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Freddy Gray **Flays David Cameron**
Geoffrey Kabaservice **Revives L. Brent Bozell Jr.**
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THE PROMISE OF AMERICAN NATIONALISM

by Michael Lind



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Misusing History

By Jacob Heilbrunn

The lesson of history, the British scholar A. J. P. Taylor once observed, is that there is no lesson. It is not a stricture, however, that has ever enjoyed much acknowledgment, let alone acceptance. Quite the contrary. In the past few months, a fresh spasm of analogizing the past to the present has taken place as politicians and journalists, at home and abroad, draw upon a rich treasure chest of events—World War I, whose one hundredth anniversary arrives this August, the Munich agreement in 1938 or the Cold War—to explain foreign affairs. At times, the battles over the meaning of the past almost seem to eclipse in intensity the original events themselves.

In Britain, for example, Education Secretary Michael Gove created a flap in January when he came out swinging against Sir Richard Evans, Regius Professor of History at Cambridge, in the *Daily Mail*. “Why does the Left insist on belittling true British heroes?” Gove asked. Far from being about incompetent political and military leaders mindlessly sending millions of young lads to their deaths in the trenches on the western front, the Great War, we were told, was truly the stuff of greatness. Evans, Gove claimed, had traduced the efforts of British soldiers and “attacked

the very idea of honouring their sacrifice as an exercise in ‘narrow tub-thumping jingoism.’”

If Gove pointed to World War I to inculcate British national pride in a new generation, Japanese prime minister Shinzo Abe took a slightly different course. Speaking at Davos in January, he raised eyebrows among the international elite by alleging that Japan and China were in a “similar situation” to Britain and Imperial Germany on the eve of World War I and by noting that close economic ties had not prevented those European nations from going to war. Abe called for greater communication channels between the two powers to avoid misunderstandings (though he himself has gone out of his way to incite Chinese ire by espousing Japanese nationalism, as evidenced by his recent visit to the Yasukuni shrine, where the remains of soldiers, including numerous war criminals, are interred). A Chinese foreign ministry spokesman, in turn, dismissed Abe’s allusion to World War I: “Such remarks by Japanese leaders are to evade the history of aggression, to confuse the audience.”

In the United States, which did not enter World War I until 1917 and, unlike Great Britain, doesn’t have an uneasy conscience about the conflict, most historical allusions have centered on World War II. To forestall complaints that she had been soft on Russia during her tenure at the State Department, Hillary Clinton said in a speech at the Boys and Girls Club of Long Beach, California, that Russian president Vladimir Putin was doing in Ukraine what “Hitler did back

Jacob Heilbrunn is editor of *The National Interest*.

Historical comparisons often amount to an emotionally satisfying but misleading exercise in manipulating past figures and events as props to justify current policy stances.

in the '30s." She added, "All the Germans that were . . . the ethnic Germans, the Germans by ancestry who were in places like Czechoslovakia and Romania and other places, Hitler kept saying they're not being treated right. I must go and protect my people, and that's what's gotten everybody so nervous." And in the *Wall Street Journal*, former Bush administration official Douglas J. Feith echoed Clinton:

With a victory in Ukraine under his belt, Mr. Putin might manufacture grounds for a Russian military intervention to protect the ethnic Russians in Latvia. They could be for him what Czechoslovakia's Sudeten Germans were for Hitler in 1938: a pretext for aggression. If Mr. Putin thinks NATO is bluffing when it says it will defend the Baltic states, he may call that bluff. If he's right, he could destroy NATO without war, the very alliance that destroyed the Soviet Union without war. Nice.

But just how much do such comparisons really elucidate about international affairs? Do they provide a reliable guide to the present? Or do they amount to an emotionally satisfying but misleading exercise in manipulating past historical figures and events as props to justify current policy stances?

Consider Hillary Clinton. After her embarrassing record of engaging in threat inflation to justify voting for the Iraq War, you might think that she, of all people, would be more cautious about drawing parallels between Putin and Hitler. Putin, after all, is acting upon traditional Russian national interests in Crimea. In preaching

racial conquest, Hitler went far beyond trying to rectify what many contemporary observers saw as the injustices of the Treaty of Versailles. Hitler was a reckless gambler who launched a genocidal war unparalleled in history.

This is worlds removed from Putin. But such details have never deterred the liberal hawks and neoconservatives from routinely invoking Munich, robbing it of all meaning. The neocons in particular have a penchant for characterizing any action that can be construed as attempting to pursue diplomacy rather than a reflexive resort to force (in Iran, North Korea, Syria, Russia and so on) as truckling to the enemy, a futile and craven effort in—here we go again—appeasement. President Obama thus has to explain what his Iran policy is not before he can begin to explain what he hopes it will accomplish. As Yale historian Paul Kennedy sardonically observed in these pages in 2010, "Nothing so alarms a president or prime minister in the Western world than to be accused of pursuing policies of appeasement. Better to be accused of stealing from a nunnery, or beating one's family."

When it comes to World War I, similar cautions may be sounded. No doubt there are some unsettling parallels between 1914 and today that should not be brushed aside. Substitute America in the position of Great Britain, China for Wilhelmine Germany and Russia for the Habsburg Empire, and either Ukraine or the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands can serve as a contemporary Balkans, where a small power enlists greater

ones, creating a general catastrophe based on a series of miscalculations. Indeed, then, as today, a complex web of financial interdependence existed right before 1914, as Charles Emmerson reminds us in his excellent *1913: In Search of the World Before the Great War*. And then, as today, no one really wanted a wider war or expected a protracted one.

Still, the sense of complacency that existed in prewar Europe has vanished. In 1908, President of the Board of Trade Winston Churchill could assure his Manchester constituents that London's preeminence would never fade: "It will be the same . . . when the year 2000 has dawned upon the world." With the Battle of the Marne, however, the belief in war as a shining crusade for liberal values disappeared in the mire and muck of the western front, which, among other reasons, is why Michael Gove's sallies against Richard Evans and other historians for subverting Britain's glorious role constitute an antiquarian exercise in nostalgia. As Evans himself observed, "How can you possibly claim that Britain was fighting for democracy and liberal values when the main ally was Tsarist Russia? That was a despotism that put Germany in the shade."

Indeed, the dominant feeling after the war was one of betrayal and treachery as the reputations of the British generals, among others, suffered a brutal battering. As the novelist Ford Madox Ford, who fought in the Battle of the Somme, observed in his magnum opus *Parade's End*, "All these men given into the hands of the most cynically carefree intriguers in long corridors who



made plots that harrowed the hearts of the world. All these men toys, all these agonies mere occasions for picturesque phrases to be put into politicians' speeches without heart or even intelligence." Those very sentiments continue to resound down to the present, as Americans and Britons grapple with the fallout from the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Nor is this all. There are other reasons that suggest a return to the mindset of World War I is improbable. The old European order, based on consanguine and rickety monarchies, that Christopher Clark eloquently describes in *The Sleepwalkers*—"Opaque and unpredictable, feeding a pervasive mood of mutual distrust, even within the respective alliances"—is gone. Instead, integration, not disintegration, is bien-pensant Europe's credo.

Which is why the Cold War is likely no better an analogy to the present than either of the world wars. In the *New Republic*, Paul Berman declares, "We do seem to

be on the brink of Cold War II, which might end up being a long affair.” But this, too, represents self-indulgent nostalgia for a bygone era when intellectuals saw themselves as on the ramparts fighting for freedom. America, for one thing, cannot wage a cold war solo. A Europe intent on overcoming its bellicose past may agree to economic sanctions, but it is loath to engage in a real confrontation with Russia. Moreover, if the best Russia’s latest *Vozhd’*, or leader, can do is to restore a few shards of the former Soviet empire, then there’s room for skepticism about how well he is really doing. Putin presides over a sclerotic country and a move into eastern Ukraine, let alone the Baltic states, would present the prospect of a messy entanglement, complete with partisan warfare. Anyway, it’s a long march from Sevastopol to the Elbe.

If a historical analogy can help to explain current events, then the most salient one is probably not a war, but the Treaty of Versailles. It created a wounded nationalism in Germany, both through the demand for exorbitant reparations, which Germany finally paid off in October 2010, and through Article 231, the war-guilt clause,

which was viewed as an odious national humiliation that had to be avenged. Today it is the malignant spirit of Versailles that hovers over Putin’s Moscow. The triumphalist mood that enveloped Washington after the collapse of the Soviet empire, the zeal to expand NATO up to Russia’s borders, the intervention in the Balkans, the calamitous war in Iraq, and the ouster of Muammar el-Qaddafi in Libya, which has since descended into anarchy—all these have allowed Russia and China to depict the United States as a hypocritical and duplicitous and self-aggrandizing power that, whenever and wherever it can, deploys the idea of exporting democracy as an instrument to subvert foreign regimes it dislikes.

Moscow’s—and Beijing’s—persistent urge to redress their historical grievances should not be underestimated. They are linked by a deep resentment of the West, one that they have sedulously nursed over the past decade. If Washington was animated by a genuine idealism, then that crusading impulse has boomeranged upon it. For the dangerous thing, to borrow once more from A. J. P. Taylor, isn’t when statesmen cannot live up to their principles. It’s when they can. □

The Case for American Nationalism

By Michael Lind

The United States of America has lost its mind. To put it more precisely, the United States has lost its collective institutional memory. America achieved its present global preeminence by means of values and strategies that Washington's current bipartisan elite chooses to repress from memory or actively stigmatize. Foremost among the repressed memories in what Gore Vidal called the United States of Amnesia is nationalism—including self-confident, unapologetic American nationalism.

Until recently, the United States was both the modern liberal nation-state par excellence and the major champion of national self-determination around the world. The country owed its very existence to a war of national liberation from the British Empire. Subsequently, the United States preserved its existence in the Civil War by crushing the South's attempt to secede from the American nation-state. At the same time, long before Woodrow Wilson included the principle of national self-determination in his Fourteen Points address and Franklin Roosevelt invoked it in the Atlantic Charter, Americans championed the right of ethnocultural nations to secede from multinational empires and form their own (preferably, but

not necessarily, democratic) nation-states.

Americans gave moral and rhetorical, though not material, support to Latin Americans who broke away from colonial-era Spain, to Greek patriots opposing the Ottoman Empire, and to the Poles and other rebellious nations in the revolutions of 1848. Americans had scant respect for the British Empire they had exited. They failed to conquer Canada in the War of 1812, but through much of the nineteenth century it was hoped that Canadians would one day voluntarily join the United States. During the two world wars, America championed the rights of small nations against empires—including its imperial allies like Britain—and during the Cold War Americans sympathized with the “captive nations” of the Soviet bloc.

At the same time, the United States practiced the liberal nationalism that it preached. In its security strategy, Washington for most of its history has been guided by self-interested nationalism. By means of the Louisiana Purchase, the Mexican-American War and the defeat of Southern secession, America's leaders ensured that North America, which for centuries had been a battleground for European empires, would henceforth be dominated by a regional hegemon. As John Mearsheimer has observed, the United States, while jealously guarding its own regional hegemony in North America, ensured that no other great power would be able to enjoy a similar status in Europe or Asia.

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Since the end of the Cold War, however, the United States has abandoned enlightened nationalism in order to pursue permanent American global hegemony while preaching a new doctrine of postnationalism. This grand strategy has undermined the very morality, liberty and security it was supposed to enhance. And so, after several misconceived wars and interventions, Washington must repudiate its post-Cold War commitment to global hegemony and the ideology of postnationalism that justifies it, and it must embark upon a wholesale revision of military, trade and immigration policy in the national interest. None of these measures would endanger world order or subvert American ideals. Rather, they would enhance them. It is time, in short, for a new nationalism.

For much of its history, Washington has pursued a security strategy by means that look more like cold, calculating nationalism than crusading idealism. In both world wars, the United States assumed the role of an “offshore balancer,” allowing its allies to suffer tremendous losses of life and wealth before belatedly entering the conflict to tip the balance at a minimum cost in American blood and treasure. With the exception of the wars in Korea and Vietnam, the United States waged the Cold War on the cheap, preferring to subsidize and advise enemies of Communist regimes while using embargoes and arms races to bankrupt the Soviet Union. While the Soviet Union may have spent up to a third of its GDP on the military, America during the Cold War never spent more than around 15 percent, even at the height of the war in Korea; it never mobilized its peacetime industries; and it never adopted a universal draft, relying instead on a limited “selective service” lottery draft. The losses of life in Korea and Vietnam, horrifically disproportionate

to the strategic value of the objectives as they may have been, were extremely limited compared to the price paid by the United States for victory in the wars with Germany—a price which, in turn, was much lower than that paid by the other great powers in the world wars.

Cold War America, like America during the world wars, championed the right of national self-determination of small nations like those of Eastern Europe and Taiwan against regional empires, in order to undermine the legitimacy of its Soviet and Chinese rivals. Indeed, during most of the past century, the United States made national self-determination a higher priority than democracy.

This approach was encoded in the fifth of Wilson’s Fourteen Points. To a greater extent than has usually been acknowledged, it became the DNA of American foreign policy. Wilson demanded

a free, open-minded, and absolutely impartial adjustment of all colonial claims, based upon a strict observance of the principle that in determining all such questions of sovereignty the interests of the populations concerned must have equal weight with the equitable claims of the government whose title is to be determined.

Free elections everywhere in the world are not mentioned in the Fourteen Points. Nor is there any mention of internal democracy in the Atlantic Charter, which declared that all peoples had a right to self-determination in world politics. Franklin Roosevelt also left the right to vote in free elections out of his Four Freedoms. This ranking of priorities did not reflect any hostility to democracy; Wilson and Roosevelt would have agreed that liberal democracy is the best form of government for an independent nation-state. Rather, the emphasis on national independence rather than internal democracy reflected the recognition that a

world of many sovereign nation-states, most of which are small and weak, is safer for the United States than a world of a few powerful multinational empires.

Neither Woodrow Wilson nor Franklin Roosevelt was a postnational globalist in the contemporary sense. Quite the contrary. They were both old-fashioned liberal nationalists in the tradition of Giuseppe Mazzini, John Stuart Mill and William Gladstone, for whom international organizations were intended to coordinate—not replace—sovereign nation-states. After all, the word “nations” is found in the titles of the international organizations they founded. The League of Nations was not the League of Citizens of the World, just as the United Nations is not United Humanity.

The Nuremberg trials and the UN Charter focused on banning not only genocide but also “aggressive war.” Indeed, the central norm of the United Nations is the norm against the violation of state sovereignty by outside powers—a norm that postnational champions of “humanitarian intervention” and “liberal imperialism” lamented and sought to alter in the Cold War’s aftermath.

During the world wars and the Cold War, the United States did not allow its preference for liberal democracy to interfere with its self-interested national strategy. Before and during World War II, the Roosevelt administration pursued a policy of appeasement toward dictatorial regimes in Latin America in the hope of minimizing Axis influence in America’s neighborhood. During the Cold War, the United States pragmatically allied itself with military dictators and royal autocrats in Latin America, Asia, Africa and the Middle East as well as with Communist China against the immediate threat of the Soviet Union. Only with the end of the Cold War did the United States push for democratization in South Korea, the Philippines and Latin

America—when the geopolitical risk involved in doing so was greatly reduced.

In its economic strategy as well as its security strategy, America traditionally has pursued policies of enlightened, self-interested nationalism. Many otherwise educated people today believe that the United States has always championed free trade and free markets. Nothing could be further from the truth.

From America’s founding until World War II, the country used tariffs not only for revenue but also to protect “infant industries” from competition with exports from industrial rivals like Britain. In its rise from a postcolonial agrarian backwater to the world’s leading industrial power, the United States successfully used protectionism (in the form of tariffs), state capitalism (for example, subsidies to the private contractors who built the transcontinental railroad), and public research and development (such as government-funded research for



During the world wars and the Cold War, the United States did not allow its preference for liberal democracy to interfere with its self-interested national strategy.

the telegraph, agriculture and aviation). During this period, free trade was chiefly championed by the agrarians of the South and West, many of whom would have been content for the United States to specialize as a second-tier, commodity-exporting nation.

America's repudiation of free-market ideology in favor of an American version of the developmental capitalist state extended to the intellectual sphere. To justify government policies to help U.S. industry catch up with British industry, American nationalists in the tradition of Alexander Hamilton and Henry Clay contrasted the "American School" of "national economy" with the "English School" of free-market liberalism. As an exile in the United States, the German liberal nationalist Friedrich List absorbed American nationalist economic doctrines and publicized them in Europe. Thanks partly to List, the American model of economic nationalism inspired the state-sponsored industrialization of Bismarck's Germany and Meiji Japan, as well as economic nationalists in other countries.

Having successfully used protectionism and state capitalism to industrialize the United States behind a wall of tariffs, the U.S. government then adopted a different—but equally self-interested—strategy of reciprocal trade liberalization in the first half of the twentieth century. By that time, America's powerful, mature industries were better served by a federal policy of seeking to open foreign consumer markets than by further protection from import competition. America was now ready to battle the other industrial powers for market share in their own markets.

To the distress of British and French imperialists, the United States used its power and wealth after World War II to force the rapid dismantling of colonial empires and their replacement with an integrated global economy centered on New York and Washington, DC. As Britain had done in the 1840s, the United States became a champion of free trade only in the 1940s, when its industrial supremacy seemed assured.

If enlightened liberal nationalism served the country so well for two centuries, how is it that "nationalism"—including American nationalism—is now frequently identified as the evil that all right-minded Americans are supposed to oppose?

In hindsight, the shift from American liberal nationalism to American postnationalism took place between the Nixon and Clinton administrations. A case can be made that Nixonian nationalism represented the makings of an alternate grand strategy that was ultimately rejected.

What I am calling Nixonian nationalism was a response to the perception of American military overextension and relative economic decline. Like Dwight Eisenhower, Richard Nixon sought to wind down an unpopular, expensive proxy war with the Soviets in Asia begun under Democratic predecessors. In his inaugural address, John F. Kennedy had declared, "Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, in order to assure the survival and the success of

liberty.” Nixon implicitly rejected Kennedy’s grandiose vision. Instead, Nixon sought to achieve security at a reduced cost by means of détente—a divide-and-rule strategy, pitting China against the Soviet Union—and the “Nixon Doctrine,” according to which America’s client states and allies would be expected to do their own fighting, rather than relying on American soldiers to fight their battles for them. In his address to the nation on the war in Vietnam of November 3, 1969, Nixon declared:

In cases involving other types of aggression, we shall furnish military and economic assistance when requested in accordance with our treaty commitments. But we shall look to the nation directly threatened to assume the primary responsibility of providing the manpower for its defense.

Like his security strategy, Nixon’s economic strategy put the American national interest first. During the 1950s and 1960s, following the loss of Japan’s Chinese market and Germany’s Eastern European and Russian markets, the United States unilaterally opened its prosperous market to help its Cold War allies and protectorates export their way to recovery, while turning a blind eye to mercantilist policies that discriminated against American exporters or investors. By the Nixon years, however, the costs of this generous policy were apparent. Japan and West Germany had recovered, and the United States was beginning to run the chronic merchandise trade deficits that continue to this day.

The Nixon administration responded by trying to defend the interests of American industry, by means of policies that included delinking the dollar from gold and imposing quotas on Japanese imports. Whatever the merits of these particular measures, they illustrated a recognition that the post-1945 policy of sacrificing

national economic interests for the purpose of holding together Cold War alliances allowed free-riding trading partners to prosper at America’s expense.

Unfortunately, the Nixonian nationalist turn in American security and economic policy did not last. The realpolitik of Nixon and Henry Kissinger was denounced as amoral by many on the left and right alike. On the center-left, Jimmy Carter sought to make the promotion of human rights central to U.S. foreign policy at the price of undermining allies like the shah of Iran and Nicaragua’s Anastasio Somoza. On the center-right, the neoconservatives—some of them former Democrats—denounced realism as amoral appeasement and argued for a grand strategy of crusades for global democracy, showing a Kennedyesque insouciance toward costs.

The Reagan administration was divided between neocons and those who might be described as realists, including Vice President George H. W. Bush, James Baker and Brent Scowcroft. In economic policy, too, the Reagan administration was of two minds—defending U.S. manufacturers against Japanese mercantilism while simultaneously preaching free trade and free markets. The one-term administration of George H. W. Bush tilted even more toward realism in its sober and prudent foreign policy. Although he presided over the end of the Cold War and the dismantling of the Soviet Union, the elder Bush refrained from the American triumphalism that became a staple of neoconservatism and helped inspire the 2003 Iraq War.

American realism went into decline in the 1990s, largely because an increasingly favorable global environment altered the calculation of costs and benefits. Nixonian nationalism had been the policy of an embattled United States confronted by rising powers—an increasingly sophisticated and assertive Soviet Union and China in the

security realm, and increasingly competitive trade rivals in Japan and West Germany. In the 1990s, both security and trade threats temporarily receded. The Soviet Union collapsed. Post-Maoist China was viewed as a huge potential consumer market for American corporations, rather than as a serious rival. The puncturing of the Japanese real-estate and stock-market bubbles plunged the Japanese economy into decades of stagnation. Germany was plagued by a decade of slow growth because of the costs of absorbing the former East Germany.

Meanwhile, the United States was the sole remaining superpower and the initial beneficiary of the information-technology revolution, identified with Silicon Valley. The ease with which the United States defeated the armed forces of Saddam Hussein and the Serbs in the Balkans added to the giddy triumphalism of America's foreign-policy elites. Talk of the limits of American power—and of the need to balance commitments against resources—was seen as *passé*. It became an article of faith that Washington could afford quick, high-tech and relatively bloodless wars to promote democracy and human rights, like the Gulf War and the Balkan wars. At the same time, the Nixon-era concern about predatory trade and currency policies by other countries gave way, in the administrations of Bill Clinton and George W. Bush, to complacency about foreign mercantilism.

The post-Cold War grand strategy of American global hegemony, shared by mainstream elites in both parties, was buttressed by a new ideology of postnational globalism. Unlike the old-fashioned internationalism of Wilson and Roosevelt, the new postnationalism argued that the American national interest and the interest of humanity were one and the same.

In U.S. national-security policy, the

new postnationalism meant rejecting America's traditional support for national self-determination in favor of a policy of freezing arbitrary, European-drawn colonial borders forever. The United States initially opposed the breakup of the Soviet Union, the partition of Yugoslavia, the secession of Eritrea and the division of Sudan. American policy makers did not seriously consider the partition of Iraq or Afghanistan, arbitrary territorial states that combine antagonistic nationalities.

While the new postnationalists reflexively opposed the redrawing of borders and national secessionist movements, they favored weakening state sovereignty to legitimate U.S. bombings, invasions and other forms of intervention. Postnationalists called for a new norm in which the United States and its allies could annul state sovereignty at will, not only in cases in which governments sought to carry out genocide (as in the post-World War II United Nations system) but also in cases in which a government failed to carry out its "responsibility to protect" (R2P) its citizens. The R2P doctrine had the potential to serve as a hunting license for the United States and its dependent allies to intervene militarily in purely internal conflicts unrelated either to genocide or cross-border aggression. This was postnationalism, not internationalism.

In trade policy, postnationalists favored continuing and extending America's Cold War policy of unilateral free trade—allowing other countries like China access to America's market, even if they used various mercantilist techniques to keep American goods and services out of their own. Critics of foreign mercantilism were marginalized and derided as protectionists.

In immigration policy, the refusal of presidents and members of Congress of both parties to enforce immigration law seriously created a *de facto* open-borders policy in

which the number of illegal immigrants ballooned to more than ten million. At the same time, the traditional idea of the melting pot was abandoned for “multiculturalism”—the notion that the United States was not a diverse nation-state, but rather a collection of separate ethnically or racially defined nations. Not only radical leftists but also centrist pundits compared immigration limits to racial segregation. The traditional American idea that immigrants should be expected to assimilate to the American majority’s language and culture in time was often stigmatized as repressive and illiberal.

This new postnationalist consensus, however, was found only among the American elite, not among the general public, who, except during the brief panic following 9/11, remained suspicious of foreign wars, supportive of policies to defend American manufacturing industries and hostile to illegal immigration.

The appeal of the post-Cold War American hegemony strategy had rested on the widespread belief that Washington enjoyed overwhelming advantages in military power and economic strength. The U.S. military was so advanced and powerful, the thinking went, that the United States could police the world and intervene in local conflict after local conflict in which it had little or no stake at minimal cost in American lives and dollars. And America was so rich, or so it was often assumed, that it could easily shed “old” industries like manufacturing for new “sunrise” industries like software, even as it easily absorbed huge numbers of poor, low-skilled immigrants.



By the second decade of the twenty-first century, the post-Cold War fantasy of limitless American power collided with reality, in the form of the Iraq and Afghan wars, the Great Recession and—most important of all—the rise of China. Of all the trends forcing a reconsideration of the fashionable postnationalist consensus, none may be of greater significance than the rise of China as both an economic and military power. In the 1990s, optimists predicted that China’s entry into the world economy would lead the world’s most populous nation to adopt free-market capitalism and multiparty democracy. Not so. On both the economic and strategic fronts, China has grown more aggressive in recent years—taking a harsher line with foreign corporations and alarming Japan and other neighbors by means of a military buildup and attempts at unilateral redefinition of its regional security prerogatives.

Today’s China is often compared to Imperial Germany a century ago. But China presents a challenge unlike any that Americans have faced in their national history, including those posed by Germany and the Soviet Union.

As a giant nation-state, the United States has enjoyed significant advantages

over medium-sized nation-states whose hopes for enduring great-power status depended on possessing foreign empires, like Britain, France, Germany, Japan and Russia. Likewise, the United States is not threatened by the feeble, multiheaded hydra of the European Union, even if on paper the EU rivals America in population and GDP. And with the exception of China, the other countries that will have the greatest populations in the generations ahead, such as India, Nigeria and Pakistan, are multinational agglomerations, some or all of which in the future might split into more homogeneous successor nation-states. Only China rivals America in combining a majority population whose members share a strong sense of common national identity with a huge domestic market and a high level of industrialization. The fact that China has surpassed the United States already as the world's leading manufacturing power—and will soon surpass it in total GDP—makes the triumphalist American vision of a unipolar world in which other great powers like China forever accept the subordinate status of American Cold War satellites like Japan and the former West Germany appear even more delusional.

When confronted with any challenge to their newly minted orthodoxy, postnationalists often try to foreclose debate by claiming that the only alternative to their grand strategy of American hegemony is retreat into the bad old days of isolationism, protectionism and nativism. But one can reject the project of a hugely expensive American global hegemony without favoring a return to pre-World War II isolation. Likewise, one can reject the policy of allowing other industrial nations to export their way to riches and military power by exploiting one-way access to the American consumer market and U.S. technological innovations without favoring a revival of nineteenth-century infant industry tariffs.

And one can reject the combination of lax immigration enforcement with multiculturalism without embracing xenophobia or rejecting immigration tout court.

A new strategy of enlightened nationalism would revive the Nixon-era themes of shifting more of the burden of defense to America's allies and clients and treating the country's remaining manufacturing industries as national-security assets to be defended against foreign mercantilist assault, not as bribes to be given away to American allies and protectorates.

I nstead of seeking global hegemony, the United States should seek what Samuel P. Huntington called primacy, as the *primus inter pares* in a world of multiple great powers. The hegemony strategy is based on the idea that the best way for the country to prevent hostile hegemonies from dominating Europe, Asia and the Middle East is for the United States itself to be the hegemon of Europe, the hegemon of Asia and the hegemon of the Middle East. The hegemony strategy not only permits but also encourages free riding by America's European and Asian allies, which, relieved of much of the burden of defense spending, can devote greater resources to investment in economy-growing infrastructure, civilian industry and generous social-welfare spending.

As part of a strategy of primacy rather than hegemony, America should replace its policy of unilateral protection of other great powers with a less expensive strategy of offshore balancing—or what I call a concert-balance strategy. Unilateral American protection would be replaced by regional concerts in Europe and Northeast Asia, to which the local nations would be expected to contribute more while the United States contributed less. Hostile regional great powers would be met, not by unilateral protection for which American taxpayers

As Britain had done in the 1840s, the United States became a champion of free trade only in the 1940s, when its industrial supremacy seemed assured.

and soldiers pay most of the costs, but by traditional balance-of-power coalitions in which Washington takes part, like the coalitions of World Wars I and II.

A concert-balance strategy would allow the country to spend less on the military, without compromising its security. The United States could remove most of its troops from Europe and Asia, as allies in those regions assumed more responsibility for their own defense. The army could be downsized to a modest expeditionary force, stationed most of the time in the United States and expected to fight alongside American allies in regional concerts or balance-of-power coalitions—not to fight for them while they watch from the sidelines. The navy, air force and Marines would grow in relative importance.

Nor is this all. Unlike the Cold War, in which the Soviet Union was a first-rate military power but a third-rate economic power, rivalries in the future are likely to take place chiefly in the realm of geoeconomics. In a world in which geopolitics is becoming indistinguishable from geoeconomics, the three most important states in the world for the United States are the next three biggest economies: China, Japan and Germany (the European Union is a single economy only in theory). All to some degree are nonliberal mercantilist economies, using various methods to maintain permanent merchandise trade surpluses. These trade surpluses come directly or indirectly at the expense of the United States, which has run chronic trade deficits since the 1970s. In China, Japan and Germany, chronic

export surpluses have been obtained in part with the help of mercantilist policies of wage suppression, which in turn suppress consumption, to the detriment of the world economy in general.

It is not only absurd but also dangerous for American strategists to focus on the Iranian threat to the Strait of Hormuz or the Chinese naval threat to this or that island, while complacently accepting the decline of the domestic American industrial base on which U.S. military power depends. America's strategy toward China is particularly perverse, combining military encirclement with economic appeasement. A sensible strategy would do the reverse, combining limited military appeasement of China in its own neighborhood with robust defense of American industry against Chinese mercantilism. Encircling China with bases in Japan, Korea, Australia and elsewhere will only aggravate Chinese nationalism, without any impact on the major sources of Chinese power—its domestic population and its domestic industry.

Much contemporary American strategic thinking appears to be shaped by the archaic geopolitical theories of Alfred Thayer Mahan and Brooks Adams, who thought that the control of sea-lanes was the basis of world power, and of Halford Mackinder, who grandiosely argued that the "Heartland"—Russia and Eastern Europe—was the "pivot of history." A sounder approach was set forth by Leo Amery: "The successful powers will be those who have the greatest industrial basis. It will not matter whether they are in the centre of a continent or on an island;

those people who have the industrial power and the power of invention and science will be able to defeat all others.”

As Amery recognized, in the modern world a deindustrialized country can never



be a great power, no matter how rich its financiers, realtors and insurance executives or how efficient its retail distribution networks. It would be dangerous in the extreme for a country to allow its manufacturing industries to vanish, and its skilled industrial workforce to atrophy, on the hopeful theory that it can always reconstitute them at a moment's notice, in a time of danger.

According to *Global Firepower*, the world's leading military powers are currently the United States, Russia, China, India, Britain, France, Germany, Turkey, South Korea and Japan. And according to the World Bank, in 2012 the leading nations by GDP were the United States, China, Japan, Germany, France, the United Kingdom, Brazil, Russia, Italy and India. The close correlation between GDP and military power is striking. (Because of World War II memories, Japan and Germany continue to spend proportionally less on their militaries than the victors.)

A great power must both produce and

innovate within its own borders. And it must innovate repeatedly, merely to maintain its relative rank in the world. Innovative technology increasingly is a wasting asset, given the growing ease with which intellectual property can be transferred by high-tech espionage.

Even if the great powers of the future are deterred from direct attacks on one another, great-power conflicts might take the form of new cold wars. Like the Soviet-American rivalry, tomorrow's cold wars may be fought by several means, including arms races, proxy wars and embargoes. In each of these arenas of competition, the country with the superior domestic manufacturing base, and a large economy to support it, will have the advantage. The greater industrial power will find it easier to ramp up weapons production in arms races, without severely curtailing production for civilian consumption; easier to supply allies, client states and insurgents with state-of-the-art technology and supplies; and easier to withstand hostile embargoes of finished goods, industrial components and critical resources.

Dual-use manufacturing capability that can be quickly converted from civilian to military production will become all the more important, as expensive robots and drones move to the center of international security competition. Today's incipient revolutions in manufacturing are not likely to undermine the logic of security-conscious, manufacturing-focused economic nationalism. Automation may eliminate the jobs of most industrial workers—but for purposes of national security, a robot factory on American soil will always be preferable to a robot factory in a foreign nation that

can embargo exports to the United States or have them cut off by a blockade. Rapid prototyping or 3-D printing may allow greater customization of production. But visions of 3-D printing leading to a revival of home and village industry are probably wishful thinking. It is more likely that 3-D printing will be adopted most successfully by large industrial concerns, many of them state backed or state owned, which can exploit economies of scale and scope.

Immigration policy is seldom thought of as an element of national strategy, but an immigration policy in the national interest should also be a central component of a new American grand strategy of primacy.

A generous immigration policy helps the United States tap into a global pool of talent and enterprise. Another country's brain drain can be America's brain gain. Today's American immigration is based chiefly on nepotism, with most slots for legal immigrants going to the relatives of American citizens. Because poor people in poor countries tend to have larger families, this policy promotes chain migration by unskilled people from Third World countries. Meanwhile, skilled immigrants from developed and developing countries alike must compete for limited quotas, including H1-B quotas, which represent a modern form of indentured servitude, binding immigrant workers to their employers. The United States should follow the lead of the other English-speaking countries and allot most of its quotas for legal immigration on the basis of skills, not nepotism.

Immigration will be even more necessary in the future to prevent population decline and perhaps to enable gradual expansion of the U.S. population. While it would be folly to bring in immigrants at a rate that drove down wages or overwhelmed the processes of cultural and economic

integration, a moderate level of immigration combined with domestic fecundity could permit the U.S. population to grow even as the populations of China and India, absent immigration, peak and begin to decline. Moreover, if the world population crests at 9–12 billion and starts to diminish, the United States could account for a growing relative share of global population, markets and military power.

The promotion of population growth is a venerable American tradition. Benjamin Franklin, in his 1751 *Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind*, noted that Americans saw population growth as proof of the benefits of enterprise and freedom. In 1806, the famous American novelist Charles Brockden Brown predicted that in a century the United States would have three hundred million people (a number that was reached only around 2006). Abraham Lincoln looked forward to the day when the United States would have “five hundred millions of happy and prosperous people.” In his 1890 book *The Cosmopolitan Railway*, William Gilpin, the former territorial governor of Colorado, predicted: “The basin of the Mississippi will then more easily contain and feed ten times the population [of the Roman Empire], or 1,310,000,000 of inhabitants!” If Canada were added, he wrote, “2,000,000,000 will easily find room—a population double the existing human race!” The really surprising thing would be an abrupt stop to America's historic population growth, which has ballooned from four million in 1790 to seventy-six million in 1900 to nearly 320 million today.

The United States will not run out of land. Only 3 percent of America's land area is urbanized. Will population growth lead to mass poverty? It hasn't to date. Between 1900 and 2000, average American income rose seven-fold, even as the population

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swelled from seventy-six million to about three hundred million.

In recent years, the U.S. population has grown at the slowest rate since the Great Depression, around 0.7 percent a year. But even at this slow growth rate, the U.S. population could be more than half a billion in 2100 and nearly a billion in 2200. China's population is expected to peak at 1.4 billion around 2026, while India's is expected to peak at about 1.6 billion around 2060. If China's population, along with that of India, stabilizes and begins to decline, while America's population, fed by immigration from other countries, continues to grow, then, as odd as it sounds, at some point in the next century or two the United States really could become the world's most populous nation.

Needless to say, the proposal that U.S. immigration policy should aim at gradually expanding the U.S. population, without undermining assimilation to a common national identity, will horrify neo-Malthusians who think the United States is already overpopulated. But from America's founding to the present, the country has eclipsed its great-power rivals mainly by outgrowing them in population and GDP.

In the fall 1990 issue of this magazine, Jeane J. Kirkpatrick, the former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, published an essay entitled "A Normal Country in a Normal Time." She wrote: "The United States performed heroically in a time when heroism was required; altruistically during the long years when freedom was endangered." But now, she argued, it was time

for the United States to pay more attention to its domestic needs, while adapting to a multipolar world: "With a return to 'normal' times, we can again become a normal nation—and take care of pressing problems of education, family, industry, and technology. We can be an independent nation in a world of independent nations."

Nearly a quarter century later, Kirkpatrick's prescription is more relevant than ever. It is time to reject the strategy of perpetual U.S. global military hegemony and the doctrine of postnationalism that justifies it, and replace them with enlightened American nationalism. In the pursuit of primacy, the United States would shift much of the burden of the defense of its allies and protectorates to those countries themselves, while insisting on strictly reciprocal trade rather than access to American markets by mercantilist nations that protect or subsidize their own industries. America would combine its security strategy of offshore balancing with intelligent economic nationalism. Finally, an immigration policy in the national interest would shift the emphasis from family reunification to skills, while using immigration to enable long-term population growth, of a kind compatible with the economic integration and cultural assimilation of newcomers to the United States.

This is the path to the restoration of American security and solvency, one that should have been taken following the Cold War. After a quarter century of delusion and debacle and folly, it is time for an American foreign policy based on the national interest. □

The Hollow Man

By Freddy Gray

In Anthony Trollope's novel *Phineas Redux*, Mr. Daubeny, a prime minister modeled on Benjamin Disraeli, proudly announces, "See what we Conservatives can do. In fact we will conserve nothing when we find that you do not desire to have it conserved any longer." It's a credo that Prime Minister David Cameron appears to live by.

Among a crowded field of contenders, Cameron may be the slipperiest Briton ever to have successfully climbed the greasy pole. We read his name in the papers. We see his face on our televisions and computer screens, yet nobody is quite sure who he really is or what he is doing. Buying muffins for his children? Tending to weighty matters of state? Conscientious servant? Rank opportunist? He has been at the forefront of British public life for almost a decade, yet all definitions slide off him. He has been prime minister for nearly four years, but his agenda remains no more than an aspiration. As the journalist Alex Massie recently asked, "What is David Cameron for?"

We used to think we knew: "Dave" was a modernizer. In 2005, when Cameron first rose to prominence, the British Conservative Party seemed ruined. The Tories had lost several elections in a row. They were distrusted, reviled, "the nasty party." They needed a savior: in breezed Cameron. Only a few months earlier, nobody outside Westminster Village—

London's equivalent of the Beltway—had heard of him. His only brush with the big time had come in his twenties when he worked as a special adviser to Norman Lamont, the chancellor of the exchequer, and then Michael Howard, the home secretary. In the footage of "Black Wednesday," September 16, 1992, when Britain announced the withdrawal of its currency from the European Exchange Rate Mechanism, you can see the twenty-six-year-old Cameron, his hair and suit unruffled, standing behind Lamont as he addresses the cameras outside Downing Street with the momentous news.

Cameron went on to have a successful career as a PR man at the media firm Carlton Communications, where he fine-tuned his genius for news management. He returned to politics as a member of Parliament in 2001 and quickly emerged as a first-rate public speaker, the outstanding figure among a group of young center-righters on a mission to "detoxify" the Tory brand and drag their party into the twenty-first century. He went to great lengths to appear as un-Tory as he possibly could. He wore Converse trainers and quoted Gandhi. He promised "compassionate conservatism" and talked about sharing the proceeds of growth. Politics, for him and his camarilla, was about "achieving progressive ends through conservative means," whatever that meant. He bicycled around London and preached about the environment. He changed the party logo from a flaming

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torch of liberty to a green-and-blue tree. He lauded gay marriage and sneered at the “headbangers” on his right.

There were grumbles from the old guard. Peter Hitchens (brother of the even more famous Christopher) accused Cameron of having “mopped up the last-remaining puddles of moral, social and cultural conservatism.” Lord Saatchi, the advertising guru and former Conservative Party chairman, called Cameron’s entourage the “say anything to get elected” Tories. But most British right-wingers—a practical more than an ideological bunch—were cheered by the thought that, finally, the Conservative Party had found a winner. Cameron bested his rival David Davis, a more robustly right-wing type, took his party by storm, or at least by the neck, and instantly established himself as a popular public figure.

There was another aspect of Cameron that everyone understood: he was privileged—not an aristocrat, exactly, but upper-middle class enough to be seen by almost every voter as “posh.” An Old Etonian and Oxford man who mingled among a circle of similarly smart and successful friends—the “Notting Hill set”—he seemed almost typecast from one of those soppy Richard Curtis comedy films such as *Love Actually*, in which English toffs roam around London being self-deprecating and charming.

Experts suggested that Cameron’s elite background meant he would never hold mass appeal. They were wrong. In the middle of the last decade, Britain was

feeling affluent and strangely unburdened by notions of class. Cameron’s poshness was a good joke, and it infuriated committed socialists, but the public didn’t feel put off. Indeed, the media, even on the left, were infatuated by Cameron’s glamour. Successful journalists in Britain tend to have liberal values and come from the richer parts of London, so even if they despised Tories they could at least identify with Cameron—someone who came from money but tried to be enlightened. The Cameroons—Cameron’s immediate circle—had tailored their message specifically to placate the BBC and the *Guardian*, Britain’s most important lefty institutions. Meanwhile, the new-look Tory combination of enthusiasm for free markets and progressive social attitudes—mixed with social pedigree—made the party attractive again to the power brokers at News International, Rupert Murdoch’s empire, who had fallen for Tony Blair in the 1990s. This particular alliance turned out to be acutely toxic—following the great phone-hacking scandal—but in the last decade it was still considered invaluable in politics. The *Sun*, Britain’s most-read tabloid, embraced the Cameron project, as did the *Times*.

When, in 2007, Blair stepped down to be replaced by the more robustly left-wing figure of Gordon Brown, Cameron’s stock rose further still. The self-appointed “heir to Blair,” Cameron appeared destined to capture the center back from New Labour. He was the good guy in British politics; Brown was a thug.

But then disaster struck in the form of

the global financial crash. Cameron found himself stranded: having maneuvered the Tories to the middle, he found that the atom of Blairite centrism—with its faith in the unifying power of neoliberal and global economics—had started to split. People were scared and wanted something more than platitudes and spin from their politicians. Brown veered left, virtually nationalizing the bankrupt banking system and presenting himself as a megastatist hero of the future. Cameron could not be seen to support Brown's dangerous overhaul of the economy, but he also didn't want to be viewed as unpatriotic during a crisis. He floundered, while "Super Gordon" enjoyed a bizarre political revival. Suddenly, too, the posh factor counted against Cameron: nobody wanted an Old Etonian in charge at a time of real emergency.

The "Brown bounce" didn't last. It did, however, expose a real weakness in Cameron's position. He needed to reassure voters that he stood for something more than his own personal advancement and that he had deep answers to the big questions posed by the crash. He needed "the vision thing," as George H. W. Bush called it. Cameron had always said that his "progressive conservatism" had intellectual roots, but now, with the 2010 general election looming and the global crisis ongoing, he had an urgent PR need to spell it out. Encouraged by Steve Hilton, his director of strategy, and Oliver Letwin, the shadow cabinet policy coordinator, Cameron began talking about

Edmund Burke and the importance of "little platoons" in civil society. He had a curious flirtation with the political philosopher Philip Blond, a "new localist" who believed that the financial crisis had created an opportunity to revive the neglected tradition of "red Toryism." "British conservatism," wrote Blond in a much-discussed essay in *Prospect*, "must not . . . repeat the American error of preaching 'morals plus the market' while ignoring the fact that economic liberalism has often been a cover for monopoly capitalism and is therefore just as socially damaging as left-wing statism." At the World Economic Forum in Davos, Cameron expressed his concern that "someone working in the local branch of a global corporation can feel like little more than flotsam in some vast international sea of business." Elsewhere, he seized on a report by Demos, the London-based think tank, about the value of stable families, those littlest platoons. "Parenting is the coalface of creating character," he said, in a deep voice, to some applause.



All this high-minded waffle came to a head in the Conservative Party's election manifesto in 2010, which laid out the party's vision for the "Big Society"—a Brave New Even Greater Britain in which the state would empower individuals or small groups to make life better for everyone. The central government would act as the enabler of "social entrepreneurship," cutting away red tape and pushing the petty bureaucracies aside to enable true localism to prosper.

It was much too grandiose an idea for British politics, and duly backfired. The concept sounded suspiciously intellectual to common sense-loving Tories—it didn't help that the Big Society's acronym was "BS"—and the public could not process the idea that the nasty party wanted to be nice, actually. Critics on the left smelled a Tory rat: those cruel right-wingers were at it again, they said, scrapping vital public services and dressing it up as benevolence. Polly Toynbee, the influential *Guardian* columnist, called the Big Society a "big fat lie." Under pressure from his more hands-on shadow ministers, Cameron promptly ditched the BS and started campaigning again on practical policies. But the damage had been done: soon after their Big Society manifesto was published, the Conservatives' poll ratings dipped, and they did not recover sufficiently to win an outright majority. Today, Cameron still uses the words "Big Society" from time to time as a feel-good line in the odd speech—in his 2013 Christmas message, for instance—but it's hardly a model for reforming the nation. He would never again make the mistake of trying to be too profound.

The general election of May 6, 2010, resulted in a hung Parliament. The Conservatives had only a small majority. To form a proper government, they would have to enter into coalition with the Liberal Democrats. For a few days, however, uncertainty ruled. The loathed

Gordon Brown did not leave Downing Street. It looked, for a day or two, as if the left-leaning Liberal Democrats might enter into coalition with Labour instead of the Conservatives. A charm offensive was needed: here Cameron came into his element. He quickly forged a close bond with the Liberal Democratic leader Nick Clegg—another privately educated man (Westminster) with whom Cameron has more in common than he does with many Tories. As Labour sulked, Cameron and his negotiators offered the most generous terms to their prospective government partners. Sure enough, on May 12, Cameron and Clegg appeared together in the Downing Street Rose Garden to announce their political marriage to the world. Cameron was prime minister, at last, and Clegg would be his deputy. It looked, at least for a few hours, like a triumph.

That was then. Ever since, Tory policy decisions usually have involved resistance—often in public—from the Lib Dems, Britain's most leftward-leaning political party. Cameron insists that his administration has proved itself resilient—"it does what it says on the tin," he said, quoting a well-known varnish commercial—and it's true that the "Lib-Con" union has survived its first term in reasonable condition, in large part thanks to the working relationship between Cameron and Clegg. But often the two men have been tugged apart by their respective bases. Cynics may say that Cameron has been able to use the Lib Dems as an excuse to be less and less conservative. But sharing power has both narrowed and broadened the prime minister's political scope. On some issues, Cameron and Clegg have been able to sing from the same liberal hymn sheet—for instance, in legalizing gay marriage last year. But, in exchange for supporting the Tories, the Lib Dems have been eager to present them-

Cameron's enthusiasm for announcing big policy ideas is not matched by a willingness to go through the heavier, less exciting slog of implementing them.

selves as the coalition's progressive force, holding back the rabid right-wingers. This has proved tricky for Cameron, precisely because it is exactly the image of himself that he liked to project. Governing in a coalition has forced him to be less left-liberal, especially because these days he faces an insurgent challenge from the right in the form of the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP). Ferociously Euroskeptic and led by the charismatic Nigel Farage, the UKIP has been attracting ever-larger numbers of disaffected Tory traditionalists. As a result, Cameron has repeatedly felt compelled to reassure grassroots supporters that, au fond, he remains one of them. So Dave the once-proud environmentalist has found himself being quoted as saying that he wants to "cut the green crap"—though aides deny that phrase was ever uttered. And Dave the Tory leader who once told his party to stop "banging on about Europe" has found himself committed to an "in/out" referendum as to Britain's future within the European Union. He particularly infuriated Clegg, an outright eurofederalist, by effectively vetoing an EU treaty change on the grounds of protecting Britain's national interest.

The constraints of coalition have not, however, prevented Cameron's government from attempting radical public-sector reform on a number of fronts. The coalition has attempted to revolutionize state education (inspired in part by the U.S. model of charter schools), revamp the administration of the National Health Service (NHS), overhaul the dysfunctional welfare system, and—most of all—tackle Britain's economic

crisis and its immense debt problem. For these reasons, at the end of 2013, the *Daily Telegraph's* Peter Osborne called the prime minister "the great reformer." "Mr. Cameron," he wrote, "has had to cope with economic crisis, a mutinous Tory party, a coalition government and a fractious media. But in his first three years in office he has already a more solid record of domestic achievement than Tony Blair can boast over a full decade."

Is it possible that behind the superficial front Cameron really is a great conservative pragmatist? Again, it's hard to say. Effective domestic reform is, as Osborne says, hard and unglamorous work, only recognized in the long term. But there is a lingering suspicion that Cameron's enthusiasm for announcing big policy ideas is not matched by a willingness to go through the heavier, less exciting slog of implementing them. The coalition's reforms have in fact been something of a mixed bag so far. On schools, thanks to his energetic minister for education, Michael Gove, Cameron has made progress. But only 174 so-called free schools have opened in the last three years, and Britain's slide down the international education rankings continues. The effort to reshape the welfare system has great public support, but has been ruined by bureaucratic mistakes. The ambitious shake-up of the NHS has been reduced to a step-by-step managerial effort. And while the economy is showing clear signs of improvement, the "green shoots" are growing off ever-vaster levels of government borrowing. For all the talk of austerity and cuts, Chancellor of the Exchequer George

Osborne has actually increased state spending in real terms: In 2009–2010, public-sector current expenditure, adjusted to 2011–2012 prices, was £634.2 billion. By 2012–2013, it was reportedly around £647.1 billion.



At the same time, Cameron's reputation as a good man has been undermined by the never-ending phone-hacking scandal. The story began as a series of revelations that Rupert Murdoch-owned newspapers had been illegally intercepting celebrity voicemails. By 2011, after incessant pushing by the *Guardian*, the BBC and the *New York Times*, whose own motives are not hard to fathom, it had transformed into a wide-ranging exposé of the entire political-media matrix through which Britain is run. Cameron was compromised first by the fact that his director of communications, the tabloid man Andy Coulson, had resigned in 2007 as editor of the *News of the World* following the first round of hacking reports. Cameron's decision to appoint Coulson only seven months later—and stand by him as the allegations intensified—raised serious

doubts about his judgment. Coulson finally stepped down in January 2011, but the problem would not go away. Cameron subsequently established an official inquiry into “the culture, practices and ethics of the press,” presumably in a bid to make himself

look above reproach, but the decision caused him acute embarrassment when his turn came to answer questions. The lead counsel, Robert Jay, humiliated the prime minister by reading out a series of flirtatious text messages between him and Coulson's successor at the *News of the World*, the red-haired Rebekah Brooks, who lived near him and was a close friend. Nothing else could have so perfectly encapsulated the cozy complicity of the political

and media elite. In one cringe-inducing message, Cameron thanked Brooks for letting him ride one of her family's horses (“fast, unpredictable and hard to control but fun”). In another, the day before one of his major speeches, she told him: “I am so rooting for you tomorrow not just as a proud friend but because professionally we're definitely in this together! Speech of your life! Yes he Cam!” In the last decade, Cameron's successful wooing of News International had made him look like a worthy prime-minister-in-waiting. In the more anxious 2010s, it made him look grubby and not a little absurd.

Like so many leaders struggling at home, Cameron has found solace in adventure overseas. He always promised that he was no neoconservative: in a speech delivered on the fifth anniversary of the 9/11 attacks,

he had warmed many a realist heart by distinguishing between his liberal conservatism and the more hawkish variety. “We will serve neither our own, nor America’s, nor the world’s interests if we are seen as America’s unconditional associate in every endeavor,” he said. Democracy, he added, “cannot be imposed from outside. . . . Liberty grows from the ground—it cannot be dropped from the air by an unmanned drone.”

Yet Cameron’s instinctive liberalism—his impulse to be the good guy—also makes him a natural interventionist on humanitarian grounds, and in the civil war in Libya, he saw a conflict worth fighting. Cameron’s friends today insist that he was a reluctant warrior. His priority, like President Barack Obama’s, was to heal the economy and fix a broken society at home. The last thing he wanted was an expensive and energy-sapping military engagement. But as Muammar el-Qaddafi’s forces rounded on Benghazi, and a terrible slaughter looked imminent, Cameron performed a volte-face and became a passionate advocate for intervention. It was Cameron—probably even more than the bellicose French president Nicolas Sarkozy—who applied the most external pressure on President Obama to intervene. (Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, along with Susan Rice and Samantha Power, did the twisting of Obama’s arm at home.)

We shouldn’t scoff at the thought that a prime minister wished above all to save lives. It would be naive, however, to suggest that political gain was not among Cameron’s motivations. The allied effort in Libya came at a time when coalition relations were at a low ebb. Far from being an unwanted distraction, Libya was a welcome one. Clegg, like Cameron, was no conventional hawk, but he too decided military action was the right course. Is it too cynical to say that the two men, exhausted after squabbling over issues such

as university fees and social security, were pleased to have discovered an excellent adventure, a grand humanitarian mission, like gay marriage, upon which they could embark together?

Cameron, for his part, must have enjoyed playing the statesman on the global stage after a challenging few months, especially since it turned out that the military campaign was relatively quick, casualty free (for Britain at least) and successful in the short term. The drama of war excited the prime minister, too. According to the journalist Matthew D’Ancona, author of *In It Together: The Inside Story of the Coalition Government*, Cameron’s experience in Libya, in the words of one of his friends, was “the moment when Dave said to himself—‘wait a moment—I have the levers of power.’”

No matter whether Libya was a real foreign-policy success or not, the Cameroons were eager to claim the conflict as a big win for their man. He had saved the day. As another unnamed government source told D’Ancona, “Whenever things get bad, and the press is saying what a rubbish government we are, I remind myself that there are people alive in Benghazi tonight because we decided to take a risk.”

Cameron was so enthused by his Libya experience, in fact, that he soon adopted a gung-ho approach to the next major Arab conflict of Western interest. Spurred on by his wife Samantha, who in March 2013 had toured the country with the organization Save the Children, Cameron pushed hard for intervention against Bashar al-Assad in the Syrian civil war. Last August, he came back from holiday determined to act militarily following another round of reports that the Syrian president’s forces had used chemical weapons. The world could not “stand idly by” (that phrase again) as a dictator massacred his people, though, like Secretary of State John Kerry, Cameron

utterly failed to spell out what the objectives of a strike would be.

As it turned out, the war effort flopped. In a rare flex of legislative muscle, Parliament bridled at the prospect of yet another intervention in the Middle East and narrowly rejected a vote sanctioning the use of force. It helped set the stage for President Obama's own retreat from his red line, as the U.S. Congress, too, looked as though it would not serve as a rubber stamp for war, as it had before the Iraq imbroglio. And so Cameron the never-say-die human-rights warrior almost instantly reverted to Cameron the sober realist: "It is clear to me that the British parliament, reflecting the views of the British people, does not want to see British military action. I get that and the government will act accordingly." He performed the metamorphosis so smoothly

would rush to war for the sake of his own conscience, or just some good headlines.

Politics must be personal for Cameron, and it is PR. He has filled his government with his chums and he is loyal to them. One of the refreshing features of Cameron's government has been that he gives his ministers autonomy within their various departments. He has moved away from the highly centralized "sofa cabinet" system of Tony Blair. But it is also often said that Cameron has a lazy streak. As long as he is winning the headline war against Labour, he doesn't want to be bothered with the nitty-gritty of government battles. At first this claim seems incredible—a successful politician can't possibly be idle. But Cameron does pride himself on being laid-back, focused on the bigger picture.



that some of his sharpest critics were left applauding his humility in the face of defeat.

One day, we may look back on Cameron as a heroic figure who only went to war reluctantly for the noblest causes, while at the same time pulling off massive political, economic and cultural reforms at home. But Cameron's obvious impulsivity in foreign affairs suggests a far different verdict—a meretricious figure who

He reportedly calls Fridays "thinking days" (which presumably means "not working days") and can frequently be seen with his feet on his desk, drinking a beer.

In that sense, he is a typical Old Etonian: Britain's most famous public school has a reputation for turning out supremely self-confident leaders who don't sweat the small stuff. They have social inferiors to do that for them. Cameron's critics also accuse him

of “government by essay crisis”—a reference to his Oxford education. When things seem to be going well, he can be complacent; it takes a crisis to sting him into action.

One of Cameron’s nicknames is Flashman, the bully character in *Tom Brown’s School Days* who was turned into a great literary antihero by George MacDonald Fraser. He has a reputation for being rude, or, as the journalist Damian Thompson puts it: “He exhibits the calculated rudeness of people with very nice manners.” Cameron certainly has a temper. His opponents on the Labour front benches enjoy referring to the “crimson tide”—what the shadow education secretary Tristram Hunt described as “that half hour journey, every Question Time, during which the Prime Minister’s face turns from beatific calm to unedifying fury.” At the same time, however, he is an inveterate charmer, more than capable of buttering up his enemies if it provides him with an advantage.

As the 2015 general election approaches, Cameron is shifting shape yet again. He has brought in the Australian political strategist Lynton Crosby, a no-nonsense right-winger, to toughen up his image. At the same time, he has hired Barack Obama’s campaign manager Jim Messina, a lifelong Democrat. Just as Obama did in 2012, Cameron is now urging the electorate to let him “finish the job” by awarding him a second term. But the public does not seem willing to comply. The latest polls suggest that the Labour Party remains favored to win in 2015. If Cameron is ousted, he might try once more to imitate Tony Blair and Bill Clinton, setting up foundations and being a sort of global spokesman for hire. Or he could go back to the gilded life of the British toff: a good country house and some decent claret shared among a tight circle of influential and discreet friends. Who is the real David Cameron? We’ll probably never know, and he may not either. □

Reading Burke in Sydney

By Tom Switzer

Tony Abbott likes to tell the story about his first visit to the United States as a newly elected member of the Australian Parliament. It was 1995, and he was widely seen as a rising star in the center-right Liberal Party, where the word “liberal” still means more or less what it meant in the nineteenth century. He had also distinguished himself as a leading opponent of the Labor government’s ill-fated proposal to replace Australia’s constitutional monarchy with a republic.

But something got lost in translation: Abbott’s Washington-based hosts, the U.S. Information Agency, had been told that he was “very liberal and strongly anti-Republican.” Which meant his itinerary during his two-week study trip consisted of meetings with only commentators and interest groups on the far left of the American ideological spectrum.

Trans-Pacific jokes aside, the conventional wisdom of just a few years ago held that Abbott was too right-wing to become prime minister down under, a throwback to a bygone era. After all, the devout Christian and former Oxford boxing blue is skeptical about abortion, same-sex marriage and alarmist claims of global warming. He is an Anglophile who is a great admirer of the United States and its leadership role in the world. (He once said, “Few Australians

would regard America as a foreign country.”) He champions “smaller government, lower taxes, greater freedom, a fair go for families and respect for institutions that have stood the test of time.”

When he is not on message, which is rare for spin-soaked politicians in the relentless 24-7 media and Internet environment, he is gaffe-prone. During the federal election campaign last August, he said that a female parliamentary candidate had “sex appeal” and that his opponent, the then Labor prime minister Kevin Rudd, was not the “suppository” of all wisdom. He has ticked almost every unfashionable box in modern politics.

Like Margaret Thatcher’s victory in the UK Conservative Party’s leadership contest in 1975 and Ronald Reagan’s nomination as the Republican presidential candidate in 1980, Abbott’s narrow victory in the Liberal Party leadership ballot in 2009 delighted his political opponents, who had dismissed him as easy to beat in a general election. The Canberra press gallery—our equivalent of the Washington press corps—did not take him seriously as prime ministerial material. He’s “too archetypically conservative.” He’s too much of a “King Catholic.” He views the world through a “narrow ideological prism.” He’ll “split the party.” “Australia doesn’t want Tony Abbott. We never have.” So said seasoned observers of Australian politics.

Nor were they alone. The nation’s intelligentsia was contemptuous of the

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“Mad Monk.” Under Abbott’s leadership, one distinguished academic warned, the conservative Liberal Party would become “a down-market protest party of angry old men and the outer suburbs.” Even the U.S. ambassador in Canberra, in a cable to Washington that WikiLeaks revealed a few years ago, called him “a polarizing right-winger.”

And yet for all his evident shortcomings, the fifty-six-year-old Abbott reminds one of the adage that low expectations are a priceless political asset. He has seen off three Labor prime ministerships in as many years. And last September, he won one of the nation’s biggest landslide victories since World War II. Simply put, the man who once trained to be a Catholic priest has resurrected the conservative cause, which had languished in the Antipodes following the downfall of John Howard, Australia’s prime minister from 1996 to 2007, whom Abbott served as a confidant and cabinet minister.

So how did this political Neanderthal win power in Australia? What defines the Abbott worldview? Is he a role model for American conservatives? And are the early reports of his political demise exaggerated?

From the outset, I should acknowledge that I have known Abbott for fifteen years. I like him enormously and consider him a friend, or—in Australian parlance—a top bloke with a larrikin streak. He’s been so faithful to his mates that he has not lost any. He is a volunteer bushfire fighter and lifeguard in his federal seat on Sydney’s northern beaches. He is deeply committed to the welfare of indigenous Australians, and spends weeks living in remote Aboriginal communities in the outback. There is nothing phony about him.

But although I am not one of his many critics in Australia’s media and intellectual community, neither am I an uncritical

admirer. Among other things, his oratory tends to lack range and theatrical effect. At times, he is even rhetorically challenged, more likely to address his fellow citizens in simple sound bites than in an engaging conversational style. He gave unqualified support to the previous government’s commitment of Australian troops in the depressing and endless war in Afghanistan. Never mind that our presence there had not been yielding lasting improvements that were commensurate with the investment of blood and treasure. (Australia lost nearly forty lives in the last four years.)

Moreover, despite his vaunted commitment to reducing the size and scope of the federal government, he is hardly the second coming of Milton Friedman. His government, not even three months old last December, controversially rejected a takeover bid by the U.S. agricultural giant Archer Daniels Midland of Australia’s GrainCorp. Given Abbott’s declaration on the night he was elected that Australia was “open for business,” it was an uncharacteristic move, one that earned an editorial rebuke from the usually sympathetic *Wall Street Journal*. His plan for an expensive paid paternal-leave program also suggests a social-engineering streak.

Still, one can concede Abbott’s flaws and broadly support his political agenda. At the heart of his appeal is his brand of conservatism, something both his friends and foes misunderstand. Abbott does not subscribe to the left-liberal consensus, which explains why the well-educated folk of inner-city Sydney and Melbourne are full of scorn. But neither does he cleave as faithfully to the conservative “movement” as do many American conservatives. Nor could he genuinely be described as “right-wing” in any crude ideological sense. Such terms and labels are inappropriate ways of properly understanding the true nature of conservatism.

Conservatives, traditionally speaking, are essentially antidoctrinaire and opposed to programmatic laundry lists. Like Tories of old, and unlike Tea Partiers today, they prefer flexibility and adaptability to rigid consistency and purity of dogma. As Samuel Huntington observed in an important article in the *American Political Science Review* in 1957, the antithesis of conservatism is not simply left-liberalism or even socialism. It is radicalism, which is best defined in terms of one's attitude toward change. For conservatives, temperament should always trump ideology, and the single best test of temperament is a person's attitude toward change. Although conservatism accepts the need for change, the onus of proof is always on those who advocate for it.

Abbott more or less represents this tradition. He is temperamentally conservative, someone who likes to do things in settled and familiar ways, and he recognizes that radical change is fraught with the danger of unintended consequences. This is a man at ease quoting Michael Oakeshott, Roger Scruton and Paul Johnson, distinguished conservative writers who champion incremental and consensual change over the large and divisive variety.

That is why Abbott defends the monarchy and opposes a republic. His critics try to paint him as a romantic loyalist who is sentimentally attached to the queen and "Mother Country" (where he was born in 1957). But his position is based on a belief that a republican form of government could amount to radical tinkering with the constitutional arrangements that have undergirded the nation's stability and prosperity since 1901, when Britain granted formal independence to its colony.

Abbott's conservatism also explains why he is skeptical about alarmist claims of global warming: he has proposed to abolish

the previous government's carbon tax on the grounds of its expense and uselessness. And it is why Abbott is wary of unfettered free markets and lax foreign ownership laws, lest they create a radical backlash from the losers involved in the process of what Joseph Schumpeter called "creative destruction."

On the other hand, many American conservatives, especially Tea Partiers, fail the temperament test abysmally. They do well on the doctrinal purity scale. They impatiently lust after radical change and upheaval. And they yearn to be consistent in the application of a fixed doctrine. But they attach little or no value to continuity. Nor do they place much emphasis on the role of changing circumstances and conditions in the course of devising policy. Given the intransigence congressional Republicans and presidential primary candidates have displayed in recent years, and their utterly unconservative refusal to ground ideological ambitions in political realities, there is much to be said for Abbott's mind-set.

What also distinguishes the Australian prime minister from his conservative brethren across the Pacific is his belief that a center-right party should represent a big tent, one capable of embracing a variety of beliefs and implementing a range of policies depending on the circumstances and conditions. He is fond of quoting a 1980 address by Liberal prime minister Malcolm Fraser on the natural compatibility between liberalism, understood in nineteenth-century terms, and conservatism, understood in eighteenth-century terms. (As it happens, the speech was written by Owen Harries, a fellow Australian conservative who became founding coeditor of *The National Interest* in 1985.)

Like many Australian Liberals before and since his tenure (1975–1983), Fraser believed that the Liberal Party is the

custodian of the center-right tradition in politics. But he also stressed the importance of both liberal and conservative thought in shaping public policy. Liberalism “always emphasises the freedom of the individual and the absence of restraint,” Abbott approvingly quotes Fraser (and Harries) as saying. “Conservatism . . . stresses the need for a framework of stability, continuity and order not only as something desirable in itself but as a necessary condition for a free society.” And he further asserts: “The art of handling this tension, of finding that creative balance between the forces of freedom and the forces of continuity which alone allows a society to advance, is the true art of government in a country like ours.”

Again, in striking contrast, Tea Party Republicans and many conservatives inside and outside the Beltway place more stress on classical liberalism as a rigid political ideology, à la John Stuart Mill and the Enlightenment, and less emphasis on the more classical conservative virtues of prudence, stability and measured change, à la Edmund Burke and Alexander Hamilton. This perhaps also helps explain why Tea Party Republicans exhibit a far deeper hostility toward the state than, say, Australian or indeed most Western conservatives.

Still, although Abbott has little stomach for ideology, his political rise is attributed to his doing the very thing so many British Tories have shied away from doing in more recent times: he had the political nerve and moral conviction to sell a seemingly unpopular policy to “middle Australia,” where the center of political gravity is decidedly to the right of most editorial offices of media outlets as well as the senior common rooms of our nation’s great learned institutions.

When Kevin Rudd won power in 2007, the accepted wisdom was that the Labor

leader would consign conservatives to the political wilderness for a generation, much as the American consensus predicted Barack Obama’s victory in 2008 would mark what the historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr. had previously called a new (liberal) cycle of history in U.S. politics.

During the first two years of the Labor government, from late 2007 to late 2009, the parties that form the conservative coalition were vacillating, divided and



leaderless. They proved unable to present a clear alternative to Canberra’s big-government agenda. Like David Cameron in Britain and John McCain in the United States, Australia’s conservative political leadership embraced the global-warming agenda, and essentially aped the Labor policy to introduce a cap-and-trade scheme on the eve of the UN’s Copenhagen climate conference. A gap of fifteen to twenty

Tony Abbott is the personification of old-fashioned conservatism, representative of the unexciting virtues of prudence, continuity and measured change.

percentage points between the two major parties was the norm. Aussie conservatives were in the deepest political valley.

The turning point came in December 2009, when Abbott took over the Liberal leadership. His internal opponent was Malcolm Turnbull, a Mitt Romney-type figure without any conservative instincts, and he—just like McCain and Cameron—had been a willing accomplice in the other party's agenda to price greenhouse-gas emissions in order to slash the nation's carbon footprint.

But the (political) climate was changing, at home and abroad. For several years, from 2006 to 2009—which marked the period from Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth* to the U.S. House's passage of the Waxman-Markey climate bill—the global-warming debate had been conducted in a heretic-hunting and illiberal environment. It was deemed blasphemy for anyone to dare question not only the doomsday scenarios peddled by the climate alarmists but also the policy consensus to decarbonize the economy via a tax or cap-and-trade scheme. Rudd claimed that climate change was the "great moral challenge" of our time. And in clear breach of the great liberal anti-Communist Sidney Hook's rule of controversy ("Before impugning an opponent's motives . . . answer his arguments"), Rudd linked "world government conspiracy theorists" and "climate-change deniers" to "vested interests."

It was in this environment that Abbott challenged the media-political zeitgeist. Cap and trade, he argued, merely amounted to economic pain for no environmental

gain, especially for many Australians who were mortgaged to the hilt. The nation, having weathered both the Asian and the Anglo-American financial storms in 1997–1998 and 2008–2009, respectively, has not suffered a recession in more than two decades. But a significant segment of the electorate has been increasingly conscious of high living costs, thanks to a tight housing market and exorbitant energy prices. Add to this the fact that Australia accounts for only about 1.2 percent of global carbon emissions and depends heavily on mineral exports for growth. Abbott's case was not an appeal to do nothing, but to avoid doing something stupid. And unilateral action to slash Australian emissions when no major emitter would follow Australia's lead, while its trade competitors were chugging up the smoky path to prosperity, was hardly in the national interest.

Then came the failed 2009 Copenhagen summit, which exposed the Labor agenda as a sham. When the rest of the world refused to endorse the climate enthusiasts' fanciful notions for slashing carbon emissions, Rudd imploded. Almost overnight, the Labor prime minister's stratospheric poll numbers collapsed and he ditched his cap-and-trade scheme, his government's keynote legislation. Labor factional warlords panicked and, in an act of brutality late one night in June 2010 that could have been mistaken for a scene from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, they knifed Rudd in an internal party coup and installed Julia Gillard as prime minister.

Undeterred, Abbott continued his relentless attacks on other key issues of principle and policy. Throughout

the next three years, he opposed the Labor government's big-spending and interventionist agenda, which had turned a multibillion-dollar surplus under the previous conservative government into skyrocketing debt and deficits, and he promised voters he would not be profligate with tax dollars. He also supported tough border-protection policies, which had traditionally helped boost public confidence in large-scale, legal immigration. So effective was Abbott in challenging Labor that the government changed leaders (again): Gillard herself was fatally knifed in June 2013—by the very man she had backstabbed three years earlier. By refusing to buckle in his opposition to Labor's increasingly antibusiness agenda and its craven attempts to woo groups such as gays, refugees, the arts lobby and public broadcasters at the expense of its more traditional constituency of blue-collar workers, Abbott aggravated the sensibilities of the metropolitan sophisticates. But he also broadened the appeal of his conservative agenda. He subsequently set the scene for the very electoral success that his critics had predicted he would never achieve.

On foreign policy, and reflecting a broad bipartisan consensus, Abbott will ensure that the U.S. alliance remains the centerpiece of his foreign policy. This is no surprise. Australia is the only nation to have joined America in every major military intervention in the past century: both world wars, Korea, Vietnam, the Gulf War, Afghanistan and Iraq. It has done so for the most part out of conviction as well as calculation. When disagreements do erupt—most notably over trade, where Australia has been more committed to unilateral cuts in agricultural subsidies than America—they have been moderate and usually privately expressed. Australia has not resented its dependence on American power. It has nei-

ther sought nor received aid in return for its support. And it is one of the few U.S. allies that has not been a burden on American taxpayers. At the height of the Cold War in the 1950s and 1960s, Australia provided bases and other facilities to the United States. More recently, in 2011 the Labor government, supported by Abbott, agreed to what amounts to a U.S. Marine base in Darwin on the northern coast and potentially in western Australia.

The alliance is deeply embedded in the national psyche. From its birth as an independent state in 1901, Australia has always sought a close association with a great power that shares its values and interests. For the first half of the twentieth century, Britain filled that role; since the end of the war against Japanese militarism and the onset of the Cold War, it has been the United States.

The advantages of the U.S. alliance include favorable access to technology and intelligence, as well as an important security insurance policy. On the American side, the alliance is of value because Australia is a stable, reliable and significant presence. It is the twelfth-largest economy in the world and serves as a fast-expanding and wealthy market for U.S. goods and services.

“When Australian ambassadors in Washington express support for the United States, it is heartfelt and unalloyed, never the ‘yes, but’ of the other allies, perfunctory support followed by a list of complaints, slights and sage finger-wagging,” the columnist Charles Krauthammer has observed. “Australia understands America’s role and is sympathetic to its predicament as reluctant hegemon.” Abbott shares that view. “It is often thought of America, in its dealings with the wider world, that its knowledge is scanty, its attention span short, its judgment flawed, and its actions frequently counter-productive,” he wrote in his memoirs in 2009. “What can’t seriously



be questioned,” he added, “is Americans’ collective desire to be a force for good.” And he declared at the Heritage Foundation in 2012: “America needs to believe in itself the way others still believe in it.”

But he is changing his thinking on international relations in subtle but crucial ways. For one thing, he appears to recognize what is emerging as a new political truism in the Antipodes: that the spectacular rise of China, now Australia’s largest trading partner, means that Canberra must learn to play a more demanding diplomatic game than ever before. Notwithstanding Abbott’s sincere admiration for America, there is a sense that he believes Australia is not faced with a stark binary choice between China and the United States. This means that Canberra, far from embracing old traits of dependability and unconditional loyalty, will need to be more nuanced, qualified and ambiguous in its diplomatic outlook.

On the eve of his election last September, Abbott appeared to recognize this reality. Under the headline “I would be an Asia-first prime minister,” he told the *Sydney Morning Herald*: “Decisions which impact on our national interests will be made in Jakarta, in Beijing, in Tokyo, in Seoul, as much as they will be made in Washington.”

Which brings me to another reason why Abbott has recently changed his tune on

foreign policy: he appears to have been mugged by reality in the Middle East. In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks in the United States in September 2001 and Bali in 2002, Abbott became an unashamed supporter of the George W. Bush administration’s doctrine of preventive war and democracy promotion. He embraced American neoconservatism. The invasion of Iraq in 2003 was overwhelmingly unpopular among most Australians, yet Abbott and the government of Prime Minister John Howard gave strong support to Washington’s decision to topple Saddam Hussein’s regime and attempt to transform postwar Iraq into a viable state and flourishing democracy.

Over time, however, he has come to recognize that such policies are costly in terms of blood and treasure as well as credibility and prestige. In the lead-up to last September’s federal election, he took issue with then prime minister Kevin Rudd over how Australia, a member of the UN Security Council, should deal with the Syrian crisis. The Western allies, he warned, did not have a dog in this fight between “baddies.” Victory for either the Assad regime or the rebellion could mean dreadful massacres and ethnic cleansing, as well as an increased threat of terrorism if the insurgency won.

Rudd seized on Abbott's use of the term "baddies," slamming it as "simplistic." "Words are bullets," Rudd lectured, and Abbott's failure to side with the opposition Syrian National Coalition meant that diplomats all over the globe would "scratch their heads" and "walk away in horror at this appalling error of foreign policy judgment." In Rudd's telling, a Prime Minister Abbott would damage Australia's standing in the world.

But whereas Rudd was talking as if it were still 2003, it was Abbott's more realist response to the simmering cauldron of sectarian malevolence that was more appropriate for 2013. Although no one, including Abbott, doubted the tyrannical nature of President Bashar al-Assad's regime, it was also true that many rebels were linked to powerful and sinister groups of West-hating Islamist fundamentalists, including Al Qaeda. Meanwhile, the Obama administration was wary of entangling itself more deeply in what was becoming essentially an anti-Iranian alliance with the Sunni autocracies of the Persian Gulf that back the Syrian rebels.

The episode was revealing. Here was Rudd, widely perceived as a foreign-policy prime minister, whose hawkish pronouncements merely reflected a childish posturing in an attempt to make Australia punch above its weight. Abbott, on the other hand, merely recognized the wisdom of Talleyrand's advice, "Above all, gentlemen, not the slightest zeal." This was especially the case when none of the supporters of a military strike against Syria had a clear sense of the mission. Given the lessons of Iraq and Afghanistan, and since the political objective remained perilously unclear, there was much to be said for Abbott's straight talking and foreign-policy realism.

In power for only seven months, Abbott's government has gotten off to a rocky start. Vacillation and ineptitude over the implementation of popular education reforms, along with a deteriorating relationship with Indonesia thanks to Edward Snowden's revelations of Australian intelligence spying on Jakarta's political leaders in 2009 as well as displeasure with Canberra's border-protection policy of turning back boat people to Indonesian waters, has brought to an end Abbott's postelection honeymoon. Meanwhile, he has failed to develop the art of selling the government's success in slashing illegal immigration, a hot-button issue in the electorate.

Already his new political opponents are confidently predicting that Abbott will be a "oncer"—a one-term prime minister. Leave aside the unintended irony here: after all, in the modern Labor Party, to serve a full term as prime minister is an extraordinary and enviable achievement given that the last two, Kevin Rudd and Julia Gillard, were dumped before either reached that particular milestone. The point here is that the critics who casually dismissed Abbott's prospects of ever leading the nation should be more cautious about doing so again, especially so early in his term. Besides, Australian voters are a conservative lot, wary of changing parties in power after only one administration. Not since the early 1930s has a first-term government lost office.

In any case, a clear majority of Australians preferred Abbott to the widely maligned Labor Party in last year's election. He may not be flashy and charismatic. But he is the personification of old-fashioned conservatism, representative of the unexciting virtues of prudence, continuity and measured change. It's a lesson to which conservatives in Britain and especially America should pay close attention. □

Abandon Nation Building

By Dov S. Zakheim

The January 2014 Al Qaeda takeover of the Iraqi cities of Fallujah and Ramadi, the scenes of some of the bitterest fighting between American and insurgent forces only a few years earlier, has prompted numerous questions along the lines of “Who lost Iraq?” and “Was the intervention in Iraq generally, and in these towns in particular, all in vain?” Of course, with hindsight, more and more Americans have come to the conclusion that the answer to the latter question is “yes.” It is always easy to be a Monday-morning quarterback, and Washington has no shortage of those who look brilliant when they start looking backward.

At the time, however, the case for intervention, backed by intelligence that many policy makers took at face value (whether they should have done so is still another issue) was far stronger than it appears today. Indeed, there are still those who firmly believe, in the face of so much evidence to the contrary, that, as one analyst has put it, “whatever was gained came at horrendous cost. But Iraq is changed, and in many ways for the better. So not all is lost.” Perhaps.

Nevertheless, the reemergence of a radical

Sunni threat to the Shia-led Iraqi state raises a much more fundamental issue that goes well beyond the case of Iraq itself. When the United States invaded Iraq to remove Saddam Hussein from power, its leaders had not taken into account the implications of occupying a state that was artificial from birth. Washington’s objective—to transform the Iraqi dictatorship into a force for peace and moderation in the Middle East, and to do so by promoting good governance in Baghdad—presupposed that good governance was even possible in a state whose citizens did not want to live alongside one another, unless they were forced to do so. Did the United States and the international coalition that supported it fool themselves? More to the point, should foreign nations, and America in particular, intervene with land forces in the Middle East—or, indeed, elsewhere in Asia, or in Africa—to preserve or create stability and good governance in states that are inherently artificial?

It is worth looking again at both Iraq itself and its neighbors in the Middle East before considering the wider aspects of this question. In the aftermath of World War I, Britain inherited the three former Turkish provinces of Basra, Baghdad and Mosul, which were combined under a League of Nations mandate into a single unit called Mesopotamia. The mandate took no account of the different ethnic and religious groups in the new entity, despite the Kurds’

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effort to gain their own independent state. Britain established a puppet government under the rule of King Faisal I, son of the sherif of Mecca. Faisal, a Sunni Muslim, surrounded himself with a clique of Sunni advisers who suppressed an increasingly hostile population (especially the Shia and Assyrians) with the aid of British military force. Britain, financially exhausted and frustrated by its inability to foster good governance in the League's artificial creation, finally persuaded the League to recognize Iraqi independence in 1932, though London's promises of self-determination had not been fulfilled.

The American experience seven decades later was virtually identical. Only the names of the actors had changed. The country was still led by a corrupt king, this time a secular one. Minorities were brutally suppressed. America—and indeed Britain as well—intervened with the intent of providing leadership and promoting good governance. All it did, however, was to replace one dictator with another and brutal minority rule with brutal majority rule.

The history of a large part of the rest of the Middle East since World War I is not much different. Whether one examines the recent history of Libya or Yemen or Syria or Lebanon or Sudan or even Egypt, one finds patterns roughly similar to that of Iraq. In most cases, Ottoman rule was followed by colonial domination, usually with a puppet monarch, over territories that did not match ethnic boundaries. In virtually all cases, ethnic groups engaged each other in civil strife that at times led to outright civil war. Kings were replaced by strongmen. Strongmen were overthrown in

coups, usually to be replaced by new ones. Foreign interventions made little difference.

Libya, once an Italian possession, and Yemen, part of which was under British control, both were artificial combinations of territories with vastly differing ethnic populations. Both were initially led by kings. Both suffered from civil wars and currently continue to do so. Western and Arab states have intervened in both, resulting in chaos in Libya and ongoing instability in Yemen.

Like Iraq, Syria and Lebanon were both created in the aftermath of World War I, initially the products of the 1916 Anglo-French Sykes-Picot Agreement and subsequently French mandates under the League of Nations. Both states were completely artificial, consisting of a



combination of previously Ottoman provinces that had hewed more closely, though hardly exactly, to the ethnic and religious populations that resided in them. Syria, like Iraq (and Yemen), was initially ruled by a king—the very same Faisal I, who, upon failing to consolidate power in Damascus, shifted his attention to Iraq. Syria then came under the rule of a succession of unstable governments, with coups virtually the norm, until the

It is past time for Washington to recognize a fundamental truth, which is that it cannot mold other states in its own image and that its attempts to do so through force are actually counterproductive.

rise of General Hafez al-Assad, the son of a sheikh of the minority Alawi sect, who had advocated a string of minority enclaves—including a Jewish one—along the Mediterranean Sea as a bulwark against Sunni domination. From his base as general secretary of the ruling Baath Party, Assad became the country's strongman after its defeat by Israel in the 1967 Six-Day War, successively serving as prime minister and then, after a successful coup, president for the remainder of his life. His far less capable but equally ruthless son, Bashar, now rules, and with the benefit of support from Russia, Iran and Hezbollah shows no sign of departing anytime soon.

Lebanon, which emerged from the consolidation of five previously Ottoman provinces, never had a king once the Ottomans departed, but was every bit as unstable as Syria. It had been plagued by civil strife during the period of Ottoman rule, and was wracked by civil wars afterward as well, the most recent being the fifteen-year civil war that began in 1975. It has also been the victim of Syrian, Israeli and American interventions, as well as of rival warlords and militias, with a virtually independent southern region under the control of Hezbollah. It currently is once again on the verge of civil war, as the Syrian civil war continues to spill over into its territory, and tensions between Hezbollah and Lebanon's other religious groups—the Sunnis, Druze and Christians—which were never far below the surface, continue to heat up once again.

Sudan, once an Ottoman domain, later was conquered by Egypt and subsequently

became an Anglo-Egyptian condominium, though by then Egypt was itself under British control. In the aftermath of the 1952 Egyptian revolution, Sudan achieved independence in 1956. Within two years, however, it suffered from the first of several coups. With two brief intervals, it has been under continuous military rule since 1969. From its inception as an Egyptian conquest, the country artificially incorporated both an Arab North and a black, animist South. Civil war between the two racial groups first broke out virtually at the same time as the Anglo-Egyptian condominium ended in 1955, just as independence was about to be proclaimed. A second civil war began in 1983, and only ended when the Arab North was forced to grant independence to its black African southern region in 2011. South Sudan is now itself being torn by civil strife, with the Arab North now attempting to mediate the dispute between Sudan's two main rival groupings, though several others are also at war with the central government.

Although ethnically (but not religiously) homogeneous, Egypt's modern history also reflects the pattern of Ottoman rule, beginning with colonial domination and a monarchy, followed by military rule and punctuated throughout by unrest and revolutions. The country remained under Ottoman rule until 1882, when it became a de facto part of the British Empire, though ruled through a succession of puppet kings. The 1952 revolution brought the country under military rule, which persisted in fact if not in form until the 2011 revolution, and subsequently returned after a year

in which the now-outlawed Muslim Brotherhood controlled the government.

It is arguable that even several of the Middle East's monarchies—which have been relatively stable, at least in the sense that none has been overthrown recently—are in some ways as precarious and artificial as those states ruled by the generals. Jordan, initially an Ottoman possession, was a British creation, carved out of what had been mandatory Palestine in 1921 and established as a separate British mandate the following year. It has suffered from varying degrees of unrest virtually throughout its existence, with the most marked examples being the assassination of its first king, Abdullah I, in 1951, various assassination attempts against his son, King Hussein, and the Palestinian insurrection beginning in 1970 known as Black September. Saudi Arabia was born out of warfare; it came into being when King Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud conquered the Hejaz in 1925 after previously conquering the Nejd. The country, initially part of the Ottoman Empire, was formally unified and given its current name in 1932.

Oman and Bahrain likewise have suffered from civil strife. Though never under Ottoman control, but for decades under British influence, Oman's Sultan Qaboos had to defeat a major rebellion in the country's Dhofar region. Likewise, Bahrain's minority Sunni leaders have come under tremendous pressure from the state's Shia majority, and faced virtual open rebellion in 2012–2013. Nevertheless, none of these states has collapsed into chaos, in part because traditional rulers, as opposed to strongmen, command (and often buy) more loyalty among their naturally conservative populations, and in part because other regional Muslim states are prepared to spring to their assistance. Most notably, Iran provided forces (as did Britain) to help Sultan Qaboos quash the

Dhofar rebellion, while Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates dispatched forces to come to the aid of the al-Khalifa regime in Bahrain. It is one thing for a Muslim state to come to the aid of a beleaguered fellow Muslim regime. It is quite another if a Western state does so, especially in large numbers. This was not the case with British support for the sultan of Oman, which was limited to its small but highly effective Special Air Service units.

The Middle East is hardly unique as a venue for artificial states drawn by European bureaucrats that are at best unstable and at worst collapsing entirely. Much of Central Africa reflects a similar history, with similar results. Instability, dictatorship and outright warfare have predominated both in what was once French West Africa and in the former Belgian colonies along the Great Lakes and the Congo River virtually since France and Belgium departed Africa at the beginning of the 1960s. Both European countries, and especially France, have intervened on the continent since granting independence to their former colonies; the French intervention in Mali last year was only the most recent of numerous such interventions.

For decades, Washington recognized that it was wiser to stand back and merely assist the Europeans who sought to stabilize their former African colonies. This was the case with France's numerous interventions in Chad, Britain's intervention in Sierra Leone in the 1990s and NATO's actions in Libya in 2011 (though in the Libyan case American military involvement was far more significant than was publicly acknowledged). Elsewhere, however, Washington has often attempted regime change by inserting troops on the ground, yielding mixed results over the long term.

America's 1993 intervention in Somalia's civil war did not prevent that state from



falling apart. Nor is this all. Multiple interventions in Haiti, including one in the early 1990s, have yet to yield stable and viable governance of that impoverished state. The 2003 invasion of Iraq has not been a success. Afghanistan may yet prove to be a failure as well, unless one may term achieving the objective of troop withdrawal by the end of 2014 a “success,” regardless of its consequences for the future of that state. But this would be tantamount to a student declaring to his parents that he has succeeded on a test by fleeing the examination room before it concluded.

Where Washington has successfully intervened, it has almost invariably been because the venue was in its own Western Hemispheric backyard, with its more familiar culture and shorter logistics lines. Moreover, with the notable exception of its support for the contras during the 1980s, the United States has tended to focus on providing arms, training and occasional aerial support to governments under pressure, rather than supporting opposition groups seeking to overthrow the government. In most cases, where it did insert general-purpose forces, they would quickly depart the scene of their operations. Where American forces remained in a country for a considerable length of time, as

in El Salvador or Colombia, they played a supporting role, providing training and aerial intelligence for local troops rather than leading operations against insurgents. Finally, the United States has generally refrained from seeking to overhaul Latin American societies and governments, partly because, at least nominally, they share similar roots in a European-based political culture.

Washington also intervened successfully in the Balkan wars of the 1990s. But both in the case of the Bosnian civil war and that of the fight for Kosovo’s independence, American involvement in combat operations did not include the insertion of land forces. Rather, America employed its overwhelming airpower in both Bosnia, a state roughly the size of West Virginia, and Kosovo, which has a smaller area than Connecticut. Even then, only when cease-fires were negotiated did the United States commit its forces to larger, multinational units. Unlike in the cases of Iraq and Afghanistan, American forces did not constitute the majority of those units, nor did large numbers of American land forces remain in theater for an extended period. Finally, the United States did not take the leading role in promoting good governance, much less nation building, in either Bosnia or Kosovo; that daunting task was left to the Europeans.

It is past time for Washington to recognize a fundamental truth, which is that it cannot mold other states in its own image and that its attempts to do so through force are actually counterproductive. American greatness is not enhanced by engaging abroad willy-nilly. Instead, it is under-

While advocates of nation building argue that most people want to live in a free society, it is even more the case that most people don't want foreigners telling them how to live.

mined. Indeed, if America is truly exceptional, then, by definition, other states cannot be made into knockoff Americas. It is ironic that President Barack Obama seems less inclined to intervene in other states than those for whom exceptionalism is an article of faith. His motivations may be entirely misplaced—he appears committed to avoiding entangling foreign commitments that will undermine his ability to pursue his primary objective of “nation building at home”—but his instincts regarding intervention are very much on the mark.

America's attempts at nation building have rarely succeeded. Its greatest successes have been in countries with fairly homogenous populations—Germany, Japan and Korea—and in which it has stationed troops for more than half a century. The states that are the primary sources of instability today, and that tempt some policy makers on the right and the left to intervene in order to “set things right,” are unstable precisely because they are not homogenous. Forcing nationalities with ancient communal hatreds to live in harmony is a difficult mission at the best of times. For American forces, whose knowledge of foreign—particularly non-European—cultures and languages is for the most part rudimentary at best and whose sense of history is measured in decades rather than centuries, such a mission is virtually doomed to failure from the start.

In addition, in the aftermath of the Iraq and Afghan wars, few Americans would be willing to commit troops to unstable or failing states for as much as a decade, or even longer. Yet development experts argue

that only in such extended time frames can nation building succeed. Indeed, it is remarkable that the American public was willing to tolerate both of those lengthy conflicts; the country's previous two wars, in Kuwait and the Balkans, both involved the relatively brief commitment of American forces. Moreover, public pressure led to the withdrawal from Somalia in March 1994, less than eighteen months after the initial humanitarian intervention was launched in December 1992.

A case might have been made in the early part of the past decade for supporting America's intervention in Afghanistan and its subsequent efforts to undertake nation building in that country, despite the length of time that such activity was expected to require. After all, the American intervention in 2001 was highly popular, since it removed the hated Taliban regime. Refugees came streaming back to Afghanistan from Pakistan in particular. Small businesses began to sprout throughout the country. Al Qaeda was on the run, as was the Taliban.

Moreover, despite its ethnic diversity, Afghanistan has a long history of nation-statehood. Its people have a strong sense of national identity. It has been termed the “graveyard of empires,” for good reason—its people have historically found ways to defeat invading superpowers, whether they were the ancient Greeks of Alexander, the armies of the British Empire or those of the Soviet Union. Building upon a legacy of governance, though it involved a delicate balance between a relatively weak central government and powerful provincial

leaders, was nevertheless a potentially feasible task.

However, Washington essentially turned away from Afghanistan to prosecute its war with Saddam Hussein. Until America came to realize the extent to which it had withheld the military, civilian and financial resources required to help rebuild (not build) Afghanistan, the Taliban was able to regroup and exploit the corruption that was endemic throughout the country.

Nevertheless, America's second major intervention in Afghanistan as the Iraq War began to wane might have been successful. It still might be. It has been seriously hampered, however, by the administration's premature signal that it planned to withdraw the bulk of American forces in 2014, come what may. That announcement vitiated the effectiveness of the surge, which was announced in December 2009. It provided the Taliban, other insurgent groups, Afghanistan's neighbors and the Afghan government a timetable for planning for dealing with an Afghanistan that lacked a significant American presence. As a result, the American intervention in Afghanistan is unlikely to realize U.S. objectives, despite the loss in combat of thousands of American lives and the expenditure of hundreds of billions of dollars.

To argue that America should be far more cautious about intervening abroad is not to say that it should never intervene, however. Quite the contrary. America's willingness to intervene in support of a beleaguered ally is a *sine qua non* for maintaining its alliances. Without a credible willingness to do so, the United States will find that it has no allies. Indeed, worldwide uneasiness with current American policy is not a result of the fact that America is too eager to intervene, but rather that it seems too eager to minimize the demands of its commitments on its defense resources. The

release of the defense budget for 2015 has only reinforced that sense of unease about the seriousness of America's international commitments.

In any event, it is one thing to intervene with military force to defeat aggression against an ally or a friendly state, such as Kuwait in 1990. It is quite another to insert military forces either to topple an unfriendly but nonthreatening regime, such as Iraq in 2003, or to take sides in a civil war that has no direct impact on American national security as is the case with Syria today and may well be the case in Ukraine as well. Likewise, it is one thing to attack a putative aggressor from the air or sea, as was the case with Libya in 1986 and again a quarter century later; it is another to deploy troops on the ground. It is the latter that provokes the greatest outrage among the largest number of people in the targeted country, in part because it is so much easier to insert troops into a country than to withdraw them.

Put simply, while advocates of nation building argue that most people want to live in a free society, it is even more the case that most people don't want foreigners telling them how to live, especially if those foreigners wear uniforms and carry guns down their streets and alleys, kicking down the doors to their homes in the middle of the night.

It is easy in retrospect to regret the launching of Operation Iraqi Freedom, especially since it is arguable that Iraq is hardly free today. Still, the case for intervention at that time looked far more compelling than it does today. Nevertheless, it is undeniable (except for the most partisan administration supporters whose job it is to make silk purses out of sow's ears) that America's standing in the Middle East is nothing short of a disaster. Iraq is falling apart. So is Syria. Libya and South Sudan require little comment. Somalia is a failed

state. Lebanon, ever fragile, may once again revert to civil war. Egypt has gone through multiple convulsions. American intervention in Iraq was not the sole or proximate cause of all these developments, but it surely was a contributing factor in many of them. Another American intervention in the region would only make matters worse.

Africa, with its own collection of artificial states, several of which are either failing or on the verge of failing, is hardly a better venue for American intervention. It is true that the United States has become more actively involved militarily on that continent, particularly operating from its base in Djibouti, without suffering the kind of blowback it has received in the Middle East. Indeed, Africa is one of the few places worldwide where America remains highly popular. That may be the case, however, because the focus of American efforts is on counterterrorism operations that involve a relatively small number of boots on the ground. For the most part, Washington continues to pursue its traditional, and

sensible, policy of letting others, whether Europeans or Africans themselves, take the lead in conducting both combat and stabilization operations.

At issue, therefore, is whether the United States should continue to pursue an activist combat role, followed by exercises in nation building, in Asia in general and in the Middle East in particular. Whatever one's view of whether America should or should not have invaded Iraq in 2003, there is no excuse for not learning the lesson of Iraq that should by now be clear to all. It is a lesson first enunciated in a different Asian context by General Douglas MacArthur and ignored ever since: the United States should not become enmeshed in a land war in Asia. What made sense in the late 1940s makes sense in the contemporary Middle East for the same reason: ancient peoples, with ancient hatreds, will not pay much heed to well-intentioned Americans who come to tell them what to do with their politics, and sadly, all too often, they will try to kill them. □

Let's Make a Deal

By John Allen Gay

It was long past midnight in Geneva last November when the rumors began to fly. Iran and the world powers had just reached a deal on its nuclear program. An international crisis that had been building toward what seemed like war for more than a decade was now on the path to resolution. The deal, a haggard John Kerry confirmed, was real. It wasn't comprehensive—Iran would still be heavily sanctioned and heavily centrifuged—but it was unprecedented. All prior efforts had fallen apart. Now the two sides had agreed to initial trust-building measures, had outlined the terms of a final deal and had made plans to work toward it. And what allowed the deal to happen was equally important—a glimmer of rapprochement between Iran and the United States, whose mutual distrust and occasional enmity is the root of the nuclear issue.

No sooner had the deal been reached than Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu denounced it as a snare and a delusion. Similarly, a chorus of American neoconservatives insisted that the Obama administration had cut a lousy deal. "Abject Surrender by the United States" was the headline on former ambassador John Bolton's story the next day at the *Weekly Standard*. The surrender, said Bolton,

was that under the deal, "Iran retains its full capacity to enrich uranium, thus abandoning a decade of Western insistence and Security Council resolutions that Iran stop all uranium-enrichment activities." William Kristol announced, "The American people won't be able to repeal Iran's nuclear weapons once Iran has them. That's why serious people, in Congress and outside, will do their utmost to expose and scuttle Obama's bad Iran deal." And writing in the *Wall Street Journal*, Bret Stephens did Bolton and Kristol one better. He didn't say the deal was as bad as the 1938 Munich agreement. He said it was even worse.

Such overwrought piffle exposes the weakness of the neocon case. For the truth is that the deal does not amount to surrender. It will not lead to regime change or other utopian goals. It represents something more plausible—an armed truce that is in the interest of both Iran and the United States and that could lead to a broader détente between the two nations.

Here's why the agreement's critics have hit wrong. While Iran's gains may have defied Security Council measures and worked around international sanctions, in pragmatic terms the limits on Iran's nuclear program were being set in Tehran. Fearing war and deeper international cooperation against it, Iran had converted some of its stockpile of 19.75 percent enriched uranium into fuel plates. The challenge of converting them back added time to

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and reduces the risk of miscalculation on either side.*

any rush for bomb-grade uranium. Yet it continued to install new centrifuges and expand its stockpile of 3.5 percent enriched uranium. Both would be useful in a nuclear breakout. Iranian officials regularly declared their intentions to vastly expand parts of the nuclear program in the future. And at times, they even suggested they would build nuclear submarines or other nuclear-powered vessels, which would allow them, under the cover of international law, to enrich uranium to bomb grade. In short, while international law had given us firmer ground from which to oppose Iran's nuclear advances, it was doing little to arrest them. The time had clearly come for other steps.

Sanctions have been one of those other steps. It is difficult to see why Iran's rulers would negotiate seriously with the West without being made to pay some genuine cost. They tend to agree that the international measures against Iran are illegitimate and rooted in double standards. Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, in particular, has long been skeptical of America's intentions and honesty.

The United States has had some sanctions measures against Iran in force for decades. They were not producing results until, under Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Iran's tough rhetoric and continued nuclear gains induced other countries to join in the sanctions regime. One of the broadest sanctions coalitions in history formed. These forces combined with Ahmadinejad's gross mismanagement to produce severe turmoil in the Iranian economy, including, at one point, a *monthly* inflation rate above 60 percent. Things were so bad

that the *Atlantic's* Graeme Wood took a "hyperinflation vacation" to Iran's Kish Island resorts, his hard currency granting him access to luxuries usually out of reach. And he wasn't alone; as he wrote, his flight from the United Arab Emirates was packed with

Filipinas on leave from jobs in Dubai. Kish, they told me, had emerged as a preferred holiday destination for those too poor to go all the way home to the Philippines. After just a short flight, they could live like queens for a week, having toiled as scullery maids for a year or more without vacation.

The economic troubles were undeniably linked to the nuclear situation—the rial would swing wildly when negotiations were in session. The arrival of the new government of Hassan Rouhani restored competence to Iran's economic administration, but conditions remain urgent. Rouhani's stated goal is to reduce inflation to a still-blistering 25 percent by early 2015; one of his close advisers said that he "doubt[s] that in the next four years the . . . inflation rate will fall to less than 10 percent."

Problems like these have prompted Iran to bargain more seriously with the West. Yet the key to the sanctions' effectiveness had been the broad coalition backing them. Forming that coalition had taken a big push by the United States. It is hard for many countries, especially those with struggling economies, to resist the pull of one of the Middle East's largest markets. If Washington doesn't appear to be

negotiating seriously, the sanctions regime could crumble.

Many capitals would have seen a refusal of the initial deal signed last November—the Joint Plan of Action—as just such a failure to negotiate seriously. For all its flaws, the Joint Plan represents a path to a livable final arrangement.

In the short term, the most important concession won from Iran is the reduction of its stocks of uranium enriched to nearly 20 percent purity. This stockpile posed the greatest risk of a quick nuclear breakout. Uranium needs to be enriched to more than 90 percent purity to make a usable

Plan has “drain[ed] the uranium from Mr. Netanyahu’s bomb.” By taking the most urgent concern off the table, the interim agreement buys time for negotiation and reduces the risk of miscalculation on either side.

Similarly, expansions under way at Iran’s enrichment facilities and at the unfinished heavy-water reactor at Arak (potentially a key element in a plutonium-based approach to a bomb) are now effectively paused, halting an alarming trend. And inspections of Iran’s facilities are now more rigorous and extensive, which will provide a clearer picture of the threat and a greater chance of detection in the event of an attempted



nuclear bomb, but it takes far more work to enrich a unit of natural uranium to 20 percent than to take it from 20 percent to weapons grade. This is the principle behind Netanyahu’s famous bomb diagram, shown to the world in his September 2012 address to the United Nations General Assembly. It’s also the reason Iran was converting some of its 20 percent stockpile into fuel plates—it knew that a big stockpile would be a rallying point against Tehran. As Ploughshares Fund head Joseph Cirincione put it to the *Washington Post*, reducing the stockpile under the Joint

breakout. The concessions made on sanctions, while significant, appear to be worth the price of these gains, and certainly so if they lead to a final deal.

The final deal outlined in the Joint Plan of Action represents a further improvement. The parties have agreed that a final deal will include Iran’s ratification of an Additional Protocol agreement with the IAEA, which would give inspectors a clearer picture of Iran’s activities. Getting Iran on board with the Additional Protocol has long been a key American goal. Iran would also “fully resolve concerns related to the reactor at

Arak,” and agree not to reprocess spent nuclear fuel or build facilities that can do so. This would block the plutonium path to a bomb.

What’s the cost for a final deal? It would further legitimize the elements of the nuclear program that Iran constructed illegitimately, as discussed above, and Iran would get to keep some capabilities that, all other things being equal, we’d not want them to have. We’d also “comprehensively lift [all] nuclear-related sanctions,” dismantling the impressive structure we’ve built and giving Iran a clearer path to economic strength. Yet the whole point of those sanctions was to push Iran to make a deal on the nuclear program, so it would be strange to keep them in place after making the deal. And we would be able to keep in place the range of sanctions we’ve applied to Iran over concerns about terrorism and human rights—these are, after all, not “nuclear-related sanctions.” Agreeing to that in the Joint Plan was a concession by the Iranians, who had previously insisted that *all* sanctions would have to be lifted in the nuclear deal. Lifting the human-rights and terror sanctions in order to resolve concerns about the nuclear program would have been an extremely tough sell at home—rightly so—and would have sent a dangerous message to other states that America has targeted over human-rights concerns: namely, that by making yourself dangerous you can force concessions in other areas.

The biggest open question regarding the final deal is what enrichment capability Iran will retain. The Joint Plan specifies that there will be “a mutually defined enrichment programme with mutually agreed parameters consistent with practical-needs, with agreed limits on scope and level of enrichment activities, capacity, where it is carried out, and stocks of enriched uranium, for a period to be agreed upon.” Obviously this is rather vague, especially

on the key point of whether Iran will be allowed to develop and deploy progressively more advanced centrifuges that would be a greater proliferation risk than the primitive models the country currently uses. But we should recognize that Iranian enrichment is a manageable threat. Smaller numbers of less advanced centrifuges simply take longer to make a bomb. Pairing limits with a strong inspection regime, like the one in the Additional Protocol, makes the threat even more manageable. The main work after a final deal would be ensuring that a strong coalition of nations remains committed to holding Iran to the terms. The worst-case scenario would be if Iran abrogated the deal and kicked out the inspectors, but only got a tepid response from the international community. For this to happen, there would have to be significant, likely preventable shifts in the dynamics of relations between the United States and other great powers, such that some of those powers would rather accept the danger of a nuclear Iran than cooperate with the United States to forestall it. (The Ukraine crisis risks moving things in that direction.) If we reach that point in our relations with other great powers, the problem of a nuclear Iran will be far less severe in comparison.

Yet the hawks in Washington remain bedazzled by the prospect of confrontation. Their posturing in the wake of the Iraq War brings to mind Talleyrand’s comment about the Bourbons: “They had learned nothing and forgotten nothing.” And so, days before the interim deal was signed, a bipartisan group of fourteen senators issued a statement that they intended to pass new sanctions “as soon as possible,” saying that they were “committed to preventing Iran from acquiring [nuclear-weapons] capability.” The group, which included well-known hawks like John McCain, Lindsey Graham and Charles Schumer, enig-

mas like Tennessee’s Bob Corker, and Iraq War opponent Robert Menendez, promptly moved to make good on their word, proposing the Nuclear Weapon Free Iran Act a month later. If enacted, the measure would have tightened and expanded sanctions on Iran if it violated a range of strictures or failed to sign a final deal that met certain criteria.

The bill’s proponents sold it as a reasonable step to ensure Iran was negotiating in good faith. “Current sanctions brought Iran to the negotiating table and a credible threat of future sanctions will require Iran to cooperate and act in good faith at the negotiating table,” said Menendez in a statement. When the Obama administration pushed back, saying that the measure could scuttle the deal, *National Review* quipped that “if enforcing the terms of a weak existing bargain would

imperil negotiations, that is as good a sign as any that, for now, negotiations are not worth holding at all.” And Senator Mark Kirk of Illinois, another key supporter of the bill, stated that it “would not impose any new sanctions during negotiations so long as Iran complies with the terms of the interim step agreement and concludes a final agreement to dismantle its illicit nuclear infrastructure.” Yet the bill did not merely serve to put teeth in the Joint Plan of Action. It was instead an alternative to it, drawing up parameters for a final agreement that did not match up with those that had been agreed upon in the Joint Plan. Had the bill been passed and had Iran then made a deal, even a generous one, under the Joint Plan, it would have still been hit with more extensive sanctions than ever before. The proposed legislation was thus a kind of de facto referendum on the Joint Plan—one

that attracted fifty-nine cosponsors before an intense campaign against the sanctions by the White House and its allies in the press stalled it. Even AIPAC was backing away from the bill by the end.

Just where did the bill go wrong? It included a number of miscellaneous elements that added nothing to the legal impact of the bill, but which would have greatly influenced Iran’s interpretation of it, such as a declaration of the sense of Congress that “if the Government of Israel is compelled to take military action in legitimate self-defense against Iran’s nuclear weapon program,” the United States should support it with military force. It’s hard to say what this even means in practical terms—an Israeli military action against Iran’s nuclear-weapons *program* would be preventive and therefore not “legitimate self-defense” under the traditional laws of war; an Israeli military action in



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After more than three decades of enmity and mutual isolation broken only by secret, furtive contacts, the United States and Iran are now speaking regularly and openly. That's important.

response to imminent or actual Iranian nuclear *attack* would be legitimate, but would almost certainly be supported by the United States, nonbinding resolution or not. A third reading, perhaps what some of the bill's authors intended, is that it's an attempt to stipulate that an Israeli preventive attack on Iran's nuclear program *would be* "legitimate self-defense" (the word "legitimate" now being redefined to mean "supported by a statement from some legislative body somewhere"), and further that America should support it. Whether it's prudent for Congress to declare our support before the fact for wars initiated at the leisure of a foreign government is a question we'll leave for another day, but suffice it to say the Iranians would not take such declarations as signs of our good faith.

As Edward Levine of the Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation has pointed out, the proposed legislation would also link relief of the nuclear sanctions to two nonnuclear matters: the state of Iran's ballistic-missile program and its support for terrorist activities. These are both critical areas of concern for U.S. national security, and that concern should be reflected in U.S. law. Yet that does not mean that they should be tied to the nuclear program (especially when resolving the nuclear issue would make Iran's ballistic missiles and terrorist proxies a bit less threatening). It also does not mean that the best way for Washington to address its concerns about missiles and terrorism would be to breach the commitments it made in the Joint Plan of Action. Worse still, Levine notes that these linking clauses in the bill

don't specify a time frame, which could make them impossible to fulfill—to grant sanctions relief, the president might have to certify that Iran has *never* supported an act of terror against the United States (it's done that before) or tested longer-ranged missiles (ditto).

But the worst feature of the Nuclear Weapon Free Iran Act is that it would move the goalposts set in the Joint Plan of Action. In the Joint Plan, the parties agreed that a final deal would "involve a mutually defined enrichment program with mutually agreed parameters," and would "fully resolve concerns related to the reactor at Arak." Yet under the bill, the final deal would have to "*dismantle Iran's illicit nuclear infrastructure, including enrichment and reprocessing capabilities and facilities, the heavy water reactor and production plant at Arak* [emphasis added], and any nuclear weapon components and technology." The bill and the Joint Plan are in direct contradiction on enrichment, and they're in implicit contradiction on Arak. (And, as Levine observes, "How one dismantles technology is left to the imagination.") The Iranians would complain if the legislation passed—and this time, they'd be in the right.

In sum, the Iran deal is not "surrender" or "Munich" or something even worse. It's actually a positive, if limited, step. Indeed, it promises benefits that extend beyond what's spelled out in the Joint Plan of Action. After more than three decades of enmity and mutual isolation broken only by secret, furtive contacts, the United States and Iran are

now speaking regularly and openly. That's important. Not communicating, even when relations are bad, is dangerous. It increases the chances of miscalculation and misunderstanding, and prevents potential areas of cooperation—which do exist—from balancing troubles in the relationship.

If the Joint Plan leads to a successful final deal that resolves the nuclear dispute, the unwritten benefits will be greater. Iran and the United States do not trust each other. Each has ample reason for that. That mistrust amplifies each side's worries about the other—and makes behavior that will be seen as untrustworthy more likely. This unhealthy cycle has been on clear display with the nuclear issue: Iran builds secret nuclear facilities that make us think they're up to no good; we mull attacking those facilities to head off evil intentions, which makes them more secretive, which makes us more worried, and so on. Cooperating to resolve a major strategic dispute gives each side an opportunity to test the other's trustworthiness. The success of the Joint Plan could thus yield benefits in unexpected areas.

Of course, the Obama administration must remain clear-eyed in its view of Iran. At this point, calls in some quarters for a "grand bargain" or even an alliance savor of geopolitical naïveté. Iran's government continues to be a major sponsor of terrorism. It is a rival to many of our allies, and though some of these alliances are not as close as they once were, they won't be going away anytime soon. Iran talks like a revisionist power, and sometimes acts like one, too.

But there is plenty of room for a deal with Iran that benefits both sides. Washington has no interest in provoking a military confrontation that would foster even more anti-Americanism and send the price of crude spiraling. For its part, Tehran, wracked by economic woes, appears to have a keen sense of its national interests. There are plenty of nasty countries around the world that the United States, to borrow a phrase from former British prime minister Margaret Thatcher, does business with. Iran can and should be one of them. When it comes to Iran, the Obama administration is on the right path. □

Shaping Things to Come

By Simon Serfaty

Raymond Aron called the twentieth century “the century of total war,” and so it was, arguably the worst ever, exceeding even the devastation created by the Thirty Years’ War. As many as 175 million people were deliberately killed, whether in combat or in cold blood—so many on both sides of Europe and throughout the world that it is hard to acknowledge them all. Instead, a selective history of pain and a confining geography of horrors set perverse limits on the casualties we single out over the innumerable others we ignore—each “forgotten” victim an infinity and every overlooked region an offense. Yet, with the United States willing at last to accept the baton of Western leadership from the fallen European great powers, this past century ended, or at least appeared to end, as a triumph of American power and Western values: the very values that Europe had transgressed and the power that America asserted to restore them.

Ten years past the unipolar moment that brought the past century to an early terminus, the traumatic events of September 11, 2001, threatened a new

security order, one that transformed George W. Bush, who had preached the virtues of a “humble” foreign-policy approach during his debates with Vice President Al Gore, into an unabashed unilateralist: “Bring ‘em on,” as he incautiously put it. Armed with America’s arsenal of unmatched capabilities, Bush went to Afghanistan the way Bill Gates would go to McDonald’s: with too much money for the place and too little taste for the food. And then, “because Afghanistan wasn’t enough . . . to make a point that we’re not going to live in this world that they want for us,” as Henry Kissinger reportedly said, and as Vice President Dick Cheney clearly believed, the war moved on to a new and even more disastrous theater.

The tumult and bloodshed and agony of the past decade have raised the prospect of significant change in American foreign policy and the public conception of the country’s role in the world. At stake is nothing less than the conviction that American power and world order are coeval. First announced by President Harry Truman in the doctrine that bears his name, this credo was reformulated periodically throughout the Cold War but never lost its hold on the imagination of the foreign-policy establishment. Mostly forgotten during the Clinton years, when the nation seemed eager to take a time-out, even a vacation, from the world, that doctrine was forcefully reasserted by George W. Bush in two wars to which his name remains affixed

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and which Barack Obama was elected to end. For no matter how vengeful Americans felt after September 11, the abuses of American power, in Iraq especially, proved increasingly repugnant, and the costs of both wars, including Afghanistan, unbearably excessive.

Paradoxically, a fresh appraisal of the uses of American power gained legitimacy when the evidence of failure forced Bush, too, to recognize its limits: even a power without peers cannot remain a peerless power absent allies that are not only “willing” but also capable and relevant. Indeed, remembering the expectations that prevailed in 2009 little seems more ironic now than the realization that the changes that occurred between Bush’s first and second terms in office were more significant than the changes from Bush to Obama. We are all multilateralists now. That is a part of the Bush legacy that Barack Obama did not find hard to adopt.

Not only has America’s perception of its role in the world changed, but so too has the world’s conception of that role. For one, over the past two decades and under three different presidents, this conception has been very much molded by the American performance, not only abroad but also at home. Other “emerging” powers, somewhat dismissively designated as the Rest, have equated a decline in America’s global position with a decline in American power. This is wrong. As was the case for previous such debates, both themes are exaggerated. As America stutters and Europe mumbles, other powers are starting to proclaim their superiority—China flaunts its money, Russia its machismo, India its people and Brazil its vigor. Here are the “BRICS” of a new post-Western world—and here are some of the main parameters of a putative new global order that calls for less of the West and more of the Rest.

Such calls, which seem to invite America to pick up its military toys and go home,

have been heard repeatedly before, but they never proved all that convincing. Yet now, in a world in transition—or, better yet, in mutation—the changed cast of non-Western states that are auditioning for global leadership seems to be more persuasive. Thus, at half past Obama, the president and his administration possess scant time to script a new role. Obama is caught between the aspiration to withdraw from Afghanistan, on the one hand, and the inclination to engage in the Middle East peace process, on the other.

The sense of retreat, of course, is not new. “Listening to America” over forty years ago, Bill Moyers only met people, he wrote, who “wanted to talk about the tribulations of America” and who showed “an impatience, an intemperance, an isolation which invites opportunists who promise too much and castigate too many.” About sixty years earlier, the prominent progressive Amos Pinchot had come to similar conclusions. Pinchot asked, “What’s the matter with America?” He feared that Americans had become listless and moribund—“a purposeless people, a nation . . . enamored of strife and motion for its own sake.” He added: “Something is wrong. The great majority of our people have lost faith in the government.” The effects of the Panic of 1907 still lingered on. So did those of the atrabilious presidential election of 1912, when President William Howard Taft struggled for his party’s nomination against his predecessor and former chum, Theodore Roosevelt. Then, decades later, Vietnam and Watergate prompted another spasm of national introspection. America lost its innocence all over again.

America’s debility, you could say, has, in one fashion or another, been accumulating almost forever. A key part of the syndrome has been identifying an ascending power elsewhere. In the 1980s, it was Japan and

West Germany that were reintroduced to the world as the next superpowers. Their economic dominance, it was said, presaged the end of the American Century, one already unsettled by a Soviet military surge that some cold warriors, mesmerized by the putative power of totalitarianism, said would prove irresistible. Within a few years, however, the Soviet Union went poof. Then Japan became the next great loser of the post-Cold War world. The lesson is that extrapolations that foretell the “irresistible” rise of some and the “irreversible” decline of others are no plausible substitute for facts that confirm the dominance of some and the fragility of their competitors.

The debate over the relative decline of American power and the consequences of such decline for the U.S. role in the world, then, is a rather otiose one. It is mainly geography that kept the European world away from America, but it is history that brought America into the world when it proved to be the last major power left standing. Yet even at the peak of the Cold War, with past powers recovered, the future of American primacy was never assured. Different U.S. presidents envisioned different futures. John Kennedy’s unbound faith in the primacy of American power sustained his commitment to do everything and more, but Richard Nixon’s reluctant emphasis on limits cautioned Washington to do less of everything. Subsequently, Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan held distinct but surprisingly complementary views, with Carter’s preference for restoring America’s good name serving as a needed transition to Reagan’s insistence on renewing America’s primacy.

It was the unipolar moment that created the deceptive sense that America

could refashion much of the globe in its own image willy-nilly. But that moment was not so much born out of the rise of American power as from the collapse of everyone else. Over the past decade,



the events of September 11 and their geopolitical aftermath, the financial crisis of 2008 and the Arab Spring of 2011 have served as cumulative shocks out of which has emerged the long-predicted polycentric world. For au fond, it was already emerging during the Cold War, when expectations in Third World countries rose after decolonization and when some temerarious nonaligned countries demonstrated their reach in the shadow of two superpowers.

Now, entering the new century, the days of ever-deeper U.S. engagement are over: this, at least, is no longer a matter for debate. The overwhelming public opposition to the war in Afghanistan suffices to confirm its closure: two-thirds of the American public now conclude that the war is not worth fighting—an astonishing exclamation mark on a war that had nearly unanimous support

at home and abroad when it was launched. “People used to say,” confided longtime Iraqi foreign minister Hoshiyar Zebari to Afghan president Hamid Karzai in late 2013, “that no matter what . . . the Americans are here [in Iraq] to stay. . . . But they were eager to leave, and they will be eager to leave your country as well.” Describing such fatigue as isolationism and interpreting a willingness to negotiate as appeasement, however, betrays a simplistic understanding of both nineteenth-century isolationism and twentieth-century appeasement. A decade after 9/11, Barack Obama is resetting the United States halfway between the Kennedy-like forceful commitment to deep engagement and extended deterrence, and the Nixon-like diplomatic turns of selective disengagement and retrenchment. For in the end, and as was the case after each world war waged during the twentieth century—in 1919, 1945 and 1991—this remains an American moment: Obama’s moment.

Can a significant change in American foreign policy be expected during such a moment? Will it produce a more modest role in the world for the United States? Is the world better prepared to respond to this reduced position? Here we go again: in the 1950s, these questions accompanied the Korean War; in the 1970s, they grew out of the Vietnam War; in the 1990s, they followed the end of the Cold War; and now, in the 2010s, they are prompted by the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Even in a period of austerity, this is not just a matter of costs; it is also a matter of interest and efficacy. Insisting on “no more Iraqs” is all too obvious: never since the French invasion of the Ruhr in late 1922 has there been such a perfect example of strategic failure.

Iraq alone, however, hardly prescribes what comes next. For what if the emerging polycentric structure of power is not ending the world’s dependence on American power? Will the result be a greater degree

of disorder; will such greater disorder place U.S. interests at greater risk without a reappraisal of their range and geography; and will such greater risk and narrower interests prove acceptable to the American public? In short, will the emerging post-American, post-Western world show the institutional discipline and adopt the democratic values we favor?

Answers to these questions remain elusive. Eager to move on, history does not grant its occasional partners any time out, and it is vital for them, therefore, to not lose sight of priorities because it is over such priorities that the threat is most imminent and the risks greatest. For Truman in 1949, the priority was Europe, and before long a newly reelected president concluded an unprecedented peacetime alliance that prepared the West for a new post-European world. For Reagan in 1985, the priority was the Soviet Union, and just as swiftly as Truman had faced it down nearly forty years earlier Reagan ended the “evil empire” and introduced the unipolar world that came next. In 2014, it is in the Middle East that Obama is summoned to become the transformational president he had hoped to be during his first term.

This is the region where Washington has the least historical experience, pursues the most contradictory geopolitical interests and faces the deepest cultural obstacles. But in a crucial moment this is also the undisputed pivotal region—the global Balkans of the new century. In short, whatever distaste Americans may have for the area, more disorder there would result from a lesser American role.

The agenda for the Middle East is all the more daunting as the timetable is short. Indeed, the agenda for 2014 is so full that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict no longer looms as the priority it has been over the past sixty-five years. A few years ago

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it looked as though the Middle East was headed toward a new model—in 2011 the political awakening that had taken place in Eastern Europe in 1989 seemed to be living on in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya. These revolutions seemed neither anti- nor pro-Western, neither religious nor secular. But the revolutions of 1848 were, of course, followed by the crackdowns of 1849. Soon after the revolutions said no to the oppressors, the new leaders dismissed the revolutionaries. What looked like a healthy democratic contagion turned into a pandemic of authoritarianism and anarchy in Libya, Syria, South Sudan and Egypt.

In addition, consider the messy aftermath of the war in Iraq and the ambiguous end of the war in Afghanistan; a critical confrontation with Iran, imminent should the six-month interim agreement painfully negotiated in late 2013 not satisfy, at least tacitly, the other regional powers; the unfinished business of the Arab Spring, in Egypt especially, but also its spillover in the Sahel region; the increasingly one-sided, no-happy-ending civil war in Syria, and its impact on Lebanon and Jordan; the disruptive potential of ever more fractured states like Sudan and Libya; the agonizing reappraisal threatened by some of the closest U.S. allies in and near the region, including Saudi Arabia and Turkey; and more, including the “known unknown” of an ever-possible act of terror in the United States or elsewhere in the West à la 9/11 in 2001, or in the region or close to it à la Sarajevo in 1914. What all these issues

have in common is their urgency: by the end of 2014 most of them will have gotten much better or much worse—but few will have remained the same as “framework agreements” alone will not suffice.

Thus, even as a post-American, post-Western world keeps coming, and even as it raises the prospects for change in the nation’s foreign policy, the Middle East is the region where the postwar equation of American power with world order continues to prevail: If not the United States, who? And if not now, when? Secretary of State John Kerry had it right, in Davos, Switzerland, on January 24, when he dismissed the “bewildering version” of the myth of disengagement from the Middle East during a moment, he said, “of American diplomatic engagement that is as broad and as deep as at any time in history.”

Admittedly, neither the region generally nor any of the issues that define it specifically can be addressed conclusively by the United States without the rest of the West, or by the West without (let alone against) the Rest. But this new reality extends beyond the Middle East. Rather, this is the sorry condition of a messy zero-polar world the like of which was last seen during the so-called interwar years when the twentieth century was at its worst: American power is indispensable to the making of a post-Western order, but it is no longer conclusive and must become inclusive of the non-Western powers that hope to influence it. □

China Goes Ballistic

By Andrew S. Erickson and Michael S. Chase

China is increasingly a force to be reckoned with, not only economically but also militarily. Its aggressive stance toward some of its neighbors, along with Asia's growing economic importance and the need to assure U.S. allies that Washington will increase its attention to the region despite budgetary challenges and fractious domestic politics, prompted the Obama administration to announce a "rebalance" toward Asia. Now Beijing's relations with Japan—which has been indulging in what China sees as alarming spasms of nationalism, including a recent visit by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to the Yasukuni shrine—have deteriorated to their lowest level in many years. In addition, China's efforts to undermine Japan's administrative control over the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu islands are raising the possibility of a crisis that could draw in the United States by challenging the credibility of U.S. extended deterrence. To deter negative Chinese actions in this vital but volatile region while avoiding dangerous escalation, Washington must better understand the ultimate instrument of Chinese deterrence: the People's

Liberation Army Second Artillery Force (PLASAF), which controls the country's land-based nuclear and conventional ballistic missiles and its ground-launched land-attack cruise missiles.

Possessing the world's second-largest economy and a growing defense budget has enabled China to deploy more formidable military capabilities, such as the world's first antiship ballistic missile (ASBM) and largest substrategic missile force. Wielding such conventional capabilities, it seeks to increase its leverage in disputes regarding island and maritime claims in the East and South China Seas and to deter or if necessary counter U.S. military intervention in the event of a conflict with one of its neighbors. Meanwhile, continued development of its nuclear forces—with a new mobile intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) reportedly capable of carrying multiple independently targetable reentry vehicles (MIRV) under development and its first effective nuclear ballistic-missile submarine (SSBN) going on a deterrent patrol this year—indicates China's determination to further improve its position at the great-power table and force the United States to respect its vital interests.

Like its home nation, the PLASAF is itself increasingly a formidable force. Thanks to top-tier industrial capabilities and long-term strategic prioritization, it boasts what the National Air and Space Intelligence Center (NASIC) calls the world's "most active and diverse ballistic missile development

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program,” with both types and numbers expanding; longer-range, more accurate, improved-payload missiles being tested and introduced, even as older systems are upgraded; and new units being formed. China’s missile force has deployed a variety of systems, including short-range ballistic missiles (SRBMs) opposite Taiwan; mobile, conventionally armed medium-range ballistic missiles (MRBMs) for regional deterrence and conventional-strike operations; and new mobile, nuclear-armed ICBMs for strategic deterrence.

From its establishment in the late 1960s until the late 1980s, the missile force was responsible only for a small, outdated and potentially vulnerable arsenal of nuclear missiles, but since the early 1990s it has added a conventional-strike mission and improved its nuclear capabilities. In sharp contrast to its relatively humble beginnings, it now controls a more sophisticated and survivable force of nuclear missiles capable of reaching the United States and regional targets as well as what has emerged as the world’s premier conventional ballistic- and cruise-missile force. The latter now includes not only the SRBMs it began introducing in the 1990s, but also conventional MRBMs capable of striking regional air bases and ASBMs designed to target U.S. aircraft carriers. Underscoring the Second Artillery Force’s growing importance to China’s national defense, in a December 2012 meeting with PLASAF officers, Chinese leader Xi Jinping described the force as “the core strength of China’s strategic deterrence, the strategic support for the country’s status as a major power, and an important cornerstone safeguarding national security.”

China has been taking other measures as well. To increase its influence over disputed territorial and maritime claims around its contested periphery in peacetime and—if necessary—through wartime

operations, China has developed and deployed the world’s foremost force of theater ballistic missiles. It has fielded a large, diverse array of increasingly capable SRBMs, particularly within range of Taiwan. Following a period of rapid growth in the last decade, the total number of SRBMs seems to be holding relatively steady over the past few years, but China continues to enhance or improve the force in other ways (for example, by swapping in newer missiles with better range, accuracy and warhead types). By December 2012, China’s inventory of SRBMs stood at more than 1,100. The PLASAF also fields the ground-launched variant of the DH-10/CJ-10 land-attack cruise missile, with a range of up to 2,000 km. The vast majority of China’s many other cruise missiles are controlled by the service on whose platforms they are deployed.

Conventional DF-21C (CSS-5) MRBMs, which have a range of at least 1,750 km, and DF-21D ASBMs, with a range of at least 1,500 km, represent an important strategic deterrent and a growing long-range conventional precision-strike capability. China currently deploys fewer than thirty launchers of the former and an unknown but growing small quantity of the latter (multiple missiles can use a single launcher). China has developed—and fielded since 2010 in limited numbers—the world’s first ASBM. Future developments will include longer-range conventional-strike capabilities, such as conventional intermediate-range ballistic missiles (IRBMs). Indeed, NASIC assesses that “the PLA is developing conventional intermediate-range ballistic missiles (IRBM) at a steady pace, to increase its capability for near-precision strike out to the second island chain.” The PLASAF’s capabilities for long-range conventional missile strikes are particularly critical given the nascent or limited long-range conventional-strike capabilities of the People’s Liberation Army Air Force and



People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN). According to NASIC, "China's emerging missile strategy will be marked by increased shooter survivability, enhanced operational flexibility, and significantly greater reach and precision."

At the theater level, China's missile force is capable of supporting a variety of types of campaigns against Taiwan. According to the Department of Defense, while "China today probably could not enforce a full military blockade, particularly if a major naval power intervened," its "ability to do so will improve significantly over the next five to ten years." China's missile force could also strike key targets on Taiwan with short-range missiles or participate in operations against other potential regional adversaries, such as Japan, Vietnam and the Philippines.

After relying on a small, relatively unsophisticated and potentially vulnerable nuclear force for several decades, China is now well on the way to a more credible nuclear retaliatory capability, mostly because of the PLASAF's deployment of more survivable mobile ICBMs. Importantly, Beijing continues to adhere to a "no first use" policy, though there have been debates about the circumstances under which it would apply, and some Chinese military

publications indicate that the PLASAF's nuclear capabilities could help to deter conventional strategic attacks against China.

How quickly is China moving? Some caution is in order here. China is not "racing to parity" with the United States and Russia, as some observers in the two nuclear superpowers have suggested, but it is enhancing its nuclear capabilities by increasing

the size and sophistication of its strategic missile force to respond to what it sees as threats to the credibility of its nuclear deterrent. Specifically, Beijing is modernizing its nuclear force to enhance its survivability, increase its striking power and counter missile-defense developments. In addition, China is enhancing its nuclear command and control. According to the U.S. Department of Defense, "The PLA has deployed new command, control, and communications capabilities to its nuclear forces. These capabilities improve the Second Artillery's ability to command and control multiple units in the field."

Under way for decades, Chinese nuclear modernization can be traced back to concerns about the viability of China's traditional strategic posture that were highlighted in Chinese military publications released in the 1980s. In particular, Beijing became concerned about what it perceived as potentially threatening advances in adversary intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, conventional precision strike and missile-defense capabilities. While China's overall approach to nuclear weapons may not have changed, its nuclear force is becoming larger and more advanced. The transition to a somewhat larger, much more modern

nuclear force that includes road-mobile ICBMs and SSBNs, the latter controlled by the PLAN, is providing China with a more survivable—and therefore more credible—nuclear deterrent. This is in keeping with official documents like China's biannual defense white papers, in which China has underscored its determination to deploy the "lean and effective" nuclear force it views as necessary to meet its national-security requirements.

Most nongovernmental experts believe that China currently has several hundred nuclear warheads. For example, in the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, Hans Kristensen and Robert Norris estimate that China has roughly 250 nuclear weapons. China possesses MRBMs and IRBMs for regional deterrence missions, and silo-based and road-mobile ICBMs capable of striking targets anywhere in the world. NASIC projects that China's ballistic-missile force will continue to grow by size and type, and that "the number of Chinese ICBM nuclear warheads capable of reaching the United States could expand to well over 100 within the next 15 years."

For regional nuclear-deterrence missions, China currently fields five to ten launchers for the limited-mobility single-stage liquid-propellant DF-3 (CSS-2) IRBM, which has a range of at least 3,000 km, and fewer than fifty launchers each for the DF-21 and DF-21A (CSS-5 Mod 1 and 2) MRBMs. Many observers expect that these older DF-3 missiles will likely be retired from service in the near future, as China has been transitioning to a more survivable, road-mobile theater nuclear force composed of DF-21 and DF-21A MRBMs, both of which are solid-propellant road-mobile missiles with ranges of at least 1,750 km.

The Defense Department states that China currently has fifty to seventy-five ICBMs. The liquid-propellant, two-stage, silo-based DF-5 (CSS-4 Mod 1) ICBM served

as the mainstay of China's intercontinental nuclear-deterrence force for more than two decades after its initial deployment in 1981 and remains an important component of that force even today. China currently deploys about twenty silo-based DF-5 ICBMs, which have a range of at least 13,000 km, sufficient to strike targets throughout the continental United States. Moreover, according to the director of the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency, China is "enhancing its silo-based systems" as part of the modernization of its nuclear-missile force. In addition, China also retains some of its older, liquid-fueled, two-stage DF-4 (CSS-3) ICBMs with a relatively limited range of at least 5,500 km. In 2013, NASIC stated that China retains about ten to fifteen CSS-3 launchers, but many observers anticipate that China will soon decommission this older system.

After lengthy development programs, the PLASAF has deployed two three-stage road-mobile ICBMs: five to ten launchers for the DF-31 (CSS-10 Mod 1), which has a range of at least 7,200 km, and more than fifteen launchers for the DF-31A (CSS-10 Mod 2). This represents an important development because road-mobile ICBMs are more difficult for an enemy to locate and therefore more survivable than their silo-based counterparts. The DF-31's range is sufficient to reach U.S. missile-defense sites in Alaska, U.S. forces in the Pacific and parts of the western United States. After a protracted development history that began in the 1980s, China conducted the first developmental flight test of the DF-31 in August 1999, and the DF-31 was finally deployed in 2006. The DF-31A has a maximum range of more than 11,200 km, which allows it to reach targets throughout most of the continental United States. China reportedly began deploying the DF-31A road-mobile ICBM in 2007; the Pentagon estimates that its

*Beijing is modernizing its nuclear force to
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force will increase by 2015, and be joined by enhanced DF-5 ICBMs. Hans Kristensen and Robert Norris estimate that China has deployed a total of about twenty to forty road-mobile ICBMs.

What this ongoing quantitative and qualitative modernization portends for the future of China's nuclear force is a subject of growing attention in the United States, Russia, India and other countries. Over the next decade, China is likely to continue increasing the size of its nuclear stockpile while concentrating on further enhancing its ability to survive a first strike and overwhelm adversary missile-defense systems, steps which Chinese strategists appear to regard as critical to maintaining the credibility of China's nuclear deterrent.

As part of a broader effort to counter U.S. and allied ballistic-missile defenses, the PLASAF could employ MIRVs and hypersonic capabilities. In addition, the Pentagon noted, it could deploy "decoys, chaff, jamming, thermal shielding, and anti-satellite (ASAT) weapons," as well as other countermeasures.

Even as China's nuclear force continues to increase in quality and quantity, however, Beijing is highly unlikely to achieve numerical parity with the United States and Russia, unless the numbers of nuclear weapons in those countries' arsenals decline dramatically. According to General Jing Zhiyuan (who served as PLASAF commander from 2003 to 2012), China's "limited development" of nuclear weapons "will not compete in quantity" with the nuclear superpowers, but as many Chinese scholars

have written, it will be sufficient to protect China's national security. China does not believe it needs to match the United States or Russia to protect its national security or to cement its status as a major power, but it will continue to deploy the larger and more capable nuclear force it appears to see as essential to guaranteeing an assured-retaliation capability and a credible nuclear deterrent. In particular, China is reportedly developing and testing the DF-41, a road-mobile ICBM capable of carrying MIRVs. The principal motivation for developing MIRV technology appears to be increasing the number of warheads China could deliver against targets such as major cities and large military installations as a means of overwhelming U.S. missile-defense capabilities. In NASIC's assessment, "Mobile missiles carrying MIRVs are intended to ensure the viability of China's strategic deterrence. MIRVs provide operational flexibility that a single warhead does not." For China, the key advantages of MIRVs include "simultaneously increasing their ability to engage desired targets while holding a greater number of weapons in reserve." Additionally, from an organizational perspective, when the DF-41 is deployed, it will very likely ensure that the PLASAF maintains its status as the cornerstone of China's strategic nuclear deterrent even after the PLAN's *Jin*-class SSBNs begin conducting deterrence patrols later this year.

As with the rest of the PLA, albeit perhaps to a lesser extent given the extreme gravity of its mission, PLASAF software



in the form of personnel and training has long lagged behind hardware. That is now changing as recent Chinese leaders, and Xi in particular, have charged the PLA with enhancing training realism. While the PLASAF lacks real combat experience, authoritative sources such as its official newspaper, *Rocket Forces News*, and the PLA's *Liberation Army Daily* document extensively that it is implementing more realistic and rigorous training. Particular emphasis is placed on preparing the PLASAF to conduct future joint operations and operate under what are known as "informatized" conditions. Specifically, the PLASAF's latest known volume, *China Strategic Missile Force Encyclopedia*, emphasizes the importance of a "mobile command post" and "minimum communication support." As a "necessity of high-tech localized warfare," the "New Three Defenses" are likewise stressed to protect the PLASAF against precision attack, electronic interference and reconnaissance. Initiated in 2001 by an editorial committee led by PLASAF commanders, the tome endeavors to support the PLASAF's development by offering detailed entries in such areas as doctrine, operations, command and control, logistics, management and history.

Meanwhile, hardware to support such efforts is being improved still further, in the form of capabilities such as the integrated

command platform. China is improving command and control over its nuclear arsenal. Over the past decade, a wide range of demanding technical standards have been promulgated and implemented. Technical talents are being recruited through such pipelines as the Defense Student Program, China's version of ROTC, to ensure that the PLASAF is able to operate and maintain its increasingly sophisticated equipment effectively.

As part of his rapid, vigorous consolidation of leadership, Xi has emphasized the importance of developing reliable war-fighting capabilities. Along with the development and deployment of a more modern, survivable nuclear deterrent, China also seems to be improving the readiness of its strategic forces. Scholars have long thought that all of China's nuclear weapons were kept in centralized storage facilities and that its nuclear-missile forces were kept at an extremely low level of readiness, especially in contrast to those of the United States and Russia. Indeed, at least one Chinese scholar has suggested that China might not have any nuclear weapons that would be considered operationally deployed by U.S. and Russian standards. Yet passages in recent Chinese missile-force publications indicate that even in peacetime China stores at least a small number of

nuclear warheads at missile bases and suggest that some PLASAF units maintain a higher level of readiness than others.

These sources indicate that China has been increasing the readiness of its forces, which is consistent with its transition to a strategic deterrent that will be composed largely of mobile missiles and SSBNs. Indeed, China's most recent national-defense white paper indicated that the PLASAF "keeps an appropriate level of readiness in peacetime," and "has formed a complete system for combat readiness and set up an integrated, functional, agile and efficient operational duty system to ensure rapid and effective responses to war threats and emergencies." Moreover, the white paper states:

If China comes under a nuclear threat, the nuclear missile force will act upon the orders of the [Central Military Commission], go into a higher level of readiness, and get ready for a nuclear counterattack to deter the enemy from using nuclear weapons against China. If China comes under a nuclear attack, the nuclear missile force of the PLASAF will use nuclear missiles to launch a resolute counterattack either independently or together with the nuclear forces of other services. The conventional missile force is able to shift instantly from peacetime to wartime readiness, and conduct conventional medium- and long-range precision strikes.

As a result of the PLASAF's growing capabilities for nuclear deterrence, rapidly improving long-range conventional-strike capabilities, increasingly sophisticated command-and-control systems, and more rigorous and realistic training, China's strategic missile force poses an increasingly serious set of strategic, operational and tactical challenges for the United States and its regional allies and partners. Likewise, China's conventional missile force poses an increasingly serious threat to regional bases and may also enable China to target U.S. aircraft carriers. As for the modernization of the PLASAF's nuclear forces, China continues to derive considerable advantages from adhering to its current nuclear policy, but a larger and more diverse nuclear missile force may also give Chinese leaders a broader range of policy and strategy options. China's growing nuclear capabilities could create fresh challenges for U.S. regional extended deterrence, particularly with respect to Japan. Moreover, the United States will need to continue developing and refining new operational concepts and capabilities, and work even more closely with its allies and partners to respond to the challenges posed by China's growing conventional missile-force capabilities. If it chooses not to do so, then it will discover that this, too, is a choice with potentially dire implications for American security. □



The Tea Party's Godfather

By Geoffrey Kabaservice

Daniel Kelly, *Living on Fire: The Life of L. Brent Bozell Jr.* (Wilmington: ISI Books, 2014), 272 pp., \$27.95.

It sounds like the premise of a novel: Two gifted young men meet in college, become inseparable friends and plot the beginnings of a political movement that will irrevocably change American politics. Their contemporaries predict that one will become a prominent writer and editor who will influence both elites and average voters, while the other will become a transformative politician whose unstoppable drive will propel him to the White House. As events unfold, one will achieve all his dreams and more, while the other will go insane and die in obscurity.

Such, in fact, was the real-life story of William F. Buckley Jr. and his best friend and brother-in-law, L. Brent Bozell Jr. After graduating from Yale in 1950, they helped to create the modern conservative movement. They channeled the ferment stirred by McCarthyism and established

National Review, the magazine that gave the movement intellectual guidance and focus. Buckley rose to national prominence as an author, media personality and arbitrator of internal disputes within the conservative camp. He produced the provocative best seller *God and Man at Yale* at the age of twenty-five and deployed his wit and charisma to attract recruits to the conservative cause. His quest to move conservatism from the margins to the center of American political life came to fruition with Ronald Reagan's election as president in 1980. He ended up as the éminence grise of the movement, only to view what he had wrought with trepidation by the end of his life.

"Hell Bent" Bozell was, for a while, as much of a conservative-movement golden boy as Buckley. In 1960, he both cofounded the activist group Young Americans for Freedom and, as ghostwriter for Barry Goldwater, penned the movement's canonical text, *The Conscience of a Conservative*. But Bozell's own election campaigns failed, and during the 1960s he increasingly distanced himself from Buckley and the New Right that he had helped to create. In 1966, he started the conservative Catholic magazine *Triumph*, but its hard-edged theocratic politics attracted few readers.

By the mid-1970s, Bozell was in the throes of alcoholism and manic depression. His political and intellectual aspirations cut short, he plunged into a nightmare succession of arrests, forced hospitalizations, escapes and recommitments. When he died in 1997, there were few who remembered

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him aside from movement veterans and scholars of conservatism.

Living on Fire, the new biography of Bozell written by the historian Daniel Kelly (who died in 2012), is a sympathetic and briskly readable account that is candid about its subject's personal torments and failure of promise. But in a curious way, it both makes too much and too little of Bozell's significance. It overestimates his impact on the conservative movement as it developed from the 1960s onward, yet underestimates the ways in which he was a precursor of the snarling, turbulent conservative movement we have today. It is Bozell, not Buckley, who deserves to be remembered as the unacknowledged godfather of the Tea Party.

Bozell was born in 1926 in Omaha, Nebraska. His father and namesake was a founding partner of what became a highly successful advertising and public-relations firm, now operating as Bozell Worldwide. The young Brent enjoyed a prosperous and relatively uneventful boyhood. In 1944, at age eighteen, he won the American Legion's

national oration contest, then served in the merchant marine and navy at the tail end of World War II.

In 1946, he enrolled at Yale University. As Kelly notes, "Brent arrived at Yale a Democrat and an Episcopalian. He left a Republican and a Catholic." Though Bozell seems to have converted to Catholicism of his own initiative, his political

transformation came about thanks largely to his classmate, Bill Buckley. The two became best friends and formed a near-invincible debating partnership, in which Bozell was the grave orator to Buckley's sardonic verbal assassin. Buckley increasingly influenced Bozell to adopt his blend of conservative Catholic social values, anti-New Deal Republicanism and hard-line anti-Communism. According to Kelly, Bozell even went so far as to acquire some of his friend's faux-aristocratic mannerisms and verbal tics.

In his senior year of college, Bozell married Buckley's favorite sister, Patricia. In the fall of 1950, when Bozell was in Yale Law School and living a few doors down from Buckley in a New Haven suburb, his wife gave birth to the first of what would be ten children, all of whom inherited their father's bright red hair. (Patricia Buckley Bozell later explained that she'd had to abandon horseback riding, an activity at which she excelled, since "I was always pregnant.")

Buckley and Bozell were captivated by Joseph McCarthy's headline-grabbing

investigations into domestic subversion during the early 1950s. The two were not put off by the Wisconsin senator's character assassination and anti-Communist hyperbole. Quite the contrary. They indulged in it themselves in the advertisements and radio spots they wrote against Connecticut's Democratic senator William Benton in the 1952 elections on behalf of the Republican candidate, Prescott Bush. "Senator Benton has pampered and coddled loyalty and security risks in his own office," they charged. "Senator Benton energetically leads the Administration's effort to cover up Communist treachery in government."¹

After Bozell graduated from law school, he toiled with his brother-in-law on a book defending McCarthy and his populist crusade. *McCarthy and His Enemies*, published in early 1954, essentially concluded that the ends justified the means. Communism, in the view of Buckley and Bozell, presented such a grave threat that extreme measures were needed to root out Communist ideas from American government and society. Those who protested that these actions violated traditional civil liberties were, the authors strongly implied, unpatriotic. And since Democrats and moderate Republicans could not be trusted to act on their own to remove security risks, McCarthyism was a success because it spurred them to do so.

Buckley and Bozell conceded that McCarthy himself had at times made exaggerated or unsupported charges, though his overall record was "extremely good." It was not true, they maintained,

that liberalism was the same thing as Communism, as McCarthy and many of his followers often claimed. But while McCarthy the man was fallible, McCarthyism was a movement "around which men of good will and stern morality [could] close ranks." Of course, they were wrong. As Sidney Hook pointed out at the time, no one did more to discredit genuine anti-Communism than McCarthy and his associates. The Kremlin should have been delighted by his efforts.

McCarthy, who by the time of the book's publication had become a full-blown alcoholic, complained that he couldn't understand it: "It's too intellectual for me." But he was sufficiently impressed with Bozell that he hired him as his speechwriter and adviser.

Bozell was one of the first writers and editors at *National Review*, the conservative intellectual magazine Buckley founded in 1955. When McCarthy died in 1957, Bozell moved into conservative journalism full-time. He became, Kelly writes, one of *National Review's* "more prolific contributors." His articles focused on the Communist menace, the Eisenhower administration's failings in domestic and foreign policy, and the unconstitutional overreach of the Supreme Court under Chief Justice Earl Warren. Bozell's views in the late 1950s were in line with what was later termed

¹ William F. Buckley Jr. and L. Brent Bozell Jr. radio copy, n.d. (1952). William F. Buckley Jr. Papers (Yale University) 97-M-160-4: "Corr.—1950s."

Bozell was poised to become one of conservatism's principal spokesmen. Instead, he gradually moved away from the movement he had helped to birth.

“fusionism,” the synthesis of traditionalism, libertarianism and anti-Communism that defined the emerging conservative movement and that would be championed by *National Review*’s Frank Meyer. More recently, David Brooks has revived the notion.

Kelly’s biography, like some other accounts, implies that Bozell acted as *National Review*’s principal in-house defender of civil rights. No doubt Bozell criticized Buckley’s notorious 1957 editorial, “Why the South Must Prevail,” which justified Jim Crow oppression in the South on the grounds that the white community was “the advanced race.” But Bozell argued only that the Fifteenth Amendment prohibited states from abridging the right to vote on account of race. He believed that private businesses were fully entitled to deny service to African Americans, while the principle of federalism meant that state and local governments could maintain segregated schools and other public facilities. Bozell was a harsh and unrelenting critic of the Supreme Court’s 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, and he denied that the court was “the final arbiter of what the Constitution means.” During the Little Rock High School integration crisis, he castigated Arkansas governor Orval Faubus for caving in to federal pressure instead of upholding John Calhoun’s right of interposition.²

Bozell’s McCarthyist credentials and conservative outlook commended him to Arizona senator Barry Goldwater. The senator, who had been one of the few Republicans to vote against McCarthy’s censure, became the most prominent

conservative politician left standing after the Republican Party’s disastrous 1958 elections. (Bozell was one of the victims of the anti-GOP backlash that year in an abortive run for Maryland’s House of Delegates.) Goldwater used Bozell as a speechwriter and, at the urging of backers who wanted the Arizonan to run for president in 1960, hired the thirty-four-year-old to ghostwrite a book that would publicize his views. Bozell wrote *The Conscience of a Conservative* in about six weeks, with little input from Goldwater. To everyone’s surprise, it became the biggest political blockbuster of all time, selling 3.5 million copies by 1964.

The Conscience of a Conservative appealed to young people in particular because of its romantic assumption that the heroic individual could galvanize sweeping change through sheer force of will. “I have little interest in streamlining government or making it more efficient,” ran one well-known passage, “for I mean to reduce its size. I do not undertake to promote welfare, for I propose to extend freedom. My aim is not to pass laws, but to repeal them.” (No one reading those lines would guess that Goldwater was an isolated and largely ineffective senator, with almost no legislative accomplishments to his name.) The book overturned conventional wisdom by presenting conservatism as an idealistic philosophy attuned to the spiritual nature of humanity, while liberalism stood for mere

² Carl T. Bogus, *Buckley: William F. Buckley Jr. and the Rise of American Conservatism* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2011), 168.

grubby materialism. And Bozell channeled the restless spirit of the coming decade in his paean to freedom, individual autonomy, existential authenticity and radical action. With totalitarianism threatening at home and abroad, readers were summoned to a life-or-death struggle to “enforce the Constitution and restore the Republic.”

The book’s specific policy stances were also radical. Bozell proposed to devolve to the states all federal programs not specifically enumerated in the Constitution, including social-welfare programs, education, agriculture, public power and public housing. Federal spending would be reduced by 10 percent each year in all areas where “federal participation is undesirable.” Progressive income taxation would be repealed, as would the farm subsidy program. The federal government would be forbidden to impose its understanding of civil rights (other than voting rights) on the Southern states—and in any case, Bozell declared that he was “not impressed by the claim that the Supreme Court’s decision on school integration is the law of the land.” In foreign policy, Bozell said that the United States should act unilaterally, break diplomatic ties with the Soviet Union, achieve military superiority in equipment and weapons, and bring total victory over Communism closer by allowing battlefield commanders to deploy “small, clean nuclear weapons.”

With the success of *The Conscience of a Conservative*, Goldwater became the conservative movement’s darling, while Bozell was poised to become one of its principal spokesmen. Instead, he gradually

moved away from the movement he had helped to birth. While his former soul mate Buckley channeled the conservative movement toward Reagan’s victory in 1980, Bozell made all the wrong moves and backed all the wrong horses. But it is Bozell’s trajectory after 1960, not before, that seems to have greater relevance today. His dissents and divergences anticipated the missteps that have afflicted conservatism over the past decade, particularly in the years since the rise of the Tea Party movement.

Bozell’s first miscalculation was his declaration that, after Goldwater abandoned his pursuit of the Republican presidential nomination in 1960, conservatives should abandon the Republican Party, which had too many Eisenhower-style moderates to be worth saving. The way forward would be to create a purely conservative third party. Bozell later backtracked from this position, but stipulated that the conservative movement should act as a sort of fifth column seeking to infiltrate the GOP. The movement would preserve its freedom of action by ensuring that “its ties with the Republican organization will be, as a practical matter, severable—ideally at a moment’s notice.”³

This, in fact, would be the approach that Goldwater’s supporters pursued, culminating in their seizure of enough delegates to the 1964 GOP convention to secure the presidential nomination for their candidate. But it did the conservatives little

³ L. Brent Bozell Jr., “The Challenge to Conservatives, II,” *National Review*, January 14, 1961, 12.

good in the long term to portray themselves as disloyal subversives burrowing into the party with the goal of ruling or ruining it. Farther-thinking strategists such as Reagan and Buckley instead would present conservatives as loyal Republicans capable of coexisting with moderate party faithful—so long as ultimate control rested with the conservatives.

Bozell had been one of the founders of the Young Americans for Freedom organization, and along with Goldwater was a principal speaker at the group's packed anti-Communist rally in Madison Square Garden in March 1962. The conclusion of Bozell's speech brought the crowd to their feet as he envisioned the orders a conservative president would give upon taking office:

To the Joint Chiefs of Staff: Make the necessary preparations for landing in Havana. To our commander in Berlin: Tear Down the Wall. To our chief of mission in the Congo: Change sides. To the Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission: Schedule testing of every nuclear weapon that could conceivably serve the military purpose of the West. To the Chief of the CIA: You are to encourage liberation movements in every nation of the world under Communist domination, including the Soviet Union itself. And you may let it be known that when, in the future, men offer their lives for the ideals of the West, the West will not stand idly by.

As much as Bozell's young audience loved this apocalyptic rhetoric, however, it struck the vast majority of Americans as dangerous and irresponsible. In *The Conscience of a*

Conservative, Bozell lamented that "a craven fear of death is entering the American consciousness." But demanding that the American people embrace heroic self-immolation was hardly the way to win their votes. Buckley recognized this when he killed an article Bozell submitted to *National Review* favoring a preemptive strike against the USSR.

In early 1961, Bozell relocated his family to Spain, renting a farm near the sixteenth-century monastic palace El Escorial. Kelly suggests that Bozell may have wanted to move there in order to have a distraction-free environment in which to produce a book about the Warren court, or because costs were low, or because he wanted to live in a thoroughly Catholic society. What the book skips around, however, is the extent to which Bozell was attracted to the military dictatorship of Francisco Franco.

Scholars continue to debate whether Franco is better described as a fascist or an authoritarian. What is indisputable is that Spain under his rule was at odds with American ideals of freedom and democracy and presented a gruesome contradiction to the basically libertarian philosophy Bozell had extolled as Goldwater's ghostwriter. After Franco's victory in the Spanish Civil War, thanks in large part to assistance from Nazi Germany and fascist Italy, he abolished independent political parties, trade unions and free elections. The regime executed and imprisoned opponents by the thousands, demonized Jews and Freemasons as well as Communists, and suppressed women's rights. And Bozell can hardly have failed to notice that, for

all his praise of decentralization and states' rights in America, Spain was the most centralized country in Western Europe and enthusiastically persecuted advocates of regional autonomy.

But Bozell was greatly impressed by the ways in which the Spanish regime elevated the power of the Catholic Church and prohibited other religions. The church ran the country's schools and imposed cultural censorship; divorce, contraceptives and abortion were illegal. Bozell was also enthralled by the throne-and-altar conservatism of the Carlist monarchists (part of Franco's Falangist coalition) as well as the medieval poverty, piety and passion of Spain. His wife recalled, "In Spain he was swept away . . . by the concept of Christendom. Where before he was a dedicated Catholic, he [now] became a Catholic who believed that all thinking, all action, no matter where and when, should be rooted in Catholicism."

Bozell began to introduce religio-political absolutism into his writings. In a long article entitled "Freedom or Virtue?" published in *National Review* in September 1962, Bozell declared that the libertarians in the conservative movement were wrong to believe that freedom was the highest value. In fact, the principal end of humanity was religious salvation, which required virtue. Economic and political freedom were good only to the extent that they supported virtue. And since humans were prone to stray if left to their own devices, government should use its power to inhibit freedom in order to promote



virtue—by outlawing divorce, for example. This was consistent with the American tradition, according to Bozell, since the Founding Fathers' writings contained "not a hint of the ideology of freedom . . . not a word suggesting that freedom is the goal of the commonwealth."

Bozell wasn't yet calling for the traditionalists to break off from the libertarians in the conservative coalition. Anti-Communism still provided the glue holding the two wings of the movement together. Bozell instructed liberal Catholics that the church's mission was not to end poverty but, rather, to lead the Christian West in a "crusade" against Communism. Increasingly, however, Bozell would argue that religious conservatives and libertarians had little in common, and indeed were diametrically opposed on many points.

Religious absolutism prompted Bozell to reevaluate the distinction he and Buckley had carefully drawn between liberalism and Communism in *McCarthy and His Enemies*. Following the formulation of political philosopher Eric Voegelin, Bozell

claimed that liberalism and all other modern revolutionary ideologies that had emerged since the Enlightenment were secular versions of gnosticism. And the goal of all gnostics was to “immanentize the eschaton”: to create the kingdom of heaven on earth.

There was no point in conservatives arguing with liberals, then, since both sides held incompatible views of human nature. Liberal aspirations to improve the lot of the poor, for instance, were expressions of what Bozell called the “hope of perfecting man through the agency of man,” and were foredoomed to failure—for God had taught that the poor would always be with us. And liberals, according to Bozell, were coming to understand that their dream of an earthly paradise could only be fulfilled “not by changing society, but by changing man”—through Communism.⁴

Not surprisingly, Bozell deemed the Democratic Party basically illegitimate. He suggested to Buckley that the Kennedy administration had timed the Cuban missile crisis to benefit Democrats in the 1962 elections.⁵

Bozell became increasingly dissatisfied with the compromises of American democracy and the inconsistencies within traditional Christian conservatism. As Buckley’s protégé Garry Wills shrewdly observed, “I think Brent’s starting point is a distrust of reality. He demands of creation a consistency it cannot afford him; and thinking it an insult to the Creator to accept such a messy universe, he tidies it up by cutting a large part of it away.” And as Bozell continued to marinate in Spanish politics

and mysticism, Wills warned, “He is taking an authoritarian course that can do [*National Review*] no good, I am afraid. Franco may be good for Spain, but transferred to America his kind of rule goes down hard, and there is no reason for anyone to waste time trying to make it go down.”⁶

Bozell returned to the United States by mid-1963, and by early the next year had decided to challenge the congressman in his Maryland district for a seat in the House of Representatives. The incumbent, Charles McC. “Mac” Mathias, was a moderate Republican and Yale graduate from a long-established Maryland family—“the living image of a type that Brent detested,” according to Kelly. What especially raised conservative hackles was the fact that he was one of only a handful of members of Congress from segregated states who openly advocated integration. The district’s registration was three-to-two Democratic, and a New Right candidate like Bozell had no realistic chance of winning in a general election. Nonetheless, anticipating the logic of Tea Partiers decades in the future, he preferred to launch a primary challenge against a moderate Republican in a losing cause than to defeat a Democrat in a more conservative district.

⁴ “To Magnify the West,” reprinted in L. Brent Bozell Jr., *Mustard Seeds: A Conservative Becomes a Catholic* (Front Royal, VA: Christendom Press, 2001).

⁵ L. Brent Bozell Jr. to William F. Buckley Jr., October 23, 1962. Buckley Papers I-18: “Buckley Family - Bozell, Patricia and L. Brent (1962).”

⁶ Garry Wills to William F. Buckley Jr., n.d. (1964?). Buckley Papers I-33: “Wills, Garry (1964).”

As much as Bozell's audience loved his apocalyptic rhetoric, it struck the vast majority of Americans as dangerous and irresponsible.

Bozell's campaign also proved ahead of its time in claiming that Mathias was not a "real" Republican, though his great-grandfather had run on the same ticket as Abraham Lincoln in 1860 and the Republican Policy Committee determined that he had supported party positions 83 percent of the time. Bozell cast Mathias as a soft-on-Communism advocate of big-government handouts, and said that his opponent's support for civil rights would lead to "compulsory integration" at bayonet point. At a time when religion rarely figured into electoral contests, Bozell implied that Mathias's opposition to mandatory (rather than voluntary) school prayer meant that he was an atheist. (In fact, Mathias was a devout Episcopalian.)

Kelly's account quotes various Bozell campaign workers to the effect that he was "the greatest natural campaigner" ever. His principal fund-raiser, General Albert C. Wedemeyer, perhaps more accurately described Bozell's appeal when he wrote to Buckley that "I cannot tolerate middle-of-the-road people. I would rather have them far over in the gutter either to the right or the left but with convictions and the courage to defend them."⁷ The Republicans of Maryland's Sixth District, however, did not warm to Bozell. They were persuaded by the incumbent's argument that Bozell was a "radical" seeking to impose an "alien doctrine" on the GOP. Mathias trounced the conservative in the primary before going on to win the general election and, later, several terms as senator. Bozell never ran for office again.

In the fall of 1964, Barry Goldwater ran

for president on a Republican platform that was almost identical to the radical program Bozell had laid out for him in *The Conscience of a Conservative*, including opposition to federally enforced Southern desegregation. He went down to smashing defeat in every part of the country outside the Deep South and took most of the GOP with him, reducing the party's representation in Congress to levels unseen since the New Deal's high tide. The magnitude of the public rejection made many conservatives rethink their strategy. Frank Meyer, one of Bozell's intellectual sparring partners at *National Review*, admitted that conservatives could no longer seek to repeal the entire New Deal outright, since most Americans would interpret the elimination of Social Security and other programs as "a radical tearing down of established institutions. . . . It has to be made very clear that conservatives by their nature proceed in all changes with caution."⁸ Chastened leaders like Buckley and Reagan came to realize that conservatism could not win national elections if it refused all compromise and embraced extremism and unpopular positions.

Bozell, however, was prepared to double down. In 1965, he vehemently objected to Buckley's condemnation of the John Birch Society. When Buckley refused to publish his protest letter, Bozell asked that his name be removed from *National*

⁷ Albert C. Wedemeyer to William F. Buckley Jr., August 21, 1963. William F. Buckley Jr. Papers I-28, "Wetherby-Weiner (1963)."

⁸ Frank S. Meyer, "What Next for Conservatism?" *National Review*, December 1, 1964, 1057.

Review's masthead. Indeed, Bozell later turned to the Birch Society's founder for advice about *Triumph*, the conservative Catholic magazine he started in 1966. And although *Triumph* originally was marketed as a Catholic *National Review*, Bozell quickly took the publication in a far more radical direction.

In short order, *Triumph* attacked American Catholic bishops (for their alleged weakness on abortion and failure to crack down on liberal deviancy); the Catholic Church (for its Vatican II reforms); the Constitution (for vesting final authority in "the people" rather than God); the United States (for its moral degeneracy); and the conservative movement (for its secularism). By 1967, the magazine was explicitly calling for Catholic theocracy.

Kelly's account suggests several reasons for *Triumph's* radicalization. Bozell's jealousy of and growing separation from his more famous brother-in-law led him to take positions that he knew would distress Buckley. Bozell's incipient mental illness may also have played a role. Conservative thinker Russell Kirk, who briefly wrote for *Triumph*, felt that Bozell had been possessed by "the demon of the absolute," which led him to "look for a dogma in all things."

Buckley felt that his former friend had absorbed the "antinomian" ambience of the late 1960s, when "formulations à



outrance" became the norm. Indeed, *Triumph* closely resembled the leftist revolutionary publications of the time in its millenarianism, its told-you-so delight in urban riots and other ills of the

era, and its contempt for America, which it often spelled "Amerika" to emphasize its similarity to Nazi Germany. Bozell boycotted patriotic and civic celebrations and refused to salute the flag.

Bozell even took a page from the Students for a Democratic Society playbook when he staged an antiabortion demonstration at George Washington University in Washington, DC, in August 1970. With his group, the Sons of Thunder (modeled after a pro-Franco Carlist militia), Bozell occupied a campus building, allegedly assaulted police with a large wooden cross and was dragged off to jail, bleeding and in handcuffs. New Right and New Left had come full circle, with Bozell now exhibiting the same sense of martyrdom, exaltation of "direct action" and with-us-or-against-us mentality that characterized his erstwhile political opposites.

But the conservative movement as a whole didn't follow Bozell's path, and he was not really, as Kelly half asserts, a founder of the Christian Right. Paul Weyrich spoke for most Christians and conservatives when he worried that Bozell's actions would lead the public to "equate

abortion opposition with Black power and college lunacy.” Right-wing civil disobedience wouldn’t resurface on a large scale until Randall Terry’s Operation Rescue of the 1980s and 1990s. Bozell’s bid to lead an ecumenical antiabortion movement was thwarted by the Catholic bishops (who feared further violence) and his own magazine’s antipathy toward Protestants; *Triumph* maintained that only Catholics were authentic Christians.

Indeed, for all Bozell’s personal fecundity, he was something of a mule in terms of his influence on the conservative movement as it developed after 1960. He disavowed his book *The Warren Revolution* shortly after its publication in 1966, and hardly any conservative scholars seem to have directly followed his take on constitutional originalism. Few conservatives nowadays call for Catholic theocracy or advocate some of the more interesting ideas that came out of *Triumph*’s extremism, including its moral opposition to nuclear weapons, its promotion of a quasi-communal economy, and its condemnation of capitalism and the free market. *Triumph*, which never had more than a few thousand subscribers, finally sputtered to a halt in the mid-1970s, after which Bozell’s mental and financial troubles all but incapacitated him. He spent the last years of his life performing Catholic charitable work and regained some measure of internal peace before dying from pneumonia at age seventy-one.

Bozell partially reconciled with Buckley before his death, but in the 1960s and 1970s he would have presented *National*

Review’s leader with a series of object lessons on how *not* to conduct the conservative movement. Now that the movement no longer has Buckley’s guidance, it has tumbled into many of Bozell’s pitfalls. The Tea Party is much closer to Bozell than Buckley in its permanent rebellion against the Republican Party and its leadership, its determination to eliminate any vestiges of moderation from the GOP, its inability to distinguish between liberalism and Communism, and its use of religion to divide rather than unite.

Buckley wanted the modern conservative movement to be intellectually respectable and politically responsible. He knew that the wild, paranoid conspiracy theories of the Birchers made conservatism look “ridiculous and pathological.”⁹ Like Reagan, he believed that conservatism needed to win friends rather than destroy enemies, and that conservatives had to devise policies to appeal to Americans rather than mocking them as ignorant and cowardly sheep. He knew that traditionalism and libertarianism could only be held together by refraining from taking either belief to its extremes. And he cautioned against the tendency of Bozell and other conservatives toward fanaticism and obsession, which ultimately represented a surrender of individual freedom. His warnings are as pregnant with meaning today as they were then. The problem with living on fire is that you end up flaming out. □

⁹ William F. Buckley Jr. to Edward T. Foley, April 17, 1962. William F. Buckley Jr. Papers I-20: “Foley, Edward T. (1962).”



The Secret Life of Robert Ames

By Paul R. Pillar

Kai Bird, *The Good Spy: The Life and Death of Robert Ames* (New York: Crown, 2014), 448 pp., \$26.00.

The secret world of clandestine operators and the more public world of statesmen intersect in a number of ways. The gathering of useful information through espionage is well known, but the clandestine operator can also help take action and not just inform it. Sometimes what he or she does is given a formal structure and called covert action. At other times the help is less formal, such as making contacts and opening channels of communication that the statesman cannot, for one reason or another, embrace openly or directly. An inspired and skillful operator can make important things happen.

What the operator can accomplish, however, is ultimately limited by the political constraints that apply to the statesmen for whom he or she works. Inspiration and skill can open promising avenues, but the constraints may keep them

from being fully explored. The clandestine operator, exposed to dangers that typify the spy world when the action is hottest and the opportunities greatest, is as likely to experience tragedy as triumph.

Of course, the intrigue and danger of that world have provided material for an entire genre of fiction. David Ignatius launched a successful second career as a writer of spy novels with *Agents of Innocence*, which is based on events in the Middle East he had covered as a journalist. Set mostly in Beirut in the 1970s, the story involves American intelligence officers trying to swim through a cauldron of conflict involving Israelis, Palestinians and other Arabs. Although this novel was a roman à clef, Ignatius could take the fiction writer's prerogative of bending the story in his preferred directions.

Now Kai Bird has written a vivid nonfictional account of many of those same events. Bird demonstrated his chops as a biographer with a national-security specialty in earlier books on John J. McCloy, the Bundy brothers and J. Robert Oppenheimer. He centers *The Good Spy* on Robert Ames, the CIA operations officer who did more than anyone else to open a channel of communication between the United States and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) at a time when the need for such a channel and the perils of opening it were both great. It is a reflection of the drama of this patch of history as well as Bird's skill in rendering it that the book is as compelling a read as most spy novels. Not detracting from its page-turning quality is our knowledge of the protagonist's tragic end: his death in the rubble of the U.S.

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embassy in Beirut when a truck bomb demolished it in 1983.

Ames is less well known to the public than several other American intelligence officers of his and earlier generations, including ones who had operated in the same part of the world and accomplished no more than he had. Probably the main reason for this difference is that those other officers lived to write their own books and Ames did not. Bird's volume fills that gap; while he presents other perspectives he is consistently sympathetic toward the mission Ames saw himself performing and Ames's views of the best way of doing so.

The Good Spy depicts multiple and often-conflicting considerations that go into planning and conducting clandestine operations, a diversity of opinions that often exist internally about how to conduct them and complexity in the CIA's relations with its policy-making customers. The book also describes the personal stresses that accompany the life of a clandestine operator, including geographic separation from a spouse while trying to support a family (which in Ames's case included six children) on a government salary.

The principal contribution of Bird's book, however, is to illuminate earlier chapters of a political and diplomatic story that challenges U.S. policy makers to this day. It is the story of the United States being caught between Israel and its regional adversaries as those enemies have waged war against each other both openly and in the shadows. The United States has suffered as a result at a personal level—as with the victims of the bombing of the embassy in

Beirut—and at the level of its own broader foreign-policy interests. The United States has been handicapped in coping with this uncomfortable situation because it often has lacked effective communications with parties that it really should talk to. That handicap is partly the product of deference to Israeli sensibilities and partly due to Americans' own notions of who ought to be shunned as an enemy.

Bird's reportage relies on the cooperation of Ames's widow, including access to personal correspondence. Many of the book's intimate looks at the perceptions and opinions of Ames come in the form of quotations from letters to his wife. Bird also conducted interviews with dozens of former officers, some identified by name and some not, who worked with Ames. The author's only direct contact with his principal subject took place long ago and was nonsubstantive—in Bird's youth as the teenage son of a U.S. diplomat at the U.S. consulate in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, when he lived next door to Ames. Bird knew him as a young officer who liked to play basketball with the consulate's Marine guards.

Although the operations Bird describes occurred more than three decades ago, they remain sufficiently in the shadows that readers who were not involved in them—this reviewer included—cannot independently assess their accuracy. A few of Bird's subthemes about the CIA seem to be grounded more in cliché and conventional wisdom than in reporting. Elsewhere, however, Bird is appropriately agnostic about events whose details remain unclear.

Little about the early life of Robert Ames pointed to the sort of role he would later play in Middle East policy and diplomacy. He grew up in Philadelphia and attended college locally at La Salle University, where the basketball was serious—Ames played on a team that included a future NBA professional. Inducted into the army, he was assigned to a signals-intelligence facility in Eritrea, where in his spare time he began learning the Arabic he heard spoken by townspeople in Asmara. He developed an itch to work someday in the lands on the other side of the Red Sea. Once out of the military, he worked as a repo man for an insurance company. He applied to the Foreign Service but failed the written entrance exam. The CIA hired him in 1960.

Ames had several of the qualities that make for an excellent intelligence officer. He had a flair for learning foreign languages and would become highly proficient in Arabic. He liked making contacts with a lot of strangers, increasing the odds of contacts growing into friendships and lasting relationships. That, in turn, increased the odds of some of these relationships yielding useful information or leading to still other contacts that would yield it. He had a genuine yen for wandering the streets of dusty and even dangerous places. He was a good listener and an avid reader who easily absorbed and digested information about subjects in which he was keenly interested, and he was fascinated by the Middle East.

After duty in Dhahran and Aden, Ames was assigned to Beirut. There in late 1969 he met a Lebanese Shiite named Mustafa Zein, who would function as, in the words

of another CIA officer, “Ames’s Sancho Panza” for the next fourteen years: Zein would become the model for a major character in Ignatius’s novel, and would later become one of Bird’s major sources of information about Robert Ames.

Zein grew up in a moderately wealthy family in southern Lebanon. He learned English attending an American school in Lebanon before graduating from high school and college in the United States. He stayed there and became one of the leaders of the New York-based Organization of Arab Students. He became more actively involved in issues related to the Palestinians. While still in his twenties he started acquiring powerful acquaintances in the Middle East, meeting Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser during a stint in Cairo and then landing a job as an adviser to the ruler of Abu Dhabi, where he served as an interlocutor with American and British interests seeking to make deals in the oil-rich emirate. Zein’s subsequent endeavors, bringing him back to Lebanon and later again to New York, spanned the worlds of international politics and business.

Zein’s entrepreneurial talent for making contacts in high places made him an ideal candidate to be what intelligence officers call an access agent: someone whose main value lies not in having useful first-hand information himself but instead in identifying and facilitating relationships with others who do. Access agents may be put on the payroll of an intelligence service just as primary, information-providing agents typically are. It appears, however, that Zein never entered into a

paid relationship with the United States, and with his business success he was not in need of the money anyway. Bird quotes testimony in court (related to a lawsuit many years later involving Zein) from a CIA official stating that “Mustafa Zein never received any monies for his efforts. The basis for Mr. Zein’s collaboration with the Agency has been his desire for the United States to comprehend and sympathize with the Arab and Palestinian perspective on the situation in the Middle East.”

This sort of relationship suited Ames as well. He was not a standout operations officer as measured by the number of fully recruited spies he put on the roster. He believed that useful information often could be more easily obtained, and useful business more readily conducted, by maintaining a relationship on the basis of friendship and parallel interests rather than formal recruitment. This outlook was at times a source of disagreement between Ames and other officers in the clandestine service at the CIA. But it would govern Ames’s dealings with Zein for the rest of his life.

By far the most important of the contacts that Zein would facilitate was with a young, energetic, flamboyant, cosmopolitan, womanizing Palestinian named Ali Hassan Salameh. Salameh was a member of the Revolutionary Council of Yasir Arafat’s Fatah, the largest of the resistance groups under the umbrella of the PLO. Salameh’s principal responsibility was to try to develop Fatah’s nascent intelligence organization, later called Force 17, into a professional intelligence organization. That role

by itself would obviously have made Salameh of interest to the CIA. But during the 1970s Salameh’s broader influence within Fatah grew to the point that some considered him second in importance only to Arafat himself.

According to Bird’s account, there would not be a recruitment, and Salameh would not be a paid agent any more than Zein. But when Zein brought Ames and Salameh together, it was the start of a decade-long relationship that provided a hidden and tempered (but important and otherwise missing) means of communication between the Palestinian nationalist movement and the United States. The incentive that Ames held out to Salameh for having the relationship was nothing material but instead the argument that, as Bird puts it, “You Arabs claim your views are not heard in Washington. Here is your chance. The president of the United States is listening.” Ames, the U.S. point man at the start of this relationship, kept a hand in it even after he moved on to other assignments.

The extent to which the president of the United States really was listening is one of the factual lacunae that Bird acknowledges and does not attempt to fill with a made-up narrative. He assesses that the CIA director at the time, Richard Helms, would very likely have informed Richard Nixon and his national-security adviser, Henry Kissinger, of the contact. Kissinger says nothing of this in his memoirs, but Bird’s assessment is probably correct; however much distrust of the PLO there was at the White House, the channel was too important and potentially useful to disregard.

From the perspective of today, two decades after Arafat and Yitzhak Rabin shook hands on the White House lawn, regular communication between the Palestinian leadership and the U.S. government seems unexceptional and uncontroversial. The absence of such communication would be an anomaly that disables U.S. diplomacy on a subject that is very important to U.S. interests. But Ames established his channel more than two decades *before* the handshake, when any official and openly acknowledged U.S. contact with the PLO was considered out of the question. The organization was viewed as a manifestation of international terrorism, to be shunned or combated rather than accepted as an interlocutor or the instrument of a legitimate nationalist aspiration.



Underlying this American posture was intense Israeli opposition against contacts with the PLO. Israel spared no effort, up to and including assassination, to prevent or destroy any U.S. channel with the Palestinians. Salameh thus became a prime Israeli target. Probably the first Israeli attempt to kill him was in 1971, using a Mossad-constructed letter bomb. Salameh—whom Zein says was warned by Ames to be wary of letter bombs—did not open it and instead had it x-rayed.

The kidnapping and murder of Israeli athletes at the 1972 Munich Olympics by an offshoot of Fatah called Black September accelerated the Israeli assassination campaign against Palestinians (with Black September striking back, with less effectiveness, against the Israelis). The Israelis, among others, believed

that Salameh had a role in the Munich incident; Bird examines the evidence and concludes that he probably did not. But it didn't matter as far as Salameh's eventual fate was concerned, because the Israelis had their other reasons to kill him, including their determination to abort any dialogue between the United States and the PLO. They tried again to do so in 1973 but bungled the attempt when a Mossad hit team, in a case of mistaken identity, shot an innocent Moroccan waiter to death in Norway. The negative publicity from this incident led the assassination teams to stand down temporarily.

By the mid-1970s the value of doing business with Arafat and the PLO had become increasingly apparent—including to Henry Kissinger, who built on the Salameh channel by authorizing some other secret contacts with PLO emissaries. By 1974 Arafat had shut down Black September, the Palestine National Council had adopted a “ten-point plan” that implicitly accepted Israel’s existence and marked a step toward a negotiated two-state solution, and the Arab League had recognized the PLO as the “sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.” For Ames it was a time of hope and of satisfaction in his own role in generating some diplomatic movement. These sentiments were tempered by his disappointment that the movement was only slow and incremental. The disappointment was well founded; in retrospect, it is hard to see how much of the diplomacy that would wait until the 1990s should not have been accomplished in the 1970s.

On the U.S. side the slowness was due partly to hang-ups about what the PLO should say explicitly and not just implicitly. It was also partly due to uncertainty over the shape that Palestinian self-determination might take, and especially what the implications would be for the kingdom of Jordan. The idea of Jordan becoming “the Palestinian state” was still out there, even though the PLO’s ten-point plan also implicitly recognized that a separate Jordan was there to stay. U.S. policy makers as well as intelligence officers had differing sentiments about this, which tended to correlate with who had been their partners in doing business—

and striking up friendships. Ames was sympathetic chiefly to the Palestinians. A different perspective, one sympathetic to the Jordanian monarchy, can be found in the posthumously published *King’s Counsel* by Jack O’Connell, who had been the CIA’s station chief in Amman and a longtime confidant of the late king Hussein.

Meanwhile, the resistance to talking directly with the PLO persisted. When Jimmy Carter negotiated language in the Camp David accords that tentatively addressed Palestinian political rights, he was negotiating with an Egyptian president, not a Palestinian. Carter’s ambassador to the United Nations, Andrew Young, was forced to resign in 1979—ten years after the first meeting between Ames and Salameh—when Israel leaked word that Young had held a single meeting with the PLO’s representative to the UN.

The Israelis had not forgotten Salameh. They finally got their target in 1979 with a remotely detonated car bomb that also killed eight other people in a Beirut street. Bird’s account tells us that the Mossad agent who did the detonation, a woman who went by the name Erika Chambers and is living today in Israel, was chosen for the mission because in practice sessions she did a better job of pushing the button at the right moment than the men did.

Even with Salameh dead, the usefulness to the United States of secret contacts with the PLO continued. The usefulness became all the greater with the outbreak in 1975 of civil war in Lebanon, to which the PLO had retreated after King Hussein forcibly pushed it out of Jordan. U.S. diplomats and

Too often the insights and access that intelligence officers may provide are not followed up with the necessary political decisions for them to have any beneficial effect.

other Americans in Lebanon became partly dependent on the Palestinians for their security. The mess and danger in Lebanon became messier and more dangerous with multiple Israeli invasions of the country. This was especially true of the war of 1982, which featured Ariel Sharon's relentless offensive to try to crush the PLO once and for all, and the Israelis' firing of flares that enabled Christian militias to do by night the work that became known as the Sabra and Shatila massacre. Amid the chaos, the United States still had the handicap of not being able to deal openly and directly with the PLO. Bird describes the heroic and necessarily convoluted efforts of the U.S. diplomat Philip Habib to negotiate the departure of the PLO from Lebanon, amid warnings from Sharon that he would send his army into West Beirut if Habib talked directly to any PLO official.

By this time Robert Ames had made a career change that partly reflected his modest prospects, despite his accomplishments, for further advancement in the clandestine service; some in the service considered him "too intellectual," even though he had no graduate degree. Ames sought, and was appointed to, the position of national intelligence officer (NIO) for the Near East and South Asia. The NIOs are senior officials at the National Intelligence Council responsible for coordinating analysis and policy support across the intelligence community for their regional or functional subject. I did some work for Ames at the council and later would fill the same NIO position myself. A more unusual move was when

Ames was later made, for what would be the last year and a half of his life, director of the CIA's analytic office covering the Near East and South Asia. He had exchanged the streets of the Middle East for corridors in Washington as his operating milieu.

Ames thrived in that milieu, quickly gaining—largely through his on-the-ground knowledge of the region—credibility and access with senior figures in Ronald Reagan's administration. This was especially true of George Shultz, who became Reagan's secretary of state in 1982. Shultz was a tough, doubting customer of intelligence who was turned off by tendencies to politicize intelligence under CIA director William Casey and Casey's protégé Robert Gates. After Gates became acting director following Casey's death, Shultz told him, "I feel you try to manipulate me. So you have a very dissatisfied customer. If this were a business, I'd find myself another supplier." But Robert Ames earned Shultz's respect for his substantive command of Middle Eastern topics in general and Palestinian matters in particular, even though Shultz writes in his memoir that his distrust of Arafat and the Palestinian leadership prompted him to oppose initially even secret contacts with the PLO.

Shultz describes how on the day he was sworn in as secretary of state—and having to deal immediately with the crisis in Lebanon—his first telephone calls were to a few experts, including Ames, to help him to think fresh thoughts about the Middle East. Ames became a regular member of a small group of policy planners that Shultz assembled to shape

a Reagan administration “peace plan” aimed not only at dealing with the Lebanese mess but also at building on the Camp David accords to make progress toward settling the Israeli-Palestinian issue. In these discussions Ames’s urging was mostly in the direction of more contact, more engagement and more effort to resolve the Palestinian problem.

Although Ames, while in his senior Washington jobs, occasionally made trips to New York to meet with Zein, by the spring of 1983 it had been more than four years since he had been in the Middle East. He thought that was too long; he wanted to make a trip back to the region to get a feel for the current “ground truth.” Zein was temporarily back in Lebanon and wished to set up a meeting for Ames with the new Lebanese president, Amin Gemayel, even though the security situation in Beirut had made the city, in Bird’s words, a “veritable hellhole.” Ames did not have any other official business in Beirut, but colleagues advised him to visit the CIA to avoid it looking like a snub.

Thus Ames was in the U.S. embassy building at midday on April 18, when a suicide bomber drove a pickup truck up the steps of the embassy and detonated two thousand pounds of explosives, shearing off the front of the building and causing several floors to collapse. Bird’s account of the day of the attack is detailed, wrenching and poignant. He traces the actions before the bomb went off of several of the other sixteen Americans who died with Ames



(along with forty-six non-Americans) and others who were severely wounded, as well as the responses of some of the other Americans who were not at the embassy at the time of the attack. One of the latter was a CIA officer on temporary duty who would go to the morgue to retrieve a ring and a necklace from Ames’s body, which she brought back to give to his family.

The bombing of the embassy marked the beginning of a chapter in which the collateral damage to Americans of the Israeli-Arab conflict came partly through the hands of Shia extremists in Lebanon. Several causes contributed to the rise of that brand of extremism in the early 1980s and the emergence of the organization we know now as Hezbollah, but Israel’s actions and relationship with the United States unquestionably were a major factor. Bird quotes later testimony from Robert Dillon, the U.S. ambassador to Lebanon at the time, who survived the blast and had to reconstitute the embassy’s operations after climbing out from under the debris. “We were very much identified with the Israelis,

particularly among the Shias,” explained Dillon. “There was huge resentment of the Israelis by this time in southern Lebanon.” An even higher price in terms of the number of American dead—the highest from any terrorist attack until 9/11—came six months later when a truck bomb at the Marine barracks in Beirut killed 241 U.S. servicemen.

A narrow focus on one variety of international terrorism emanating from the Middle East had helped give rise to another brand of it. Policies of shunning or crushing a Palestinian movement that had practiced the first variety, and efforts to expel that movement from its place of exile in Lebanon, boosted the early growth of Shia terrorism. And one of the first victims was an intelligence officer who had contributed significantly to trying to break the whole deadly cycle.

Even as Arafat and the PLO were leaving their Lebanese exile for far-off Tunisia, the decisions that needed to be taken to break the cycle were not adopted. In August 1982, Shultz called in Israeli ambassador Moshe Arens to tell him that with Arafat’s departure from Lebanon imminent, it was a good time to “revitalize” the peace process. Arens disagreed: “Look, we have wiped the PLO from the scene. Don’t you Americans now pick the PLO up, dust it off, and give it artificial respiration.” It would take another decade and a change of Israeli leadership to get to the Oslo process, the signing of a declaration of principles on Palestinian self-government and the handshake on the White House lawn before a beaming Bill Clinton.

Bird begins his book with a prologue about what was happening in the Near East Division of the CIA’s Directorate of Operations on the day of the handshake. Chagrined that there was no CIA representation at the White House ceremony—despite the agency’s contributions to the diplomatic achievement being observed—the division chief, Frank Anderson, organized on the spur of the moment an observance in which his own people could participate. About three dozen officers piled into a bus and rode to Arlington National Cemetery. There they visited first the grave of Robert Ames, and then the graves of the other CIA officers killed in the embassy bombing as well as of William Buckley, the later CIA station chief in Beirut who was kidnapped in 1984 and tortured before dying in captivity. The trip to the cemetery was intended as an homage to the dead as well as an inspiration to the younger officers on the bus.

Too often the contributions of people in that profession are, as on that day, insufficiently recognized by the public, although Bird’s volume is a helpful partial corrective. And too often the insights and access that intelligence officers may provide are not followed up with the necessary political decisions for them to have any beneficial effect. On the latter subject Bird cites a cynical comment from Graham Fuller, who also had a career in clandestine operations in the Middle East before becoming the NIO for the Near East and South Asia (later than Ames and earlier than I). “You have this notion,” says Fuller, “that all you need to do is get the right skinny, the right facts before the



policy makers, and things would change. You think you can make a difference. But gradually, you realize that the policy makers don't care. And then the revelation hits you that U.S. foreign policy is not fact-driven."

In the two decades since that White House ceremony we have had Sharon's stroll on the Temple Mount, the second intifada, the breakdown of the Oslo process and plenty of reason for pessimism about an Israeli-Palestinian peace process going anywhere. We have come full circle back to several features of Middle East conflict that prevailed in Robert Ames's day. These include the festering Palestinian issue being an oft-cited motivation for anti-American terrorism, although the terrorists today are more likely to be Sunni than Shia. They also include an Israeli posture of all threats and pressure and no engagement with its principal adversaries of the day, including Hamas and the government of Iran; the United States has gone along with the Israeli posture on the first and broken with that posture only recently on the second. There is even a war of assassinations, including botched ones, such as the Israeli attempt to kill Hamas political leader Khaled Mashal in 1997, and successful (in the sense that the intended targets are dead) ones, such as the killing of Iranian nuclear scientists.

We do not know what work members of the American clandestine service may be doing today to try to blaze routes away from such futile and deadly paths. But we should hope that any such work, for the sake of its effectiveness, stays secret for now—and that years later the stories will be told by a biographer as adept as Bird. □

Red Alert

By Jacqueline Newmyer Deal

Geoff Dyer, *The Contest of the Century: The New Era of Competition with China—and How America Can Win* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014), 320 pp., \$26.95.

Robert D. Kaplan, *Asia's Cauldron: The South China Sea and the End of a Stable Pacific* (New York: Random House, 2014), 256 pp., \$26.00.

F ears of China's rise are growing. Only a decade ago, most experts insisted that the Chinese Communist Party's overseas ambitions were limited to Taiwan. Now that Beijing has begun to adopt a more assertive posture abroad, the conventional wisdom has changed from dismissing the China threat to accepting it fatalistically. But must Washington and its Asian allies defer to Chinese expansionism? Can we really have jumped from one world to another so quickly?

Not a chance. Two new books provide a corrective to the lately fashionable gloom-and-doom analysis. Each is by a crack journalist. The first, Geoff Dyer's *The Contest of the Century*, addresses the U.S.-Chinese relationship through the prism of

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China's military, political, diplomatic and economic development. The second, Robert Kaplan's *Asia's Cauldron*, focuses on the competition between China and the states around the South China Sea—the central route for shipping between the Middle East and East Asia, and the site of disputed claims to resource-rich maritime territory.

Certainly the fresh attention to China's aspirations is a good thing. As late as 2006 the defense correspondent Fred Kaplan (no relation to Robert) was belittling the Pentagon's attention to Chinese military modernization in its annual congressionally mandated report on the subject. In an article called "The China Syndrome," Kaplan wrote:

"At present," the report states, "China's *concept* for sea-denial appears limited to sea-control in water surrounding Taiwan and its immediate periphery. *If* China were to shift to a broader 'sea-control' strategy"—in other words, if it were seeking a military presence farther away from its shores—"the principal indicators would include development of an aircraft carrier, development of robust, deep-water anti-submarine-warfare capabilities, development of a true area anti-aircraft warfare capability, acquisition of large numbers of nuclear attack submarines," etc., etc. The point is: The Chinese aren't doing—they're not even close to doing—*any* of those things [Kaplan's italics].

Just eight years later, the Chinese have made substantial progress on all of these fronts, and Beijing has embarked on a path of military-backed assertiveness across the region that has already provoked shifts in

U.S. military operations. In January 2013, the U.S. chief of naval operations, Admiral Jonathan Greenert, admitted that China's new capabilities have caused the U.S. Navy to change its deployment patterns "inside the first island chain" (China's term for the major archipelagoes from Japan and Taiwan to the Philippines, Brunei and Malaysia that form the outer boundary of the East and South China Seas). Last November, China tried to unilaterally impose an air defense identification zone (ADIZ) covering airspace over Japanese and South Korean territory just before an East Asia tour by Vice President Joe Biden. Before Biden departed, the United States defied the ADIZ with an unannounced transit of two unarmed B-52s, and while the vice president was on his first stop in Tokyo he assured his hosts that the United States would go further and directly confront Beijing on the issue. During his subsequent stop in Beijing, however, Biden failed even to mention the ADIZ in public. We need to confront Chinese assertiveness with a stalwart refusal to bend, but we are in danger of conceding too much and disheartening our allies. Our lack of firmness may convince Beijing that it can get away with pressing even harder.

While there's plenty of room for debate about the scope of China's blue-water ambition, the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) has now completed sea trials of, and deployed, its first aircraft carrier, with an estimated four to six additional hulls under construction, as Robert Kaplan notes. He stresses that in addition to focusing on its surface navy, China has been expanding its fleet of nuclear ballistic-



missile and attack submarines capable of deploying into the Pacific and Indian Oceans. Dyer and Kaplan both point to China's construction of a new submarine base in the South China Sea, and Kaplan also highlights China's investment in aerial refueling to enable the projection of air power toward that sea's southern reaches. He might also have mentioned China's deployment of new Type 052D destroyers with state-of-the-art radars and a vertical launch system capable of firing advanced surface-to-air missiles against enemy aircraft, including anti-submarine-warfare aircraft, enabling the destroyers to defend other PLAN surface ships and submarines.

Dyer lucidly sets out the context in which these developments have been occurring. He traces the rise of the PLAN to China's obsession with the late nineteenth-century American naval theorist Alfred Thayer Mahan. Mahan saw sea power in general, and the ability to exert control over commercial sea-lanes in particular, as essential to the well-being of trading states. "Neglected at home," Dyer writes, "Mahan has become deeply fashionable over the last decade in Chinese intellectual circles, including translations of his books, academic articles on their importance, and conferences on his ideas."

If the PLAN's new aircraft carriers and destroyers are suited for engaging in Mahanian sea-control missions, this would be a step beyond the impressive suite of largely land- and air-based forces that China has acquired to keep adversaries from entering or operating within its near abroad. More than the carrier, these "anti-access/area-denial" (A2AD) capabilities (e.g., precise ballistic and cruise missiles, along with the complex of sensors and guidance technologies that allow them to find and prosecute moving targets) have implications for the U.S. position in the Asia-Pacific region because they raise doubts about our ability to protect our allies. Since the late 1940s, the United States has played a key role in tamping down potential conflicts between regional actors. In Dyer's words, "America has defined its vital interest as preventing any one power from dominating the other main regions of the world and turning them into a private sphere of influence."

For more than half a century the United States has guaranteed Taiwan's independence, and our security commitment to Japan has made it possible for successive generations of Japanese leaders to maintain relatively modest defense investments. Thanks to China's

Now that Beijing has begun to adopt a more assertive posture abroad, the conventional wisdom has changed from dismissing the China threat to accepting it fatalistically.

buildup of A2AD capabilities, Tokyo may now question whether Washington would send forces to protect Japan from Chinese aggression in the East China Sea, where China has been challenging Japan's administrative control over the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands. The same question may apply equally to the Philippines, another U.S. treaty ally, which has recently succumbed to Chinese military-backed expansionism over disputed land features in the South China Sea.

How did we get here? Here are three specific explanations. First, China's military rise was difficult to see because it proceeded very slowly for a long time before suddenly yielding a spate of new capabilities, and these capabilities were not the ones most Americans would have expected. The high-tech electronic and sensor systems that form the backbone of China's A2AD force took years, if not decades, to develop, and the shape of this new force may not have been observable until China actually began to test highly accurate missiles. Compounding the intelligence challenge, China did not pursue military modernization parallel to the U.S. model. As both Dyer and Kaplan note, Beijing didn't try to build a navy like ours; rather, the PLAN has become a kind of anti-U.S. Navy, centered around submarines; small, fast attack craft armed with antiship cruise missiles; and, most recently, drones. China has adopted an asymmetric approach, using relatively cheap weapons to prevent very expensive American platforms like aircraft carriers from entering the theater. Dyer cites an esti-

mate by U.S. Navy captain Henry Hendrix that puts the cost of the People's Liberation Army's (PLA) carrier-killer missiles at \$11 million each, compared with a \$13.5 billion price tag on a new U.S. carrier.

To be sure, not everyone missed the flash. In 1992, Mark Stokes, a U.S. Air Force deputy attaché, traveled around the Chinese countryside and gathered evidence that, together with what he was reading in Chinese military journals, indicated a major investment in medium- and long-range missiles. But he was largely ignored. As Dyer recounts:

Back in 1992, plenty of people in the Pentagon dismissed the analysis of people such as Stokes, rejecting the idea that a country as poor as China would have such clear-cut military ambitions. Others argued that China's ability to contest Asia's seas with the U.S. was heavily constrained by its dependency on the global economy.

At the end of the 1990s, as Chinese defense budgets continued to increase by double digits, the evidence was getting harder to ignore, but then the September 11 attacks occurred, diverting U.S. attention from East Asia to Central Asia and the Middle East for the next decade. 9/11 is thus the second reason we are only just now confronting the seriousness of China's challenge to the post-World War II order in Asia.

A third reason is that until recently, Chinese rhetoric and behavior worked to mask the ambition behind the PLA's modernization. Dyer cites the work

of journalist Joshua Kurlantzick, who chronicled how Beijing used China's wealth and a carefully crafted image to embark on a "charm offensive" across the world from the mid-1990s through 2007. China often presented itself as the anti-United States, providing capital in the form of investments and loans with no requirements for good governance. Meanwhile, in discussions with the West, Chinese Communist Party leaders offered assurances that the PLA was not seeking an aircraft carrier, nor would it militarize space, while business delegations were wooed with promises of exposure to a gigantic market of potential Chinese customers—as long as they provided investment in China's research-and-development sector and transferred critical know-how. Then, in January 2007, China tested an antisatellite missile, and in 2008 the global financial crisis supplied an opportunity for Beijing to trumpet its brand of state capitalism as an alternative to the faulty Western market-based system. Testing of China's antiship ballistic missile, runway images of a Chinese "fifth generation" aircraft and sea trials of the first Chinese carrier coincided with or directly followed these events. By March 2009, as Dyer recounts, a flotilla of ten Chinese ships saw fit to confront the USNS *Impeccable*, an American naval survey vessel, in the northern part of the South China Sea.

Even now, there is reluctance to identify China as a competitor, perhaps born of difficulty conceiving of this possibility. Unlike our last major competitor, the Soviet Union, China is also a major trade partner, and China continues to represent a market

opportunity in the eyes of many Western business interests. So we are tempted to jump from denial to defeatism. Not Dyer. In his view:

Whether they have come to praise or to warn about China's rise, most authors on China subscribe to an almost linear transfer of wealth and influence from West to East, from a U.S. in decline to an irrepressible China. There is an air of inevitability in the way China is presented. Yet the roots of American power are deeper than they seem and hard to overturn.

In different ways, Dyer and Kaplan provide reasons for hope. Where Dyer argues that we are likely to prevent China from succeeding in its effort to dominate Asia, Kaplan predicts that we will engage in a sustained naval competition, but at least the "stopping power of water" (a term borrowed from University of Chicago professor John Mearsheimer) will keep the contest from devolving into outright war. By following commonsense rules—striving to maintain a balance of power in the region—we can prevail in what is likely to be a long-term competition. What's more, both authors maintain that the United States should stay economically and militarily engaged, with Kaplan making the case that the two are linked: "It is only by enmeshing itself further into the region's trade that the United States will remain self-interested enough to continue to guard the sea lines of communications in the Western Pacific."

So Dyer and Kaplan agree on the diagnosis and even on the general prescription, with both, again,

recommending that the United States aim to preserve a balance of power. Here's Dyer: "Washington's objectives should be to maintain a favorable balance of power and to provide clear defensive arrangements against any potential aggressors." In Kaplan's formulation, "It is the balance of power between the United States and China that ultimately keeps Taiwan, Vietnam, Malaysia, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Singapore free." And again a few pages later: "For it is the balance of power itself, even more than the democratic values of the West, that is often the best preserver of freedom."

Aiming for a balance of power sounds unobjectionable, but what does this mean in practice? Kaplan distinguishes between the past American dominance and the future balance that he envisions:

The balance of power in Asia requires American military superiority, in order to offset China's geographic, demographic, and economic advantage. One does not necessarily mean the crushing American superiority of recent decades. In fact, the American military position in Asia can afford to weaken measurably, to take into account future budget cuts, so long as the American military retains a clear-cut advantage in key areas over the Chinese military. It is that edge which will preserve the balance of power.

Unfortunately, Kaplan does not specify how much "edge" will suffice. Nor does he proceed even to adumbrate which "key areas" he has in mind. One might think of the undersea domain as an area of tradition-

al American strength. Kaplan points out the challenging bathymetry around China's coast for the detection of hostile submarines, implying that the U.S. advantage in this area might be neutralized. In fact, what this means is that stealthy U.S. submarines should be able to penetrate up to China's shores, while American sonar and other detection measures can be maintained along the choke points through which Chinese submarines would have to pass to exit China's near seas and deploy out into the blue water of the Pacific. So the undersea domain does indeed seem to count as such a key area of U.S. advantage.

But more than U.S. submarines will be required in order to preserve a balance of power. Submarines are supposed to be imperceptible. But to maintain their nerve and stand up for themselves in the face of Chinese coercive pressure, China's neighbors will require visible evidence of the U.S. commitment to their security. On the diplomatic side, Dyer is clear: "The endgame in Asia for Washington is . . . to forge a robust and stable set of rules and institutions laced with American values of openness and political pluralism which will be resistant to Chinese pressure," and he cites Burma as a test case. On the military question of how to deter China from challenging the balance, he is sensible but vague:

If the basic objective is to convince Chinese hard-liners that there is no path to a quick win in the western Pacific and to defend its allies, then U.S. strategy should be built around finding ways to raise the costs so that China's lead-

To maintain their nerve and stand up for themselves in the face of Chinese coercive pressure, China's neighbors will require visible evidence of the U.S. commitment to their security.

ers would never be tempted even to consider such a proposal—and to do so in ways that are politically and economically realistic and which are not hugely provocative toward China.

The trouble is that the existence of China's A2AD force means that to ensure access the United States must possess the ability to prevent Chinese missiles from finding their targets. This would seem to require not only shipboard air-defense systems but also the ability to penetrate China's own air-defense network to eliminate the elements of China's complex of sensors and guidance systems that enable the PLA to precisely target American platforms. The U.S. military has begun to think through such an approach under the rubric of "Air-Sea Battle," but Dyer rules out this response as overly provocative toward China because it implies strikes against targets on the mainland. As an alternative, Dyer suggests a distant blockade to target China's economy, acknowledging that its imposition would entail "plenty of strategic difficulties." He also outlines an approach centered on arming regional powers and developing a network of positions from which to interfere with PLA power projection. The upshot is that the United States has a range of options to deter Beijing.

Though both Kaplan and Dyer choose to foreground military issues, their books are at their best when reporting local details or relying on deep historical research—material that should inform the development of U.S. strategy. If the authors are correct that the fate of the Asia-Pacific region will depend on whether the United

States can maintain a balance of power in the face of China's rise, then knowledge of conditions on the ground across the region will prove critical. This local knowledge will help Washington work with the countries of the region, and potentially even embed them in an alliance-like architecture (if not a formal alliance such as NATO) to keep Beijing at bay.

Kaplan's virtuoso reportage and historical sensitivity seem at odds with his insistence on the primacy of geography and structural factors. The first chapter of *Asia's Cauldron* begins: "Europe is a landscape; East Asia a seascape. Therein lies a crucial difference between the twentieth and twenty-first centuries." It is as though geography determines everything. But prior to this opening, Kaplan offers a prologue called "The Ruins of Champa" that vividly conveys India's enduring cultural influence in Vietnam:

I am in My Son, in central Vietnam, forty miles inland from the coast of the South China Sea. Flowers and grass grow out of every non-vertical surface of each monument where altars, lamps, and lingas used to be placed, swimming in incense and camphor. . . . A lichen-coated linga, the phallic symbol of Shiva's manhood, stands alone and sentinel against the ages.

So history and culture matter, too. The message of the prologue is that one must "never lose sight of the vividness of India's presence in this part of the world" even "at a time when China's gaze seems so overpowering." In chapters covering not only Vietnam but also Malaysia, Singapore, the

Philippines and Taiwan, Kaplan offers a richly textured account of how each country approaches its relations with the great powers in its midst. We learn how Mahathir bin Mohamad modernized Malaysia using Islam as the glue to unite its variegated peoples, and that the country is, after Singapore, the most reliable military partner of the United States in the South China Sea, having not forgiven China for its support of ethnically Chinese Communist insurgents through the 1970s. Kaplan similarly details the perspective of Lee Kuan Yew, father of modern Singapore, on the Vietnam War,

ippines is an “archipelagic nation,” and thus the country is desperate for U.S. help in the face of China’s “creeping expansionism” in the South China Sea.

Finally, Kaplan covers Taiwan, offering a new perspective on Chiang Kai-shek and conveying the importance of Taiwan’s position between the Japanese archipelago and the northern reaches of the South China Sea: “Taiwan is the cork in the bottle of the South China Sea, controlling access between Southeast Asia and Northeast Asia.” Furthermore, if China were to annex Taiwan, then all of the assets currently focused on “reintegrating” (in Beijing’s parlance) that island would be freed for other missions.

Kaplan points out that Chiang created a Chinese alternative to Mao’s Communist “People’s Republic” on an island where even today, 70 percent of the population has “aboriginal blood, which is ethnic Malay in origin,” cementing the connection to the South China Sea realm. To counter Chiang’s reputation as a corrupt failure, Kaplan cites the work



which in his eyes bought time for the other states of Southeast Asia to strengthen their economies and thereby ward off the Communist challenge. And regarding the Philippines, we learn that internal threats are so dominant that the army there is three times bigger than the navy, even though the Phil-

of the contemporary historians Jonathan Fenby and Jay Taylor, who show that Chiang’s forces fought much harder than has been appreciated against the Japanese invaders in the World War II period, as Mao’s Communists “were pursuing the very strategy Chiang was accused of: avoiding

major military entanglements with the Japanese in order to hoard their strength to later fight the Nationalists.” Drawing again on Fenby and Taylor, Kaplan’s review of Chiang’s early policies on Taiwan assigns him credit for putting the country on the path to its current prosperous democracy.

Kaplan also visits Taiwan’s Pratas Islands in the northern South China Sea, which provokes him to reflect on the origins of Beijing’s current “nine-dash line” claim to most of that maritime realm. The original line had eleven dashes and was developed by the Nationalists on Taiwan. When the mainland Chinese inked an agreement with Vietnam over the Gulf of Tonkin in the 1950s, two of the dashes were dropped. Kaplan lands on the main island and finds only enough to occupy him for an hour. This inspires him to reflect:

Because there was nothing here, these so-called features were really just that—microscopic bits of earth with little history behind them and basically no civilians living on them. Thus, they were free to become the ultimate patriotic symbols, more potent because of their very emptiness and henceforth their inherent abstraction: in effect, they had become logos of nationhood in a global media age. The primordial quest for status still determined the international system.

This move into the realm of theory does not serve Kaplan well. He is closer to the mark earlier in the book when defining the importance of the South China Sea in terms of its centrality to trade, its resources and the fact that disputed land features within it are being used as the basis for claims to

control traffic through its waters: “Domination of the South China Sea would certainly clear the way for pivotal Chinese air and naval influence throughout the navigable rimland of Eurasia—the Indian and Pacific oceans both. And thus China would become the virtual hegemon of the Indo-Pacific.” Regional hegemony, not symbols or logos, is what is at stake.

But Kaplan returns to more solid ground in an epilogue that, like the prologue on Vietnam, offers visceral impressions of his visit to the jungle-enclosed eastern Malaysian states of Sabah and Sarawak. He concludes on a fittingly humble note: “What if the future of the South China Sea is not just about newly strong states asserting their territorial claims, but also about a new medievalism born of weak central government and global Islam?”

Dyer’s historical research and reportage are impressive and illustrate how Beijing squandered the gains of its aforementioned “charm offensive” in the last decade by reverting to form. Dyer cites the Singapore-based scholar Geoffrey Wade to establish that despite the image of peaceful exploration that China trumpets, the Ming-era voyager Zheng He was actually a colonial gunboat diplomat at the helm of a well-armed armada. In the fifteenth century Zheng intervened with military force in civil conflicts in Sumatra, Java and even modern-day Sri Lanka, and he established a semipermanent Chinese garrison at Malacca to control traffic through the strait. Dyer also offers a revealing quote from the Chinese international-relations expert Yan Xuetong: “Ancient Chinese policy will



in what the [official Chinese] Xinhua News Agency gleefully described as ‘the wee hours’—the fourth such dressing down he had received.” From a strategic perspective, China’s conduct seems

become the basis for much Chinese foreign policy, rather than Western liberalism or Communist ideology. . . . It is easier to teach common people why they are doing certain things if it is explained in these terms.”

Putting aside his implication that “common people” are primitive, Yan’s statement sheds light on some otherwise puzzling developments of the past few years. In a range of incidents China has alienated regional powers by according them treatment more befitting traditional Chinese vassals than independent states. For instance, in 2009 Japan voted out the Liberal Democratic Party, which had been in power for fifty years, and installed a new government that favored closer ties with China at the expense of relations with the United States. Yet in September 2010, the captain of a Chinese fishing boat rammed a Japanese coast-guard vessel in the vicinity of the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands. While the captain was detained in Japan, huge anti-Japanese protests erupted in China, and Chinese shipments of rare-earth metals critical for Japanese high-tech manufactures started to decline. “At one stage,” Dyer reports, “the Japanese ambassador was hauled in to receive a formal complaint

counterproductive. Why antagonize a potentially well-disposed Japanese government over fish? “Beijing had a game-changing opening to weaken American standing in the region,” Dyer notes. “But, rather than driving a wedge between the U.S. and its most important allies, China has managed to push them much closer together.” The explanation must involve China’s sense of its status and impatience to establish a new order in which the region defers to Beijing. At the same time, the onus is now on Washington to work more closely with Tokyo.

Turning to South Korea, the other major U.S. ally in Northeast Asia, Dyer recounts that several months before the fishing-boat incident a North Korean minisubmarine had fired a torpedo at a South Korean naval vessel, sinking the ship and killing forty-six sailors. At this point economic ties between China and South Korea were “booming,” thanks in part to a fact that Dyer uncharacteristically omits: China backstopped the South Korean economy during the 2008 global financial crisis. But following the sinking, China blocked the UN Security Council from punishing Pyongyang and generally

Both Dyer and Kaplan explain that China feels entitled by history to project its authority onto smaller states in its region.

failed to convey a sympathetic response to Seoul. South Korea's disappointment was reinforced in October 2010, when then vice president Xi Jinping gave a speech on the fiftieth anniversary of China's intervention in the Korean War eulogizing the conflict as "great and just." A month later, North Korea struck again, shelling a South Korean island and killing four inhabitants. "Under pressure to rein in its ally," Dyer explains, "Beijing decided to call for a meeting of the so-called six-party talks." Seoul would of course have been loath to participate without an apology from Pyongyang, but China was counting on the gesture to "deflect some of the blame for the standoff onto South Korea." China's heavy-handed approach at such a difficult moment with South Korea can only be explained by a historically informed sense of primacy. "With no formal warning, Dai Bingguo, the senior Chinese foreign-policy official, turned up in Seoul to discuss the proposal." This account is not footnoted; perhaps an outraged South Korean diplomat provided Dyer with the full scoop:

He did not have a visa, so South Korean Foreign Ministry officials had to rush out to the airport to get him into the country. Dai insisted on meeting with President Lee Myung-bak that evening, even though he did not have an appointment. And even though he asked that the meeting be off the record, he brought a group of Chinese journalists along with him. Lee told him that Seoul would not agree to a meeting involving the North Koreans, but Dai went out and announced the proposed summit anyway.

In the course of a few months, China thus went a long way toward undoing the goodwill that it had built up with South Korea in the past decade. Dyer attributes this to Chinese fear of a North Korean collapse, but we can also speculate that, having supported South Korea's economy through the 2008 crisis, Beijing may have felt entitled to more deference than Seoul was willing to offer. Back in the era of Zheng He, after all, South Korea would have been sending tribute missions to the Chinese capital.

In the same vein, Dyer reports that the South China Sea states consider China to be pursuing a strategy of "talk and take" in an attempt to bully them into accepting a new status quo that favors Beijing. China's ambition and presumptuousness color even its relations with long-standing U.S. ally Australia. According to Dyer, a Chinese defector revealed that "senior officials in Beijing were openly suggesting that Australia could come to play a role somewhat similar to France's—still part of the Western alliance, but detached from America and willing to take its own path on important issues." Dyer also provides colorful background to the outburst by Chinese foreign minister Yang Jiechi at the 2010 Asia-Pacific Summit in Hanoi. "China is a big country," Yang ranted to an audience including Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, "and you are all small countries. And that is a fact." Before delivering this diatribe, Dyer tells us, Yang was apparently spotted pacing "in the corridor beforehand rehearsing lines." So we now know that his remarks were not

spontaneous. Why would China behave in such a heavy-handed way?

Both Dyer and Kaplan explain that China feels entitled by history to project its authority onto smaller states in its region. The authors liken Beijing's position to that of Washington in the era of the Monroe Doctrine and compare the South China Sea to the Caribbean. But as Dyer points out, unlike China's current power-projection efforts, "The Monroe Doctrine was not imposed on an unwilling hemisphere: in much of the region, it was welcomed." And as Kaplan reports:

One high-ranking official of a South China Sea littoral state was particularly blunt during an off-the-record conversation I had in 2011, saying, "The Chinese never give justifications for their claims. They have a real Middle Kingdom mentality, and are dead set against taking these disputes to court. China," this official went on, "denies us our right on our own continental shelf. But we will not be treated like Tibet or Xinjiang."

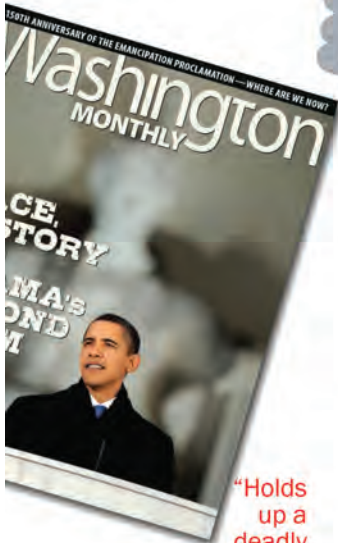
Dyer and Kaplan are thus at their strongest when they are explaining conditions on the ground in the region and drawing on history to offer context for today's competition. But Dyer stumbles

when he jumps on the anti-arms-race bandwagon, warning:

Toward the end of the Cold War, the arms race ultimately bankrupted the Soviet Union before the pressures of high defense spending began to seriously undermine the U.S. But if a deeper arms race were to develop between China and the U.S., it is not at all clear that Washington would be starting from a stronger financial footing.

In fact, the Pentagon's strategy in the Cold War was not to provoke ever-greater Soviet defense expenditures across the board but rather to try to stimulate the Soviets to spend in particular areas that were relatively less threatening to us and likely to be less productive for them. Of course Washington can't hope to drive the Chinese bankrupt through defense expenditures and wouldn't want to because increased Chinese defense spending—in the abstract, at least—is a frightening prospect. What we can try to achieve through our own behavior is to influence the investments that China makes in response. But to formulate a cogent strategy toward Beijing will require avoiding defeatism or alarmism, something that these two contributions should help to accomplish. □

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