and silences. Few writers have noted that Western authors seldom are judged on their politics or that writers in China have reasons for working within as well as outside of the system.

In any event, Mo Yan now operates under heightened scrutiny. Indeed, the honor was triumphantly embraced by Beijing as the long-awaited global acknowledgement of China's return, not only as an economic powerhouse but as a cultural leader. Mo's was the first Nobel Prize in Literature ever awarded to a Chinese citizen. (The dissident Gao Xingjian had taken French citizenship by the time he won the 2000 prize.) Its belatedness was much discussed in light of China's rich literary heritage and cultural renaissance of recent decades. Literature is a fundamental part of what Chinese officials call their country's "national rejuvenation."

Mo's literary legacy offers a rare window into this larger cultural-political mission, and to judge him by his public actions neglects much that can be learned from his work, which traces China's history of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Mo Yan won the Nobel Prize for his writing, not for political engagement. This essay thus offers a perspective on his politics based not on a few symbolic acts but on a close reading of his literary works. "For a writer," Mo said in accepting his prize, "the best way to speak is by writing. You will find everything I need to say in my works." These works offer keen insights into truth telling, the role of the writer, history's horrors, destiny and human will. They also reflect Mo's uses of tradition and modernism, his portrayals of sensuality, aggression and violence, and his views on individual conscience. Thanks to the herculean efforts of master translator Howard Goldblatt (whose translations I quote below), English-language readers can appreciate Mo's powerful fiction.

Sabina Knight is an associate professor and director of comparative literature at Smith College.

Since winning the prize, Mo Yan has become a scapegoat for the sins of the regime in which he must survive.

Controversy over Mo's prize highlights the difficult position of writers in today's China. His speeches and interviews may offer an understanding of his choices, but his fiction offers his most penetrating comments on writing, truth telling and accommodation to government censorship. In his 1989 short story "Abandoned Child," a bus driver recounts how he was once disciplined for telling the truth. When serving in the army, the driver crashed a jeep into a tree after looking in the rearview mirror to find the deputy chief of staff feeling up the commander's wife. Ordered to file a report, the driver did not spare the truth: "I lost my bearings when I saw the deputy chief of staff feel the woman up, and crashed the jeep. It was all my fault." But his political instructor swore at him, whacked him on the head and ordered him to redo the report. Asked by the narrator if he did so, the driver replies, "No fuckin' way! He wrote it for me, and I copied it."

The story suggests that being forced to copy other people's words is not the same as choosing what to write. This distinction may lie behind Mo's decision in the summer of 2012 to join other prominent writers in hand-copying Mao Zedong's 1942 "Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art" for a commemorative edition. Critics understandably assumed the copying endorsed Mao's exhortation that literature must serve the people and the revolution. That text set the stage for three and a half decades of literary and artistic repression. Mo fueled the fire of this criticism by seeming to defend "necessary" censorship at a December 2012 press conference in Stockholm.

Clearly, Mo is no naïf in the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) reign of thought control. Born Guan Moye, he chose his pen name—"Don't Talk"—to honor his mother's caution against talking too much and in sardonic recognition of his failure to heed her warning. Yet I have been struck by his quiet and unassuming presence at literary conferences in Beijing, where he offered kind encouragement in private meetings but evinced a shy persona in public.

Adroit in his political judgments, Mo has judiciously censored himself enough to flourish in what historian Jeffrey Wasserstrom calls the "gray zone." This is a subtly negotiated space where the government suffers heterodoxy as long as writers camouflage their dissent in literary metaphor. Like many writers, Mo voices political criticism that would risk reprisal if presented overtly. But since he presents his critique on the sly, often poking fun at himself as a writer, he is allowed to pursue his truth telling. Still, to many he has erred on the side of caution, and his lack of explicit protest has allowed domestic and foreign critics to paint him as an apologist for authoritarianism.

That Mo walks a fine line between writing social criticism and angering Communist censors is attested by his prominence in the government-run Chinese Writers Association (CWA). He has been a member of the CCP since 1978, and he joined the People's Liberation Army (PLA)

in 1976. In 1982, he became a CCP cadre, a functionary roughly equivalent to a civil servant, and in 1984 he enrolled in the newly established PLA College of Literature and Arts. Now vice chairman of the CWA, Mo enjoys a privileged life as one of China's eighty-three million CCP members (about 6 percent of the population). Yet he often presents his personal history in studiously naive terms. He says he decided to become a writer when a former college student sent to Mo's village for "reeducation" told of a successful writer who ate succulent pork dumplings three times a day. Those were the days following Mao's 1958–1961 Great Leap Forward, when famine killed an estimated forty-five million Chinese. Mo also claims to write strictly for himself rather than for an audience. However, he accumulated a huge audience after a film adaptation of his novel *Red Sorghum* won the Golden Bear prize for best film at the 1988 Berlin International Film Festival.

But Mo's recent public statements have only further enraged critics who have never forgiven him for his actions at the 2009 Frankfurt Book Fair, when he walked out after Chinese dissident writers entered. "Some may want to shout on the street," Mo reasoned in a speech at the fair, "but we should tolerate those who hide in their rooms and use literature to voice their opinions."

That's what Mo did in "Abandoned Child," which can be read as a modern morality play. The narrator grapples with the ethical burdens of rescuing an abandoned newborn girl. Not only can his family ill afford to raise the child, but his wife hopes to conceive a son despite China's one-child policy, which would limit them to their first daughter. But the story also illuminates Mo's ethical framework as a writer, as well as his understanding of literature's role in a modern China grappling with its rejuvenation. After a watchdog bites him in the leg at the government compound, the narrator is grateful rather than angry: "Most likely the bite was intended for me to reach a sudden awakening through pain. . . . I was startled into awareness. Thank you, dog, you with the pointy snout and a face drenched in artistic colors!"

When the township head asks whether keeping a watchdog might rupture the government's "flesh-and-blood ties with the people," the narrator points to his injured leg and says such an injury doesn't rupture ties but "molds them." The story thus alludes to Mo's own role as the writer of fiction

limning China's twentieth-century chronicle of national pain. His authorial intent may be to awaken readers into awareness, to exorcise traumatic historical memories and to restore ties of societal unity.

The idea that art molds ties between the government and its citizens frames Mo's place in the current political context. For millennia, rulers in China have understood literary culture to be foundational to political power, and China's survival through three thousand years may have depended as much on its literary traditions as on political history. Ancient history books chronicling the achievements of dynasties promoted faith that the universe was ordered and moral, and this faith bolstered belief in each ruling regime's role in carrying out the mandate of heaven. From the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE) until the dawn of the twentieth century, the government was administered by an entire class of literati, scholar-officials trained in the classical Confucian texts. Literary culture—which included history and philosophy—was the root of government and civil practice. Scholar-officials both organized history to legitimate ruling regimes and remonstrated not only with artful subtlety but also with loyalty.

Similarly, those of Mo Yan's generation believed they were the vanguard of a world-changing revolution. Mo has described this deep faith as one of his reasons for becoming a writer:

> It was a time of intense political passions, when starving citizens tightened their belts and followed the Party in its Communist experiment. We may have been famished at the time, but we considered ourselves to be the luckiest people in the world. Two-thirds of the world's people, we believed, were living in dire misery, and it was our sacred duty to rescue them from the sea of suffering in which they were drowning.

The writer's sacred duty had to be carried out within rigid constraints when Mo began writing in the late 1970s. During the Mao Zedong era (roughly from Mao's 1942 "Talks at the Yan'an Forum" to his death in 1976), socialist-realist fiction demanded portrayals of heroic workers, soldiers and peasants overcoming corrupt landlords and capitalists. In stark contrast to such black-and-white portrayals, Mo writes fantastical realism, sometimes grotesque, often full of black humor, and sometimes in a style the Swedish Academy praised as "hallucinatory realism." By using the artistic liberties of magical realism to challenge the political status quo, Mo and many fellow avant-garde writers continue the tradition of European surrealists and Latin American writers such as Gabriel García Márquez.

Mo is best known for his historical novels depicting the brutal Japanese invasion that preceded World War II. In these works he joins other post-Mao writers to exhume China's collective traumatic memories. His magisterial *Red Sorghum* (1987) consists of five novellas in which the narrator imagines his grandparents' experiences as the Japanese invade their village. Full of graphic violence, rape and even a butcher skinning a prisoner alive, the novel chronicles horrors commonly viewed in China as the

Mo voices political criticism that would risk reprisal if presented overtly. But since he presents his critique on the sly, often poking fun at himself as a writer, he is allowed to pursue his truth telling.

epitome of twentieth-century cruelties. This historical setting—safely before the culmination of the Chinese Revolution in 1949—adroitly sidesteps the party's sensitivities and thus flies underneath the censors' radar. But perceptive readers may find that such novels also evoke the horrors that Chinese citizens inflicted on one another during the Cultural Revolution of 1966–1976.

Sandalwood Death (2001) could elicit a similar interpretation. But, whereas the butcher in *Red Sorghum* is forced by the Japanese, here Mo depicts a willing Chinese executioner, which perhaps explains his use of a setting even more removed in time. The torture of the protagonist, an opera singer turned rebel during the Boxer Rebellion (1898–1901), may be the most horrific scene I've ever read. The executioner skewers the prisoner alive with a sandalwood shaft, then feeds him ginseng soup to forestall his death and prolong his torture until the opening of the German-constructed railroad.

Writing in the so-called gray zone entails much more political risk in works set in the Mao Zedong period and contemporary times. As far back as *The Garlic Ballads* (1988), Mo depicted a 1987 peasant riot against official corruption and malfeasance in the transition to a market economy. Mo wrote *The Republic of Wine* (1992) in the years just following the June 1989 massacre of prodemocracy protesters in Tiananmen Square, so one can read as allegory the plot about its detective investigating a rumor that local officials were eating human babies. *Big Breasts and Wide Hips* (1996) met with such harsh criticism over its depiction of merciless Communist revolutionaries that Mo's superiors prevailed upon him to write a letter asking the publisher to discontinue it. In his prize-winning novel *Frog* (2009), Mo's account of a village obstetrician exposes the corruption and cruelty of officials enforcing the one-child policy.

Although less acclaimed than *Red Sorghum* and *Big Breasts and Wide Hips*, Mo's real masterpiece of historical fiction is the more explicitly critical *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out* (2006). The novel begins in purgatory in 1950, where the landowner Ximen Nao has suffered two years of torture after his execution by Communist militiamen in the chaos of the revolution. Ximen argues that his decency should win him a reprieve, and the lord of the underworld grants him a series of reincarnations, first as a donkey, then as an ox, a pig, a dog, a monkey and finally as a big-headed human child. This tragicomic parody of the Buddhist six realms is but one of several narrative devices Mo employs to convey the complexity of history. Through his animal reincarnations, Ximen observes the land-reform movement, the Cultural Revolution and the headlong embrace of market capitalism in the 1990s.

Much of the modern Chinese history chronicled in *Life and Death* is also the history Mo Yan has witnessed. "Big-head," the wise survivor of so many campaigns and so much death, has seen history's horrors, seen death itself, and survived. He has the power of memory but is no more empowered than a child.

Salvation nonetheless lies in preserving the memories. By recounting events from the perspective of animals, Mo can voice criticism that might be too risky coming from a human mouth. In his first reincarnation, for example, Ximen Donkey hears the Communist cadres torturing his widow and concubines to extract the whereabouts of the family's gold, silver and jewelry. Aware that the women don't know, Ximen Donkey rushes forth to reveal the hiding place, despite his cynical expectation that the cadres will pocket the treasure for themselves.

The novel uses black humor to convey the horrors of the murderous Cultural Revolution. Mo casts doubt on the success of the CCP's campaign of forced land collectivization when the robust Ximen Ox enables a lone independent farmer with only a wooden plow to outstrip the Commune with its multiple teams of oxen pulling steel plows. During the winter described in the next chapter, the Commune's impoverished peasants are hungry. Yet the party feeds them propaganda rather than food. The passage turns fantastical after a Red Guard propaganda team arrives in the village on a Soviet truck rigged with four ear-splitting loudspeakers: "The loudspeakers blared so loud a farmer's wife had a miscarriage, a pig ran headlong into a wall and knocked itself out, a whole roost of laying hens took to the air, and local dogs barked themselves hoarse."

The raucous propaganda stuns a flock of wild geese that drops from the sky on top of the gathered villagers. Impoverished and starving, the villagers tear apart each bird:

> The bird's wings were torn off, its legs wound up in someone else's hands, its head and neck were torn from its body and held high in the air, dripping blood. . . . Chaos turned to tangled fighting and from there to violent battles. The final tally: seventeen people were trampled to death, an unknown number suffered injury.

This fantastical microcosm deftly conveys the hysteria and public murder of innocents during the Cultural Revolution.

The power of Mo's works lies not in his chronicling of events but in his probing stories of individual resilience in the face of relentless forces of instinct, sexuality and history. The inexorability of these pressures may recall the determinism of Tolstoy. Yet even as Mo's characters succumb to these forces, they also make genuine choices in deciding their lives. The tenacity of

human will expresses a vital life force that powers Mo's narrative arcs.

This celebration of human will is hard-won in the face of such strong historical trajectories. Mo came of age during the high tide of socialist theory and socialist-realist literature that emphasized utopian visions of collective revolution. Perhaps in response, Mo's works ask whether responsibility for calamities lies within individuals or in forces beyond their control. As Mo bravely gives his characters responsibility for their individual moral dilemmas and actions, the moral frameworks of his narratives not only depart from socialist certainties but also challenge many liberal and feminist pieties. He depicts instinct and lust, for example, both as frequently destructive and as potentially liberating. Mo described this "humanistic stance" in his Nobel lecture: "I know that nebulous terrain exists in the hearts and minds of every person, terrain that cannot be adequately characterized in simple terms of right and wrong or good and bad." In treating fate, lust and history in ways that defy easy moralizing, Mo's works question official morality.

This questioning may be as significant as his critical portrayals of traumatic history. Against official history with its presumption of unitary truth, his insistence on moral ambiguity challenges authoritarian government. The self-questioning of his narratives is profoundly subversive in a country whose legal system convicts 99 percent of those prosecuted and where more than fifty thousand censors "harmonize" the Internet.

In Mo's own favorite story, "White Dog and the Swing" (1985), the now-middle-aged male narrator guiltily describes an accident that disfigured a childhood friend and altered the course of her life. When he returns years later, she assuages his guilt by telling him that everything was the work of fate. Yet in a brave refusal of further resignation, the now-married mother of mute triplets pleads with the narrator to conceive a child with her: "It's the perfect time in my cycle. . . . I want a child who can talk. . . . If you agree, you'll save me. If you don't agree, you'll destroy me. There are a thousand reasons and ten thousand excuses. Please don't give me reasons and excuses" (my translation). The story ends as the narrator faces this momentous decision. The narrator's great empathy for his friend drives home the frightening freedom made possible by powerful emotions. A mother yearns for a child who can talk; a man yearns to repay a debt.

In *Red Sorghum*, the characters determine their lives by the narrator's grandfather's rape of his grandmother in the sorghum field, his murder of her leprous husband and her taking over of her deceased husband's distillery. The male characters frequently offer fatalistic explanations for these acts, as when the narrator's grandfather first touches the grandmother's foot and feels a premonition "illuminating the path his life would take." The narrator supports this notion of a destined path: "I've always believed that marriages are made in heaven and that people fated to be together are connected by an invisible thread."

In contrast to the male characters' focus on instinct and fate, the grandmother asserts her own agency, even as she lies dying. On her way to deliver food to her husband and his ragtag Chinese militia, she has been fatally shot by the invading Japanese soldiers:

> Grandma lies there soaking up the crisp warmth of the sorghum field. . . . "My Heaven . . . you gave me a lover, you gave me a son, . . . you gave me thirty years of life as robust as red sorghum. . . . don't take it back now. Forgive me, let me go! Have I sinned? Would it have been right to share my pillow with a leper and produce a misshapen, putrid monster to contaminate this beautiful world? What is chastity then? What is the correct path? What is goodness? What is evil? You never told me, so I had to decide on my own. . . . It was my body, and I used it as I thought fitting."

Mo Yan's emphasis on individual will treads on even more sensitive political territory in his works depicting the excesses of the Mao Zedong era. By acknowledging his characters' own desires and choices, Mo refuses to excuse individuals for the violence and cruelty demanded by the party's political movements. *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out* presents stark portrayals of individuals who stand against both political fanaticism and social pressure. Blue Face stubbornly farms his tiny plot of soil as an independent farmer, refusing the party's pressure to join collectivization. Out of loyalty to his master, Ximen Ox chooses to endure a vicious beating at the hands of the Commune leaders. As Blue Face's son, Jiefang, later recalls, "My tears started to flow as soon as they began beating you. I wailed, I begged, I wanted to throw myself on top of you to share your suffering, but my arms were pinned to my sides by the mob that had gathered to watch the spectacle." He goes on:

> You submitted meekly to their cruelty, and that they found perplexing. So many ancient ethical standards and supernatural legends stirred in their hearts and minds. Is this an ox or some sort of god? Maybe it's a Buddha who has borne all this suffering to lead people who have gone astray to enlightenment. People are not to tyrannize other people, or oxen; they must not force other people, or oxen, to do things they do not want to do.

The horror ends when Jiefang watches a Red Guard—Ximen's own son Jinlong—burn Ximen Ox alive: "Oh, no, Ximen Ox, oh, no, Ximen Ox, who would rather die than stand up and pull a plow for the People's Commune." Mo also has Jiefang explicitly note that such individual sacrifice is not in vain: "Ximen Ox died on my dad's land. What he did went a long way toward clearing the minds of people who had become confused and disoriented during the Cultural Revolution. Ah, Ximen Ox, you became the stuff of legend, a mythical being."

Jiefang's emotional commitments make him the most fully evolved character in the novel. After leaving the farming village and becoming a CCP official but trapped in a loveless arranged marriage, Jiefang shows uncommon independence of will

in pursuing love with another woman. Although he knows that his refusal to hide his affair as other officials hide theirs will cost him his position and social status, he chooses to live openly with his lover, a choice that his teenage son and friends admire.

As his writing has evolved over the years, Mo has developed a distinctive narrative control. Many of his works continually unsettle the reader by switching among narrators and going back and forth in time. The often-unannounced intercutting of points of view is sometimes so startling as to feel vertiginous, and the use of metafictional narrative layers often heightens the reader's awareness of his or her own role alongside the author in constructing the fictional world. During the 1980s, after the rise of Deng Xiaoping, Mo and other writers followed the reform-era exhortation to "walk toward the world," and much has been written about the influence of William Faulkner and Gabriel García Márquez, writers for whom Mo has expressed admiration. His fictional worlds have also been compared to the dark absurdity of Kafka and the grand historical vision of Tolstoy.

Yet Mo's unique narrative style is deeply rooted in Chinese literary traditions. His fantastical passages follow in the tradition of "records of the strange," a medieval form of "unofficial history" that documented tales of ghosts, fox fairies who take on human form, animals as moral exemplars and other uncanny phenomena. In the epic sweep of his longest novels, Mo also follows the six-hundred-year-old tradition of Chinese "novels-in-chapters" such as *Journey to the West* and *Dream of the Red Chamber*. *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out* pays homage to this form by beginning each of its fifty-eight chapters with a couplet that hints at the chapter's content.

The combination of traditional Chinese and modernist elements makes Mo's narratives among the most multilayered in world literature. Throughout *Life and Death*, seemingly realistic scenes are interrupted by obvious flights of fancy,

such as when Ximen Pig sees Mao Zedong sitting on the moon, or when dogs gather to party and drink bottles of beer. Yet Mo's narrative playfulness goes far beyond surreal plot elements. He suggests the slipperiness of a single knowable truth through his radical storytelling techniques: tales within tales, flashbacks and flash-forwards, dream sequences and self-mocking quasi autobiography.

The novel alternates among a dizzying cast of narrators that includes the five animals, two principal narrators and the fictional character "Mo Yan." The main narrators turn out to be Blue Face's son Jiefang and the five-year-old "Big-head," who remembers his earlier incarnations as a landowner, a donkey, an ox, a pig, a dog and a monkey. Although Ximen Nao was middle-aged when executed, by the time he comes back to life as Big-head, he is a wizened old man who has lived through the twentieth century. Embodied as a five-year-old, he has the mind of a mature adult and the memory of his six earlier incarnations. In the narrative present of 2005, the two narrators converse as the fifty-five-year-old Jiefang recalls his youth as a farmer's son beside the series of loyal farm animals he ultimately recognizes as one soul's reincarnations.

Mo reveals the date of the narrative present only about a quarter of the way through the novel:

> "[Big-head], I can't let you keep calling me 'Grandpa.' . . . if we go back forty years, that is, the year 1965, during that turbulent spring, our relationship was one of a fifteen-year-old youth and a young ox." . . . I gazed into the ox's eyes and saw a look of mischief, of naïveté, and of unruliness.

Once this narrative framing becomes clear, the reader understands that many passages from the animals' points of view are actually Big-head's memories of his animal incarnations as he speaks to Jiefang. The animals thus possess animal instincts and abilities as well as human knowledge, feelings and thoughts. Ximen Pig even quotes from classical Chinese literature, muses on Ingmar Bergman's films and shows intense interest in current events.

As the novel approaches its climax, "Mo Yan" the fictionalized author breaks the fourth wall, addresses the reader directly and introduces himself as the final narrator. In his youth this quasi-autobiographical character is frequently made the butt of ridicule, but as a young man he gains a position of modest respectability as a writer and is thus able to help Jiefang during his period of disgrace. Nonetheless, the many mocking references to "Mo Yan" add a wry internal commentary on the novel's accounts. Perhaps warning the reader not to believe anyone who claims to present the truth, Ximen Pig cautions against taking "Mo Yan" too seriously:

> According to Mo Yan, as the leaders of the Ximen Village Production Brigade were bemoaning their anticipated fate, feeling utterly helpless, he entered the scene with a plan. But it would be a mistake to take him at his word, since his stories are filled with foggy details and

The combination of traditional Chinese and modernist elements makes Mo's narratives among the most multilayered in world literature.

speculation, and should be used for reference only.

Whereas Mo's metafictional techniques produce psychological distance, the vivid sensuality of his writing creates a gripping sense of immediacy. But only rarely does Mo employ sensual description in the service of human pleasure. Pleasure is often passed over with a euphemism or an ellipsis. Mo's animals experience far more ecstasy in eating and in sex than do humans.

As with his recurrent scenes of defecation and urination, Mo often treats sexuality as an irresistible, bestial force of nature. Yet sexuality can also offer a path to redemption. Jiefang cannot resist his passion and loses his worldly station as a result. But Mo also foregrounds passion's redemptive power, as when making love speeds Jiefang's recovery after thugs hired by his wife viciously beat him. And in the end, the wife who refused to grant him a divorce forgives him on her deathbed, and Jiefang reconciles with his family once he is able to marry his lover.

More than a painter of pleasure, Mo Yan is a master of the sensuality of pain. The flaying alive and skewering of prisoners and the beating and burning of Ximen Ox are just a few of numerous scenes of graphic violence in Mo's works. The description of the ox's beating will bring a reader to tears, but Mo's narrators at other times seem to exult in the sound of whips striking bodies, the vivid red of dripping blood and the stench of burning flesh.

Why is there so much suffering in Mo's works? In his many indelible scenes of pain, Mo confronts history and ideology as these forces mark human bodies. By making his characters' bodily experiences the parchment on which he records his chronicles, he avoids direct criticism while still testifying to history's horrors. In *Big Breasts and Wide Hips*, when a party VIP sentences to immediate death the young children of a Nationalist officer framed for rape, the scene makes a mockery of violence sanctioned in the name of revolution: "On the surface, we'll be executing two children. And yet it's not children we'll be executing, but a reactionary, backward social system."

Might Mo put his characters in profoundly harrowing circumstances in the hope that their suffering might offer a healing catharsis? His sensuality—both of pain and of pleasure—may be key to Mo's underlying faith in redemption. The sensuality of suffering reminds one of Christian penitents who find ecstasy in pain. He may even present the visceral shock of pain to awaken the empathy that could build a better future. Even as we wince at the savagery, we might thank Mo Yan, as the narrator of "Abandoned Child" thanked the watchdog that bit him for his "sudden awakening through pain."

In grappling with human aggression, Mo invites readers to confront the dark depths of the human psyche. Under the duress of that darkness, in a world of extreme greed and corruption, his most sympathetic characters also vindicate the human spirit through their passion for life and their abiding devotion to others. The life force that runs through Mo's fiction powers destruction, but it also powers what

the narrator of *Red Sorghum* calls "the iron law of love."

I return now to the critics who condemn what they see as Mo's acquiescence to his government's repression. Much of the recent press coverage relies on a binary classification of progovernment versus dissident writers. But astute readers recognize his veiled yet clear political critiques. As literary historian and critic Steven Moore wrote in a 2008 review in the *Washington Post*, "Over the last 20 years, Mo Yan has been writing brutally vibrant stories about rural life in China that flout official party ideology and celebrate individualism over conformity. (How he has escaped imprisonment—or worse—I don't know.)"

Mo is neither an apologist for the government nor a reflexive dissident. "A great writer," he avers, "has to be like a whale, breathing steadily alone in the depths of the sea." He believes in individual conscience even as he takes seriously the contradictions within individuals. His characters don't generally exhibit the uncorrupted core of individual selfhood common in American fiction. Yet the characters who might qualify as heroes evince an almost-libertarian allegiance to personal freedom.

One such character is Blue Face, the sole remaining independent farmer in *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out*. A thorn in the side of the Commune, Blue Face demands respect for his independence in a passage that might convey Mo's personal statement of apolitical tolerance:

> No, independent farming means doing it alone. I don't need anybody else. I have nothing against the Communist Party and I definitely have nothing against Chairman Mao. I'm not opposed to the People's Commune or to collectivization. I just want to be left alone to work for myself. Crows everywhere in the world are black. Why can't there be at least one white one? That's me, a white crow!

Just as Mo Yan's metanarrative techniques repeatedly challenge the existence of any unitary truth—whether voiced by the government or by dissidents—it might be wise to accept him as a nuanced, even contradictory, but ultimately principled and heartfelt writer. □

The McChrystal Way of War

By Gary Hart

Stanley McChrystal, *My Share of the Task: A Memoir* (New York: Portfolio, 2013), 464 pp., $29.95.

Unlike Tolstoy's families, uninteresting books are uninteresting in their own way; interesting books all operate on several levels. Retired U.S. Army general Stanley McChrystal's *My Share of the Task* operates on three levels: first, the level of military memoir; second, as a detailed, even intimate, inside perspective on the concurrent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan; and third, and perhaps most important historically, as an account of the U.S. military's transition from traditional wars between nation-states to the unconventional and irregular insurgency warfare of the early twenty-first century.

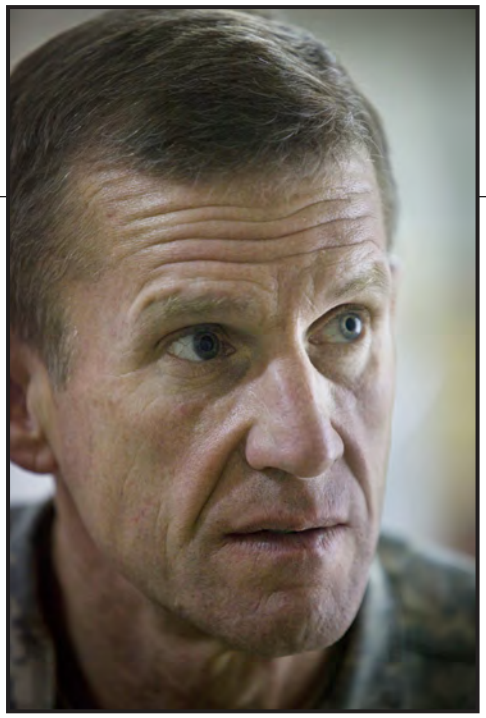
More than one of the endorsers whose words appear on the book's back cover compare *My Share of the Task* favorably to Ulysses Grant's historic memoir. And, at least on the third level of this book, they are right in doing so. This is a scrupulous, though unvarnished, account of a military life as an heir to an army family, a West Point graduate in June 1976, and ultimately as a four-star general officer in command of the NATO-sponsored International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan beginning in June 2009. McChrystal's impressive career spanned one of the most complex periods of U.S. military history and operates, intentionally or not, as a guide through that history. As he says in the book's foreword: "The Army I knew as a child, the one I experienced as a young officer, and the one I left in 2010 were as different as the times they resided in."

Because McChrystal either maintained a detailed diary or made countless calls to colleagues and friends for dates, times and places, his narrative is nailed down with specifics. Shifting bases as he rises through the command structure, McChrystal's book meticulously informs the reader as to where he is (where more often than not his long-suffering wife, Annie, is not) and who his colleagues in arms are in each venue. He assumes blame when things inevitably go wrong but is quick to share credit, almost to a fault, with those in a colleague or staff capacity.

Like Tennyson's Ulysses, McChrystal remembers "my mariners, souls that have toiled, and wrought, and thought with me," and possesses a kind word and generous remark for all who served with him along the way.

It would be a great surprise if this book does not become required reading at U.S. (and perhaps other) military academies and even more so in the network of command and staff colleges for rising officers. There is much to be learned here about strategy, tactics and doctrine, as well as the necessity for their adaptability in often rapidly

Gary Hart is a former U.S. senator from Colorado.



changing circumstances. This is especially true as our military has been transitioning into an era marked by increased integration of services and commands and the rise of special operations. As proof, one need look no further than the relatively recent creation of the U.S. Special Operations Command, one of our most important joint combat commands.

The hallmarks of a soldier's life, the first layer of this memoir, are duty, discipline and ambition. McChrystal's father was a Vietnam veteran, a captain when the son was born, who would rise to become a major general. That McChrystal would attend and graduate from West Point was virtually assumed. The memoir's early chapters trace his path through the staff assignments at various army bases to his inevitable progress up the command structure from company to brigade to battalion and eventually to leadership in newly formed multiservice special-operations combat units such as the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC). Various academic detours to command and staff colleges and even a stint at the Council on Foreign Relations in New York broadened his horizons. Along the way he encountered and traced parallel career courses with other ambitious, fast-rising officers such as David Petraeus and Raymond Odierno.

There are invaluable insights into military thinking, not least the struggle between the destructiveness of conflict and the desire to be engaged when it occurs. Six months after he left the Army Rangers for the Naval War College, he missed the elite unit's participation in Operation Just Cause, the invasion of Panama: "Soldiers don't love war but often feel professional angst when they have to watch one from the sidelines."

McChrystal's Ranger and other experiences qualified him to join a new task force in 1990, a joint special-operations command unit involving multiple services. He thus emerged at the point of the spear in the burgeoning special-operations approach to irregular warfare. The timing coincided with the winding down of the Cold War and the rise of low-intensity conflict. It would take a new generation of officers, and an even newer generation of national-security policy makers, to appreciate the historic transformation that was occurring. Nowhere would this become more evident than in the insurgencies that emerged from the postinvasion occupation of Baghdad and in the resurgence of the Taliban in Afghanistan.

Setting the stage for those insurgencies, Osama bin Laden unified a host of relatively minor conflicts throughout the Middle East and Asia into an Al Qaeda–led struggle against the United States and its stationing of troops in the Muslim holy land of Saudi Arabia during and after the first Gulf War. Then came 9/11, and the world changed. The scramble to mount a force to capture bin Laden and crush Al Qaeda "felt dangerously ad hoc," McChrystal reckons, and our "failure to trap bin Laden in Tora Bora in December and the messy Operation Anaconda . . . seemed to validate this concern." Here as elsewhere, McChrystal refuses to pin the tail on the political donkey, but his message is implicit. He astutely observes:

> I had a nagging feeling that a whole world of Afghan power politics . . . was churning outside our view. I felt like we were high-school students who had wandered into a mafia-owned bar, dangerously unaware of the tensions that filled the room and the authorities who controlled it.

He adds: "The strategy to help build Afghan institutions was well conceived, but the West's effort was poorly informed, organized, and executed." In referring to "the West," he is clearly implicating the political and diplomatic, not the military, command structure. And as his and our government's attention turned from Kabul to Baghdad, he recognizes yet again how unsophisticated and politically naive we were. The romantic balloon of neoconservative fascination with Iraqi expatriates quickly burst: "I came to believe [that] the inaccuracy of Iraqi expatriates' claims about their ability to marshal opposition to Saddam should have made us question their overall credibility." Three-quarters of McChrystal's memoir is given to his service in senior command positions in both Iraq and Afghanistan, which gave him a window into political decision making. His skepticism rose with the increasing transparency of the window as his military roles became more important.

Between McChrystal's West Point graduation in 1976, the year following the end of the Vietnam War, and the post-9/11 dual engagement in Afghanistan and Iraq, the U.S. military, and especially the army, had to rebuild itself—not only structurally but also, and more so, mentally. The U.S. military is not accustomed to losing, and Vietnam was seen as a loss. That experience caused young officers such as McChrystal to study the changing nature of conflict and to call into question the applicability of traditional nation-state military structures, weapons and doctrines to indigenous, postcolonial civil wars and the rise of so-called nonstate actors on the global scene.

Thus, the period of almost exactly twenty-five years between the end of the Vietnam War and the events of 9/11 saw the U.S. military rebuilding its morale at a time when it was also beginning the painful transition from "the most powerful nation on earth" in traditional military terms to a nation facing standoffs with more primitively equipped indigenous forces in two theaters. McChrystal was at or near the

center of this historic transition, and that is what makes his memoir so valuable and important.

In this regard, he should consider a more philosophical account of lessons learned during this period, which could serve as a guidebook for the continuing transition. This memoir does not contain such a gold mine but rather nuggets of valuable ore represented by critical experiences along the way in both theaters. The two central military themes woven throughout are "jointness"—the integration of multiservice command structures and organization (often against stiff traditional service resistance, which he does not focus on)—and the expansion of special operations, notoriously so in the SEAL raid on the bin Laden compound.

By early 2004, the joint special-operations task force originally conceived in 1980, and in which McChrystal first served in 1990, had become JSOC, and he became the first head of this special-operations command. Its principal mission was in many ways a precursor to the dramatic elimination of Osama bin Laden years later. In several chapters McChrystal documents in considerable detail the hunt for Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the Jordanian-born leader of the jihadist insurgency in Iraq, who led the anti-Shia forces, created terrible bloodshed, and prevented even preliminary stability and national unity. This narrative would provide a movie script rivaling *Zero Dark Thirty*. By now, McChrystal was becoming a sophisticated political analyst, as his summary of the motives and mentality of the Zarqawi-led jihad demonstrates.

But McChrystal is critical of so-called enhanced interrogation techniques (waterboarding, sleep deprivation and so on) and the Bush administration's initial insistence on separating the conflict in Iraq from the broader counterterrorism fight. That separation would soon disappear, and Iraq would become the centerpiece of the administration's "war on terrorism." He is equally critical of the chaos in the Baghdad Green Zone when he arrived in 2003 and the resentment of the CIA toward JSOC's role in special operations, believed by the agency at that time to be its special domain. It is a measure of the military's slowness to adapt to the new world of counterinsurgency that the CIA, meant to collect and analyze information, remade itself into a quasi-military special-operations organization.

McChrystal is fond of T. E. Lawrence, the famous Lawrence of Arabia, whose *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* he revisited "countless times," as much as anything because he saw himself in Lawrence's shoes as he tried to corral disputatious Iraqi forces, "more tribes than modern military units." And he demonstrates a human sensitivity more common to our warriors than most civilians realize. Accompanying a Ranger company in bloody Ramadi, he observes a young Ranger pull up a chair for an elderly Iraqi to sit in as a dozen other Iraqis are ordered face down on the ground. Then a four-year-old Iraqi boy, confused, joined the men and placed his face on the ground. Recalling the episode later, McChrystal mused that as he watched what must have been the

Already, national-security experts have judged McChrystal's tenure in Afghanistan as "not a success." But we still have not decided what "success" in that theater might realistically look like.

humiliation of the boy's father, "I thought, not for the first time: *It would be easy for us to lose*."

This thought raises a broader question rarely addressed by senior policy makers in Washington or senior officers in Iraq or Afghanistan: What does it mean "to win"? How do you define "victory" in venues where former European powers finally gave up and left? Is it the minimalist goal of refusing to be driven out by indigenous forces? Or is it the maximalist goal of establishing stable and enduring democratic governments and societies? Though he does not address these questions directly or at length, McChrystal comes much closer than most when he shifts his flag back to Afghanistan as commander of ISAF. As he landed in Kabul in June 2009 to assume command, he Velcroed on his four-star insignia.

Virtually all U.S. and allied operations produced at least a "steady trickle of dead Afghans," which generated little attention and were an "afterthought." Outraged at this casualness and its disconnection from the purpose of our presence, he writes:

> I'd watched as a focus on the enemy in Afghanistan had made little dent in the insurgency's strength over the past eight years and, conversely, had served to antagonize Afghans. Not only was Afghans' allegiance critical, but I did not think we would defeat the Taliban solely by depleting their ranks. We would win by making them irrelevant by limiting their ability to influence the lives of Afghans, positively or negatively. We needed to choke off their access . . . to the population.

A more thoughtful definition of winning or victory is difficult to find.

As he traveled Afghanistan, as he had done as JSOC commander in Iraq, McChrystal refused to wear body armor, carry a weapon or wear sunglasses. He understood symbols and also the negative impact these symbols represented to citizens in both countries. From his account, the higher in rank and more responsible he became, the more sensitive he became to the noncombat side of our military presence and the greater the burden he felt to dispel images of occupier or conqueror. After a lengthy period of touring, watching and listening, he concluded that his job and that of ISAF were "as much about building Afghan confidence as killing Taliban insurgents."

With more rank and responsibility, he also became more aware of the political, social and cultural dimensions of his mission and presence. It is interesting to watch his subconscious, or at least unarticulated, transition over many years and deployments from first-class warrior to seasoned commander and then sophisticated uniformed diplomat. It is a transition few senior-grade officers make with much success and marks the mind of a man willing to watch, learn and expand in scope and outlook.

McChrystal was able to make the transition, with notable difficulties, as much as anything because he was fully aware of its necessity. The warrior's code is based on separation of civilian and military command and the subordination of the latter to the former. It is possible to rise

to two- or even three-star rank and avoid much of the messy world of politics, including political journalism. But, as many have proved, it is virtually impossible to do so with the fourth star on your shoulder. As McChrystal's experience proves, a senior commander at his level deals at least as much with political realities, both in the nation he serves and the nations in which he serves, as he does with military realities. If nothing else, congressional committees often summon service chiefs and combat commanders to testify, and they are challenged to state where their judgments may differ from their civilian superiors, including the commander in chief.

"The process of formulating, negotiating, articulating, and then prosecuting even a largely military campaign involved politics at multiple levels that were impossible to ignore," he concludes. He later continues: "As a professional soldier I was committed to implementing to the best of my ability any policy selected by civilian leadership." One seriously doubts whether, on reflection, he might stand by such a doctrine were an unhinged set of civilian leaders to emerge with designs beyond the military means available to achieve them.

And this too often is the rub: civilian commanders, up to and including the commander in chief, expect field commanders to meet military and political goals with fewer resources than their professional judgment tells them are required. After making their case and being denied, usually on political grounds, for more troops and support, the commanders in the field are expected to salute and say, "Yes, sir." The history of American warfare is replete with instances of mismatches between political expectations and military resources available. And a commander is torn between the political duty of obeying his often-misguided civilian superiors and his moral duty to protect his troops.

By late 2009, toward the end of the Obama administration's first full year in office, the struggle over the definition of victory in Afghanistan reemerged in the context of the debate over another surge of troops and the dimensions of such a surge. The discussions that took place via teleconferences between the White House and the senior military and diplomatic figures in the embassy compound in Kabul focused on linguistics. Was it our goal to "defeat" or "degrade" the Taliban? McChrystal defined the mission as: "Defeat the Taliban: Secure the Population." Under questioning from an unidentified White House participant (it may have been Vice President Biden) as to why the Taliban had to be crushed or destroyed, McChrystal responded that defeat in military doctrine, since Sun Tzu, was rendering the enemy incapable of achieving its goals. "I never thought we'd crush the Taliban in a conventional military sense," he writes. "I hoped to defeat it by making it irrelevant."

McChrystal's book contains many unaddressed undercurrents that require further thought, if for no other reason than that future Iraqs and Afghanistans are just an insurgency or terrorist attack away. It should be instilled in four-star generals that

retirement comes with a requirement to write lessons learned: What did we do right that deserves to enter our doctrine under similar conditions? What did we do wrong that should never be repeated? And why did we do it?

My Share of the Task will attract attention for lessons it may hold concerning that elusive standard called leadership. It is not a primer on this topic. McChrystal does not provide sustained reflections on the nature of leadership or its qualities. He does offer anecdotal accounts of ways in which he sought to lead his troops and his subordinate officers. And those are valuable anecdotes for this purpose. But he might have expanded, and still might, on leadership's more profound aspects: ability to see over the horizon (the "vision thing"), ability to devise new policies, programs and methods to deal with anticipated changes, and finally the ability to persuade others that the old ways must give way to the new.

McChrystal's military career traces the arc of transition from set-piece major battles that have characterized nation-state wars for three and a half centuries to the advent of a new kind of conflict, whose roots are centuries old but whose recent resurrection is characterized by low-intensity, largely urban, nonuniformed insurgencies whose adherents notoriously violate established rules of war. His career marks an extremely important era of transitional leadership. Already, national-security experts have judged his tenure in Afghanistan as "not a success." But we still have not decided what "success" in that theater might realistically look like.

While insiders debate whether counterinsurgency, as practiced by generals such as McChrystal, Petraeus and others, is or should be the prevailing doctrine of twenty-first-century American warfare, realities on the ground in Afghanistans yet

McChrystal was right to tender his resignation. The president might have given more thought to rejecting it.

to come must be addressed in practical ways that will often differ from historical and traditional doctrines. The world of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries requires experimentation, with all the uncertainties and likelihood of failure such experiments imply. A mature perspective will show that Stanley McChrystal was among the few willing to experiment in the service of his nation in an age of transition and transformation. That alone is a demonstration of leadership.

It is something of a comment on our times that McChrystal's military career ended in controversy. All who followed his story in 2010 are familiar with the circumstances in which a journalist, invited to join a convivial evening with McChrystal, his wife and his senior staff, reported on unguarded remarks, which McChrystal later deemed "unacceptable," casually critical of the Obama White House. The accuracy of that report remains in doubt. Nevertheless, he flew to Washington and offered his resignation, which the president promptly accepted. The entire incident occupies only a page and a half of his four-hundred-page memoir. But upon publication, this incident dominated the news in the *New York Times* and elsewhere.

My Share of the Task will take its place among books on leadership for a time—and perhaps for considerable time. But those looking for guidance on leadership might also ask why our society and culture dismiss leaders so casually. There seems to be a disjunction, a mismatch, between the search for leaders and demonstrations of leadership over a lifetime and the often-incidental reasons for dismissing them when they are presented. McChrystal makes no excuses. It is unclear whether he was even aware of the controversial remarks made during what seems to have been a crowded evening. Nevertheless, he accepts responsibility and metaphorically falls on his sword.

A mature nation can surely find a way to reconcile the needs of journalism with the preservation of serious leadership. At present, there seems to be no "give" in the system, no ability to weigh perceived transgressions against the larger scope and scale of command and leadership. McChrystal was right to tender his resignation. The president might have given more thought to rejecting it.

For McChrystal was and is a leader, one with invaluable experience at multiple levels of the changing nature of warfare and the transformation in our military structures and doctrines that those changes are going to require for some time to come. Replacement in his command in Afghanistan need not have required his dismissal from active-duty service in that rare capacity of wise man in a department, and even in a government, not overburdened with wise men and women. To their credit, Yale University and those responsible for his engagement there understand the value his lifetime of leadership experience offers to students who may themselves someday be called upon to demonstrate leadership in a variety of transformational environments.

I, for one, would like to meet him and thank him for his service. □

Reassessing the Coolidge Legacy

By John R. Coyne Jr.

Amity Shlaes, *Coolidge* (New York: Harper, 2013), 576 pp., $35.00.

Amity Shlaes, the economic historian who almost single-handedly forced a reappraisal of the 1930s with her best-selling *The Forgotten Man,* now sets out to do the same for Calvin Coolidge, one of our forgotten presidents—and, where not forgotten, imperfectly remembered or purposely misrepresented.

In *Where They Stand,* his book on presidential performance, Robert Merry, editor of this magazine, writes of Calvin Coolidge and his low standing among historians:

> By the standard of voter assessment, he merits respect for retaining the presidency after his nineteen-month incumbency [after succeeding Warren G. Harding, who died in office] and then retaining it for his party four years later. He presided over peace, prosperity, and domestic tranquility for nearly six years. . . . and Coolidge detractors might inquire whether their ratings stem from the fact that he was among the twentieth century's most concise exponents of limited government.

Although Coolidge's economic policies are held by some to have created an unsustainable boom that led to the Great Depression, the argument that Coolidge bears responsibility for that economic calamity is more theoretical than provable. And in fact, the debate about what brought on the Depression remains unresolved, along with arguments about whether the measures taken to combat it worked in significant ways or just exacerbated the problem until it was resolved by World War II.

But what is not theoretical is the prosperity that buoyed our nation during the Coolidge administration, as documented by Shlaes in this impressively researched and engagingly written chronicle of a successful president and his administration. In the process, she brings one of our more admirable presidents back to life, both as a man and as a representative of a fast-fading era.

As an old-school Republican and a Yankee from the days before New England became a quaint theme park for the pretty people, Coolidge believed in economy in all things, including language. And Shlaes wastes no words. Despite the length and heft of her volume, there's no padding, no political or ideological skywriting, no invented drama. She shows us the man as he seemed—and wanted—to be and allows the life, the words, the actions and policies, the politics and the country itself to carry the story.

John R. Coyne Jr. is a former White House speechwriter and the coauthor of *Strictly Right: William F. Buckley and the American Conservative Movement* (Wiley, 2007).

"There are plenty of personal events in Coolidge's life," writes Shlaes, "many of them sad ones, but he was principally a man of work. Indeed, Coolidge was a rare kind of hero: a minimalist president, an economic general of budgeting and tax cuts. Economic heroism is subtler than other forms of heroism and therefore harder to appreciate."

In Coolidge's personal life, writes Shlaes, from boyhood on, he "brought saving to a high art. Coolidge was so parsimonious that he did not buy a house in Massachusetts even after he became governor, so careful that the Coolidges owned no car until after he achieved the presidency, so strict about money that his son John never forgot it." When the father became president, writes Shlaes, his younger son Calvin Jr. was working in a tobacco field in Hatfield, Massachusetts. Some friends suggested they wouldn't be working anymore if their fathers were president. The boy replied, "If your father were my father, you would."

As president, Coolidge applied his commitment to thrift and fiscal responsibility to the federal budget "with a discipline sadly missing in his well-intentioned predecessor, Warren G. Harding." Under Coolidge, Shlaes points out, the federal debt was reduced: "The top income tax rate came down by half, to 25 percent," and "the federal budget was always in surplus. Under Coolidge, unemployment was 5 percent or even 3 percent. . . . wages rose and interest rates came down so that the poor might borrow more easily. Under Coolidge, the rich came to pay a greater share of the income tax."

And think about this: "When in 1929 the thirtieth president climbed onto a train at Union Station to head back home to Massachusetts after his sixty-seven months in office, the federal government was smaller than when he had become president in 1923."

Shlaes guides us through the early years in some detail, from his birth as John Calvin Coolidge (the John is gradually shed) in 1872 in Plymouth Notch, Vermont, to John and Victoria Coolidge, through his boyhood in Plymouth, helping his storekeeper father and attending public school, then to the Black River Academy in Ludlow, Vermont, from which he graduated. He was admitted to Amherst College in Massachusetts, where after a slow start he hit his stride, graduating with honors in 1895. In his senior year, he entered a national essay contest sponsored by the Sons of the American Revolution and won first prize, a gold medal worth $150.

Upon graduation, he read law in a firm in Northampton, Massachusetts, a town that would become his home. In 1897, he passed the bar, opened a law office and began his involvement in Republican Party politics. He was appointed to the city council in 1900, elected and then reelected city solicitor, and appointed county clerk of courts in 1903.

In 1904, now chairman of the Republican City Committee in Northampton and rising in his profession, he still couldn't find the wife he wanted. Apparently he didn't have an easy way with women. "Perhaps the right girl would know

to break through herself and get to him, first," Shlaes writes. "Finally, she did."

Coolidge was living in a rooming house, with women nearby at Smith College and the Clarke School for the Deaf. One morning, still in his underwear, he planted his hat on his head and began shaving. He was startled by a peal of female laughter coming through his open window. The laugher was Grace Anna Goodhue, a teacher at the Clarke School. She'd seen him shaving in his hat while watering the flowers outside her dormitory. "Soon she sent him a pot of flowers, and he sent her his calling card. Their first date was at a political rally at Northampton City Hall." And a year later, in 1905, they married.

Of the match, a friend of Coolidge observed: "Miss Goodhue had taught the deaf to hear; now she might be able to teach the mute to speak."

Shlaes writes, "Six and a half years younger than Calvin, Grace was graceful, like her name. . . . She made friends everywhere." A Coolidge acquaintance called her "a creature of spirit, fire and dew," and Shlaes reports that other men "also found Grace stunning, and were stunned to find that she favored the quiet lawyer."

But favor him she did, and that remained the case throughout their married life, with Grace supplying the brightness, enthusiasm and joy in each day that was perhaps lacking in his. (Alice Roosevelt Longworth would observe that he looked like he was "weaned on a pickle.") He provided stability, certainty and accomplishment. To be sure, there were tragic interludes, most notably the death of Calvin Jr. from blood poisoning—a death, as Shlaes points out, with parallels to the death of Abraham Lincoln's son in the White House. But their marriage remained solid.

Once married, Coolidge rose steadily—to the state legislature in 1907, mayor of Northampton in 1910, the Massachusetts state senate in 1912 and senate president in 1914, lieutenant governor in 1916 and governor in 1919. As governor, he won national attention for his stand during the Boston police strike, with his telegram to Samuel Gompers resonating with voters across the country: "There is no right to strike against the public safety by anybody, anywhere, any time."

At the 1920 Republican convention in Chicago, Coolidge arrived as Massachusetts's favorite son, but party leaders chose Ohio's Warren G. Harding

In 1923, when President Harding died, the national debt stood at more than $22 billion. When President Coolidge left office six years later, the debt had been reduced to less than $17 billion.

as their presidential standard-bearer. After disagreements among leaders and delegates, however, Coolidge emerged as the unanimous vice presidential choice. Once elected, Coolidge kept a low profile and maintained a discreet distance from what would become a scandal-ridden administration. Harding himself was not a venal man, but he surrounded himself with people who were.

In fact, writes Shlaes, he was ultimately the victim of his own congenial temperament. "Harding, winningly rueful as always, even quoted his own father at a press conference to explain his troubles. It was good that Warren had not been a girl, his father had said. He would always be in the family way—because he couldn't say no."

On the night of August 2, 1923, while visiting John Coolidge in Plymouth Notch, Calvin and Grace retired early. There was a knock on the door (there was no phone service), his father answered, then woke them with the news: President Harding had died in San Francisco. A special phone line was installed; Coolidge prepared a statement of condolence; he consulted with Secretary of State Charles Evans Hughes. As Shlaes reports, "By kerosene lamplight, before a small group, . . . in a small town far away from even the county seat or the state capital, a new U.S. president was sworn in by his father [a notary public]."

The Coolidges went back to bed, then drove to Rutland in the morning. "At Rutland, a crowd of two thousand waited; the chief superintendent wanted to supply a special train, but the Coolidges preferred to take the 9:35." As he left Vermont, Coolidge looked ahead with simple confidence. "I believe I can swing it," he said.

And swing it he did, dedicating the remainder of the first term to cleaning up the messes left by Harding, then proceeding to bring the federal budget under control. In 1924, he was elected president in his own right, campaigning on a platform of reducing taxes, cutting the federal debt, passing protective-tariff legislation, rejecting farm subsidies and enacting the eight-hour work day. It was an upbeat campaign, emphasizing peace and prosperity, effectively making use of the medium of radio for the first time, and with enthusiastic support from figures like Will Rogers and Al Jolson, who traveled to Washington to sing "Keep Cool with Coolidge" on the White House lawn.

Coolidge won handily, beating Nebraska's Democratic governor, Charles W. Bryan (William Jennings Bryan's brother), and the Progressive Party candidate, Wisconsin senator Robert LaFollette.

During his first full term, Coolidge's emphasis was on encouraging economic prosperity; working closely with his budget director to cut costs and collaborating with his secretary of the treasury, Andrew Mellon, to cut taxes; and pushing the Revenue Acts of 1924 and 1926 through Congress. In 1923, when President Harding died, the national debt stood at more than $22 billion. When President Coolidge left office six years later, the debt had been reduced to less than $17 billion. He had restored integrity to the nation's financial

balance sheet by cutting the war debt and steadily reducing tax rates. Day by day, much like a Yankee storekeeper, he kept track of government operations, scrutinizing expenditures and cutting wherever possible. He exercised direct control over the Bureau of the Budget, which he had created, and periodically spoke to the nation by radio, giving an account of his management of the national enterprise.

Add to the unprecedented prosperity the protracted period of peace, and it seemed unthinkable that Coolidge wouldn't run for a second full term and win in a landslide. But that was not on the agenda. Coolidge, in his distinctive Yankee way, had said no. And having said no, there would be no changing his mind, no matter how hard his party's leadership pleaded.

In 1927, the Coolidges spent much of the summer at a lodge in South Dakota. It was here, writes Shlaes, that Mrs. Coolidge and a trusted Secret Service agent went for a long hike and apparently got lost. Their extended absence caused the president some irritation and provided gossips with the only potentially salacious tidbit ever served up by the Coolidges, a close and unshakably married couple. The president and his wife were received enthusiastically by Dakotans, many of whom had migrated there from eastern states such as Vermont (among them Coolidge relatives) with many of the same economic problems. From the summer White House near Rapid City, Coolidge awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross to Charles Lindbergh, approved the work at Mount Rushmore and gave a much-needed boost to a variety of projects. The Coolidge visit, writes Shlaes, "was a crucial one for the South Dakota economy."

During that summer, Coolidge was at the top of his game, enjoying unusually high national popularity, sure to win his election to a second full term in the coming year. On August 2, the fourth anniversary of Coolidge taking office, he and Senator Arthur Capper drove into Rapid City for a press conference. Meeting reporters, "Coolidge became downright chatty," talking about his record on peace, the reduction of the national debt and tax cuts. Reports Shlaes, "After the press conference Coolidge waved the reporters off, but mentioned casually that they might want to come back a little later; he would have an announcement."

Coolidge had given his confidential stenographer a note with instructions to make copies on twenty small slips of paper. "The slips were folded. At the conference itself, Coolidge asked a simple question: 'Is everybody here?' He then handed the reporters the slips." They contained just twelve words: "I do not choose to run for President in nineteen twenty eight."

And that was it. No further comment, and reporters stampeded to move the story. The reaction, national and international, was predictable and especially intense among Republicans, who mounted campaigns aimed at persuading Coolidge to change his mind. But he had made his decision.

"New Englanders relished their independence," writes Shlaes, "which

was why Coolidge had said, 'I do not choose,' emphasizing his own authority." She quotes Edmund W. Starling, head of Coolidge's Secret Service detail: "Nothing is more sacred to a New England Yankee than this privilege as an individual to make up his own mind."

And when he left office and turned the White House keys over to his successor, Coolidge could take pride in his conscientious and frugal economic stewardship. And what of other areas? In foreign policy, Coolidge was neither an isolationist nor an internationalist idealist. America's involvement in World War I, an essentially senseless venture, had left it with a crushing debt that his administration successfully paid down. His primary foreign-policy concerns included keeping the United States free from entangling foreign alliances and strengthening its commercial relations, especially with Latin America. There were important U.S. commercial interests in Honduras and Venezuela, with troops to safeguard our interests in the Dominican Republic, Haiti and Cuba. At times, U.S. policies in Latin America were heavy-handed—so much so, in fact, that Coolidge attended a Pan-American conference in Cuba to assure America's southern neighbors of the U.S. commitment to good relations.

Shlaes provides a vivid account of the trip: Early in 1928, as the USS *Texas* steamed into Havana Harbor, "the people of Cuba gathered to mount the greatest welcome they had ever given a foreign leader." At the conference, in addition to President Gerardo Machado of Cuba, "leaders from twenty-one Latin American nations were also in attendance." In his remarks, "Coolidge spoke of respect, democracy, and law," as well as in favor of "the principle of self-government for Latin American nations." He spoke against force and for the need to heed "the admonition to beat our swords to plowshares." Estimates were of as many as two hundred thousand people celebrating the visit in the streets of Havana. According to the Associated Press, "It was a spectacle such as this American President has never before participated in and recalled to mind the clamorous

In foreign policy, Coolidge was neither an isolationist nor an internationalist idealist.

entry of Woodrow Wilson into Paris." Cubans, writes Shlaes, "like the citizens of so many other nations, were not merely glad to undertake a common project with the United States. They were eager to do so. All they were waiting for was an invitation." One result: Secretary of State Frank Kellogg issued a white paper arguing against military intervention in Latin America.

Kellogg, along with French foreign minister Astride Briand, later gave his name to the Kellogg-Briand Pact, which renounced war as a means of conflict resolution. The treaty was signed in 1928 in Paris by fifteen nations (and later by most of the world's nations) and ratified by the U.S Senate after intense debate, 85-1. For the administration, it was both a political and diplomatic victory. "The vast majority of the United States had wanted this treaty," writes Shlaes, as had many of the smaller nations of the world. Coming as it did on the eve of W. H. Auden's "low dishonest decade," the treaty has faded into history as just another ineffectual attempt to bring peace to the world. But at the time it was considered a great achievement. As Shlaes writes, "The treaty had value as law, as precedent, as a model. If the United States leaned on law, the restless nations of the world might do the same."

For his efforts, Kellogg received a Nobel Prize, as did Vice President Charles Dawes for his work on behalf of post–World War I currency stabilization in Germany. Two Nobels—not bad for an administration not often credited with an imaginative foreign policy.

As Coolidge's White House departure neared, he expressed doubts about the future—and about the abilities of his successor to deal with it. Shlaes summarizes his thinking: "The downturn was coming. But bad policy, especially Hoover's spending policy, would make any downturn worse; the deficit Hoover ran might cause investors to lose confidence in the United States and gold to go to Europe. Then the recession would worsen."

As predicted, during his first term, "Hoover had spent more money than he should have; he had spent like a Democrat. But that spending hadn't been enough." Yet Coolidge had even less faith in Hoover's Democratic challenger, Franklin Roosevelt, to set things right. As Shlaes writes, "Coolidge was concerned that economy—savings—might not occur, whatever the candidate had promised. . . . There was another problem: the Democrats would pursue action for action's sake, continuing where Hoover had started." In Coolidge's words, "That only means more experimenting with legislation."

In a speech at Madison Square Garden in support of Hoover's reelection in 1932, Coolidge

> opened with a lengthy defense of Hoover and warned against switching horses in the middle of a race. But Coolidge also got to a more philosophical point. Roosevelt might mention the forgotten man, but he could not claim to be the only one who would serve him. . . . the GOP had done its part for the forgotten man: "Always the end has been to improve the well-being of the ordinary run of people."

Shlaes adds, "Roosevelt attacked the rich, but his attack seemed odd, coming as it did from a wealthy man. More loyal than he felt, Coolidge defended Hoover, noting it was important to remember that Hoover came from a common background: 'He was not born to the enjoyment of generations of inherited wealth.'"

After Roosevelt won, writes Shlaes, Coolidge told a friend, "I feel that I no longer fit in with these times." The country was turning, and New England and all that it symbolized were passé or worse. "Even Robert Frost, who had felt himself unassailable, now sensed that he was wrong for what he called 'these times.'" It was the dawning of the age of the ideologue. Shlaes quotes Isidor Schneider, writing in the left-wing *Nation,* as accusing Frost of replying to contemporary ideas "with know-nothing arrogance."

Shlaes recounts that on January 5, 1933:

> The newspapers greeted Americans with stories of the incoming administration. . . . Now it seemed that Roosevelt would take greater license than other Presidents. 'Plan Free Hand for Roosevelt,' read the headline on page one of *The Wall Street Journal.* Coolidge went to the office but did not feel well; around ten his secretary, Harry Ross, drove him home.

When, around lunchtime, Grace went upstairs and called to him, he did not respond. She found him dead in his dressing room. Writes Shlaes, "He had been shaving, just as he had been the first time she saw him that day through the window on Round Hill." But this time, there was no laughter.

The funeral was "astonishingly simple for a former president." There were few guests—among them Al Smith, Bernard Baruch, Eleanor Roosevelt, the Hoovers and old friends. "There was no eulogy, no address, just two hymns. . . . Even in the duration of the event, Coolidge made himself present: the service lasted only twenty-two minutes."

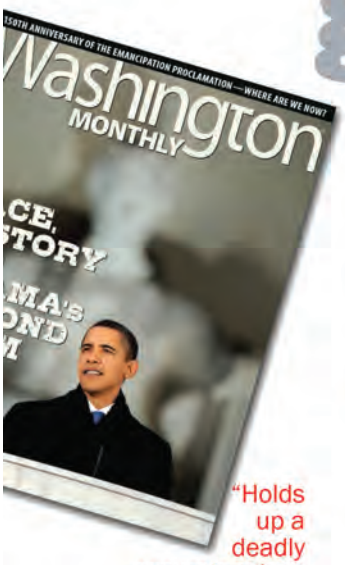
Al Smith observed that Coolidge's greatest accomplishment was "to restore the dignity and prestige of the presidency when it had reached 'the lowest ebb in our history.'" He added that Coolidge was "in the class of presidents who were distinguished for character more than for heroic achievements."

"But everyone knew," writes Shlaes, "even on that Northampton day in January 1933, that sometimes character mattered more than achievements; or that the achievements of character might not always be evident at first."

In his life and service to his country, Calvin Coolidge championed many of our once-basic national ideals, among them "civility to one's opponents, silence, smaller government, trust, certainty, restraint, respect for faith, federalism, economy, and thrift," all concepts not always reflected today in our politics, our economic thought or our dealings with one another.

Amity Shlaes, in this splendid and highly readable study, makes a powerful case for a reevaluation of our nearly forgotten president and the old American verities and virtues he personified. □

get the inside story



"Holds up a deadly accurate mirror to the Washington political culture"
—Michael Beschloss

every day

The *Washington Monthly* online edition brings you up to the minute with news and opinion through our blogs, "Political Animal," "Ten Miles Square," and founder Charles Peters' online version of "Tilting at Windmills." You can read a selection of *Washington Monthly* articles and features, delve into our archives, check out the latest political book reviews, and more — you get it first, and you get it fast, just by visiting the *Washington Monthly* online at www.WashingtonMonthly.com.

in recent issues . . .

every issue

The *Washington Monthly* print edition keeps you informed through important stories you won't find elsewhere — stories on politics, government and culture written by some of the brightest writers and commentators in the business. Choose from the most book reviews of any politically focused magazine. And each fall, check out the *Monthly*'s comprehensive — and comprehensible — rankings of the nation's colleges and universities. These days, with the chaos in world markets, the upcoming election with its bruising battles over key issues affecting our future and our finances, the *Monthly*'s in-depth coverage has never been more important.

You want the issues you care about — the issues we write about — to be heard by those with the power to shape policy. We make sure they are by hand-delivering the *Washington Monthly* to every member of Congress, White House officials, and members of the national press corps. Shouldn't we be delivering this essential reading to you? Subscribe today.

an important voice on the political and cultural scene

Washington MONTHLY

Subscribe Today
www.WashingtonMonthly.com
or call toll-free 1-888-238-0047

X

Underwriting lifelong relationships.

We are Starr Companies, a global insurance organization supporting those who not only dare to reach for the farthest shores, but thrive when they get there. That is why, from the East Coast to the Far East, our exceptional teams set new standards for risk management across a broad spectrum of industries. Because we seek out the bold ones. The visionaries. The dreamers and doers. And when we find them, we don't merely stand by their side. We put our name in ink, below theirs, as they venture forth to explore, discover and achieve the amazing. Starr Companies: **Underwriting the future.**

STARR
COMPANIES
GLOBAL INSURANCE & INVESTMENTS

starrcompanies.com

Accident & Health • Aviation & Aerospace • Casualty • Construction • Crisis Management • Energy • Environmental
Financial Lines • Marine • Professional Liability • Property • Public Entity • Specialty Products • Travel Assistance