US Foreign Policy and the Future of Conservative Faith-Based Groups

Professor Stuart Croft (University of Warwick), Dr Trevor McCrisken (University of Warwick), and Dr Richard Jackson (Aberystwyth University) kicked off a major new project on the influence of Conservative Faith-Based groups on US foreign policy by attending the Republican National Convention, Saint Paul-Minneapolis, September 1-4, 2008. Guests of the Nebraska Delegation, they were given access to a wide array of Republican officials and Convention meetings, as well as attending the nightly Convention speeches by figures such as Rudy Giuliani, Mitt Romney, Joe Lieberman, and of course Sarah Palin and John McCain. Among the Convention meetings they attended inside the “security cordon” was a foreign policy roundtable sponsored by the International Republican Institute (IRI) that featured a number of foreign policy advisers to John McCain including former National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft, former Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger, former US Ambassador to Germany Richard Burt, Congressman Pete Hoekstra, former Secretary of the Navy John Lehman and former Ambassador to the United Nations Richard Williamson. They also gained access to talks by various important religious leaders including Gary Bauer, president of the conservative non-profit organisation American Values and co-founder of the American Alliance of Jews and Christians; Richard Land, president of the Southern Baptist Convention’s Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission and a member of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF); and Jim Wallis, the liberal evangelical founder and editor of Sojourners magazine.

The rationale for the project is that while the domestic political agenda of Conservative Faith-Based Groups in the US has been extensively studied, less is known about the aims and influence of these groups in regards to US foreign policy. The project aims to better understand the core foreign policy ideas and worldview, policy agenda and strategies of influence of this extremely diverse collection of groups by conducting a series of face-to-face interviews with Conservative faith leaders and members of their churches and organisations across the country. The project focuses on the increasing engagement of the Christian Right in the United States, and specifically Conservative Protestant Evangelicals, in developing a ‘Christian foreign policy’. The project will examine how ideas about four main foreign policy commitments – to Christian solidarity globally, a hostility to international institutions such as the UN and EU, a commitment to Christian global justice, and support for Israel – are being developed across a range of US Conservative Protestant actors, in their non-governmental organisations, in Christian universities and training centres, in the Christian new media, in mega-churches; and in the Christian hinterland of the United States. There is a new consensus on foreign policy emerging among these actors. Their aim is that this consensus should be policy relevant and enable them to build networks of influence and a powerbase within the foreign policy establishment. The project will map this consensus, and will critically interrogate its basis, and its applicability. The project will address questions such as: what are the key elements of US Conservative Protestant Evangelicals’ thinking about foreign policy? Where are those ideas being generated, and how are they being transmitted? How policy relevant are they? And as a consequence, how might they impact upon the foreign policy of the Obama administration and the development of oppositional foreign policy positions within the traditional base for the religious right, the Republican Party?

Even before Senator McCain’s defeat in the presidential election, an important initial finding gained by this visit to the Republican National Convention is that Conservative Faith-Based groups are attempting to re-define their role and identity within the US political system as they face the possibility of a long term re-alignment in US politics that would see influence in policy making move further and further away from the Republican Party, their traditional allies. Whereas once liberal and conservative groups could not talk to each other because of profound differences over, for example, abortion and gay rights, now there is a real interest in engaging in finding common ground over issues such as the right to life (including abortion and poverty), and creation care (i.e., the environment). This was demonstrated in the comments of Richard Land and Jim Wallis at a roundtable on Faith and Politics held at the University of Minnesota during the Convention. Although there remain significant differences between them and the constituencies they represent,
Faith-Based Conservative Groups

CONTINUES FROM PAGE 1

nonetheless Land and Wallis were both keen to emphasize the common political ground between them on a number of issues including their opposition to the use of torture. How this emerging cross-denominational dialogue will influence ideas about foreign policy will be one of the key focuses for the research.

The significance of such shifts in political affiliation of evangelical Christians was apparent in the recent presidential election. Although John McCain still secured the majority of the self-declared evangelicals and born-again Christians who make up a quarter of the US electorate, Barack Obama made gains among some elements of the evangelical vote in particularly important states. According to the New York Times, Obama doubled Democratic support among young white evangelicals (those aged 18 to 29) compared with John Kerry in 2004. The increase was almost the same for white evangelicals aged between 30 and 44. These gains were most striking in the ‘battleground’ states where the Obama campaign had concentrated its efforts the most: Florida, Pennsylvania, Indiana, Michigan, Colorado, and Virginia. Indeed, in Colorado, Obama increased his support among white evangelicals over that achieved by John Kerry by some 10 percentage points. These shifts in electoral support toward Obama suggest that during the course of his administration there may be greater opportunities than might be expected for evangelical faith-based groups to gain access and influence, particularly if conservatives are increasingly willing to build political alliances with more liberal evangelicals and other religious groups. The next four years will prove a particularly rich time to be researching the links between faith-based groups and the development of US foreign policy.

Trevor McCrisken

WORKING GROUP EVENTS

SYMPOSIUM ON SOFT POWER, MANCHESTER, MAY 22 2008

The Politics Department at the University of Manchester hosted a one-day symposium on ‘Soft Power and US Foreign policy’ in May, at which Joseph Nye (Harvard) was the guest of honour. Inderjeet Parmar was the organiser of the event, which featured several panels on the day’s theme, followed by a lecture from Prof. Nye. The event was sponsored by the Research Group on American Power, the Centre for International Polities of the University of Manchester, and by Routledge.

ANNUAL US WORKING GROUP CONFERENCE, LONDON, SEP. 18-19, 2008

The Institute for the Study of the Americas and LSE IDEAS co-hosted the US working group’s annual conference in September. The event was organised by Tim Lynch of ISA. Spread over two days, the conference included eleven panels, as well as a keynote address from Prof. Daniel Deudney (Johns Hopkins) [see photo - top right]. More than 90 people attended the event, including a large number of postgraduates, supported by bursaries generously provided by the ESRC.

At the group’s business meeting, John Dumbrell (Durham) stood down as co-convenor of the working group after three years’ service and was thanked by members of the organising committee. John Dumbrell (Durham) stood down as co-convenor of the working group after three years’ service and was thanked by members of the organising committee.

The Argentia Editorial Team

Ed Lock is Senior Lecturer in International Relations at the University of the West of England. His article, ‘Refining Strategic Culture: Return of the Second Generation’ will appear in the Review of International Studies later this year.

Linda B. Miller is Professor of Political Science, Emerita, at Wellesley College and Adjunct Professor of International Studies (Research), at the Watson Institute, Brown University. USA. She was Editor of the ISAs International Studies Review from 1999-2002. Her article, ‘Bush-Cheney Redux’ will appear in the next edition of International Politics.

J Simon Rofe is Lecturer in International Relations in the Department of Politics and International Relations and Centre for American Studies at the University of Leicester. Among his most recent publications is Franklin Roosevelf’s Foreign Policy and the Welles Mission (Palgrave: New York, 2007). jsimonrofe@leicester.ac.uk

Adam Quinn is Lecturer in International Studies at the Dept of Political Science and International Studies, University of Birmingham. His book, US Foreign Policy in Context: National Ideology from the Founding Fathers to the Bush Doctrine, will be published by Routledge later this year.

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Layout & Design by Matthew Brough

 Recent years have witnessed the largest restructure in the American intelligence community since the early years of the Cold War. This conference will consider the historical and contemporary role of the Central Intelligence Agency in the formulation and implementation of American foreign relations.

We invite papers and panels that address any aspect of the relationship between the CIA and US foreign policy from the creation of the Agency in 1947 up to the present day. There will be a particular, although by no means exclusive, attention to issues of Agency reform, representation and interaction, as well as new approaches to intelligence.

For further information visit: www.ucdclinton.ie/events_conferences_2009_s iaandusforeignpolicy.htm

Inderjeet Parmar, Adam Quinn, Oz Hassan, Mark Phythian (Leicester) and Jim Guth (Furman, South Carolina).

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The working group held two panels at the ISA conference in San Francisco in May. The first, on ‘The Legacy of the Bush Era and Future Prospects’, featured Bruce Jentleson (Duke), Jim McCormick (Iowa State), John Dumbrell (Durham), David Dunn (Birmingham) and Inderjeet Parmar (Manchester). The other, ‘US National Interest as Ideology’, featured Adam Quinn (Birmingham), Simon Rofe (Leicester), Oz Hassan (Birmingham) and Linda B. Miller (Brown). The latter panel was chaired and discussed by Harold P Smith (University of California, Berkeley).

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After Bush: The Case for Continuity in American Foreign Policy - Timothy J. Lynch & Robert S. Singh

Oz Hassan
University of Birmingham

In the current ‘Anything-But-Bush’ environment, this is a very provocative and controversial book. The central conclusions that Lynch and Singh present are that the Bush doctrine is a continuation of a US foreign policy tradition, is highly successful and should be continued. As such their arguments are interesting and important but may make for incredibly uncomfortable reading. Not only is the book uncompromising, but it is sure to prove divisive because of the antagonistic manner that the authors continuously challenge ‘Realists’ and ‘left-liberals’ assumptions.

As one can imagine, to defend the book’s central conclusions requires doing so on multiple fronts. Indeed the book valiantly tries to deal with the most dominant critical arguments presented against the Bush doctrine. These vary from the decision to cast the terrorist attacks of September 11 2001 as an “act of war”, the decision to invade Iraq, the cost of the war, the comparison between Vietnam and Iraq, the conflict between security and liberties, democratic enlargement in the Middle East region, how US policy should face Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and North Korea, and the future of American Primacy. Dealing with such a wide variety of issues provides a holistic defence of the Bush doctrine, which is greatly reinforced by a consistently superb understanding of US culture.

However what the book covers in breadth, it is left wanting in analytical depth. As such there appears to be a temperament being put forward, rather than a robust methodology that guides the reader towards sound premises and conclusions. This is evident in the failure to develop a theory of political continuity and change, and masked in the assertion that “Tradition as a concept, is difficult to define with precision...[and] invariably involves the scholar in this often fuzzy realm of analysis”. This leaves the text without a theoretical structure that can be referred back to, whilst allowing the authors to be extremely unclear over issues of nuance.

Yet the failure to adopt a theoretical structure does allow a common thread to appear throughout the book’s arguments. A Hobbesian temperament is often present that relies on the bottom line passions of fear and desire to persuade the reader. Once understood in this way the varied elements in the book can be drawn together to suggest a more coherent rationale. This is highly evident in the manner in which the book begins by framing the debate with a fictitious announcement from a future president. The narrative espoused is one in which the United States has attacked Iran with nuclear weapons, in retaliation for nuclear strikes on Washington, Los Angeles, and New York. What is interesting about this framing is that it sits uncomfortably with the notion of ‘political science’ appealing instead to the imagination and a fear of violent death. Within this framework ‘conceivability’ is used as a justification for policy, which is very different from rigorous sound analysis of intelligence. Where there is the slightest possibility of a terrorists-technology-tyranny triad then the US is seen to have carte blanche on how it responds.

The paramount role of government, it is argued, is to protect the nation at all cost and with any methods; whether deemed internationally legal or not. This includes the use of preventative force which is seen as “a tool” and not a last resort, but also the use of military tribunals and coercive interrogation.

Yet there are more serious paradoxes and problems in the book. Notably three interrelated problems stand out. Firstly, there is a failure to see power in deontic terms. Throughout the book power is defined in terms of military and economic resources. This is most prominently demonstrated when referring to American primacy and William Wohlforth’s observations on measuring power (p.266): To this extent the book plays down the importance of rights, duties, obligations, commitments, authorizations, requirements, permissions and privileges. This writes out the type, and role, of power that exists as long as it is acknowledged, recognised, or otherwise accepted. For the authors results matter more than methods, and ‘strength’ is demonstrated predominantly through confrontation. Yet it is argued that one of the goals of the war on terror (or as the authors refer to it “the Second Cold War”), is not to win hearts and minds but to change them. Such change is seen as possible through US acts of aggression and a monopoly on violence. Indeed the Iraq war, which is termed “necessary”, is seen to have faltered because of tactical military mistakes but remains an “unsound application of a sound doctrine”. Yet there is silence over the issues concerning the use of violence and the effects that this has on strategically selective actors’ cognitions.

Such consideration is dismissed through the assertion that “the war is not a public relations exercise”. Without acknowledging the role deontic power plays in foreign relations it is difficult to see how to stop a cycle of violence from occurring. It is difficult to see how one can change minds through violence, especially when such acts help reproduce counter productive narratives and perceived injustice.

Secondly, there is a problematic representation of the US approach to democratizing the Greater Middle East. The authors argue that the Bush administration has adopted a quest for human freedom over regional stability, and that this represents the long term solution for winning the war on terror. Indeed it is argued that “the second cold war on Islamist terror is premised on such logic”. The argument put forward is that poor governments “defeat the enemy” and as long as there is a fear of proliferation then democratisation will be adopted as the long term solution. Arab Tyrannies will be weakened by denying stability for their survival. Yet if one looks at the most rigorous research on this issue from authors such as Tamara Coffman Wittes and Thomas Carothers, the reality is that the primary goal of US-MENA relations is stability first and gradual liberalisation to secure regional allies. Indeed this has been a cornerstone critique from former Bush insiders such as J. Scott Carpenter, who headed the Flagship Middle East reform program from the State Department.

Thirdly, the book fails to engage with any distinctions and first order questions about the freedom, democracy and liberalisation agenda that the Bush administration is/should be pursuing. It appears at times that such terms are conflated. The result of this is that a serious contradiction appears, where the authors argue that American primacy over the region is (and should remain) a policy goal at the same time as attempting to increasing freedom/democracy/liberalisation. Yet domination and freedom are surely uncomfortable bedfellows. Throughout the book it appears that aggression is justified in terms of “liberation” and the “foreigner’s gift of democracy”, leading to rather Orwellian moments of ‘War is Peace’ because of American benevolence and security interests. The empirical implications of this contradiction are all too evident. Accordingly the authors’ assert that Iraq should be a place for US troops for years to come. However in this “liberated nation” and newly ‘democratic’ country, the authors give little consideration that such a decision should be made by the Iraqi government, and not Washington DC.

These three related issues raise serious questions about the conclusions that the book draws. Ultimately the authors represent the war on terror as the start of an epochal struggle. Yet the failure to see the role of deontic power closes down alternative policy directions; the power/change nexus is consequently far too intrinsically linked to the barrel of a gun. Moreover, to mask power in terms of liberation and the call for an Islamic Reformation, where liberalism and ‘Islam’ suddenly synthesize, remains dubious. Especially when in reality primacy is America’s policy goal. To this extent the authors may in fact have underplayed the level of continuity in US-Middle Eastern relations; regional stability remains the overall emphasis of US policy. Nevertheless if one is inclined to agree with any of the conclusions in the book, it is that the Bush doctrine will continue under the next administration.

Yet it is important to add the caveat that this is reliant on the next administration seeing violence as a tool and believing that they alone have a monopoly on essentially contested terms such as freedom, democracy and liberalisation.

Clela Lutz Bunch
University of Arkansas at Little Rock

 cray the Bush Administration has been elevated to the level of an American national sport. The millions of people who re-elected President Bush in November 2004 have conveniently evaporated and been replaced by a multitude of pundits decrying his policies. American bookstores are filled with popular monographs which dissect and condemn the Bush Administration’s inipet handling of the Iraq War. Thus, despite my agreement with those who criticize the president’s hasty invasion

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of Iraq, I looked forward to reading an alternative view. After Bush: The Case for Continuity in American Foreign Policy by Timothy J. Lynch and Robert S. Singh provides a revisionist account of Bush’s foreign policy; unfortunately, it failed to offer this perspective with objective, scholarly analysis. This work is deeply flawed on a number of levels.

First of all, Lynch and Singh propose a number of theses that fail to stand up to scrutiny. The authors argue that the Bush Doctrine is far from unique, but instead reflects continuity with past administrations. Yet they undermine their own argument, writing that “Bush’s response was to reject the ‘narrow realism’ of his father’s administration and the ‘wishful liberalism’ of Clinton in favour of a ‘distinctly American internationalism.’” This married Wilsonian ideals to realist means, focusing on regime change in addition to containment, prevention as well as deterrence, and preserving American primacy” (p.196) If, as the authors imply, Bush crafted a unique approach to foreign policy, does this not undermine the thesis of continuity? In addition, the authors consistently refer to the War on Terror as “the Second Cold War,” but fail to prove that parallels exist between the current struggle against extremism and the Cold War. Their attempts to construct analogies justifying the term “Second Cold War” are weak and involve convoluted logic. For instance, they argue that the Second Cold War resembles the first because there is “Disagreement about the appropriate historical point at which they commenced.” Yet scholars disagree about the timelines of most historical eras, does this indicate that all they resemble the Cold War? The Cold War differed from the current battle against extremism in many concrete ways: It involved two superpowers, not an American-inspired and run “Third World” superpower and amorphous terrorist organizations; the essential threat of the Cold War was mutually assured destruction, not a devastating but geographically limited terrorist attack; and the enemy could be engaged with substantial dialogue and negotiations during the Cold War, while the non-state actors in the current struggle are outside the bounds of traditional diplomacy. Thus, the term “Second Cold War,” which the authors use liberally throughout their book, seems inappropriate.

Echoing the voice of Bush Administration spokespersons, the authors refuse to separate the attacks of September 11 from the war in Iraq. They insist on perpetuating the idea that Saddam attacked the United States. Yet President Bush originally justified the invasion of Iraq by claiming that Saddam had significant stockpiles of weapons of mass destruction, the Iraqi dictator could not be connected to the attacks of September 11. It was only after the invasion, when no weapons were uncovered, that Bush changed his statements, arguing that the goal of the war was regime change as a component of the overall War on Terror. This distinction is important, because the authors base many of their arguments on the false premise that Iraq attacked the United States. Or so it would seem when they make statements like “Few ‘rogue states’ have attacked the United States or seriously compromised its interests without suffering regime change as a consequence” (p.89).

To verify their ideas, the authors used so many leaps in logic, convoluted arguments, and unsubstantiated assertions that I found myself dizzy trying to make sense of their analysis. The book contained many factual errors and distortions of history that seem mildly manipulative, such as, “Americans have had many reasons to demand better security. The war of 1812, the Alamo, Fort Sumter, Pearl Harbour, 9/11—one of these assaults violated a perfect security” (p.28) Lynch and Singh need to review some of the basics of American history before they include the Alamo and Fort Sumter in this list of foreign attacks on Americans. The book is fraught with errors and spurious associations that undermine the authors’ credibility. Other assertions are downright ridiculous, like the idea that the term ‘reconciliation’ has no equivalent in Arabic.” (p.168) Apparently this statement is meant to indicate something about the recalcitrance of Arab culture; however, it is completely false. There are several Arabic words that can be used to indicate “reconciliation,” tasalih being the first one to come to mind.

Lynch and Singh’s overt partisanship becomes quite transparent when they make some of the most egregious blunders of the Bush Administration, with statements like, “George Bush’s declaration of a ‘crusade’ on September 16, 2001 was only superficially controversial: crusades are basic and registrable phenomena in American public policy—foreign and domestic.” Not to have spoken in similar terms after the Twin Towers fell would have been extraordinary. It is almost obvious desire to exonerate George Bush at every turn gives them the aura of Bush partisans, not objective scholars. The authors also mischaracterize the opinions of their opponents, setting up straw men that are easy to knock down. Realism is reduced to “what makes Arabs happy fulfills American national interests” a ludicrous statement that manages to insult both realists and Arabs simultaneously. (p.93)

Lynch and Singh even attempt to justify actions that should be universally condemned: “It is no surprise to find that messy campaigns, like Iraq, within the wider Second Cold War, and ugly features of the war, like Guantamano Bay and Abu Ghrabi, offended the people they are meant to liberate. Saddam, of course, tortured and killed several thousand Muslims (mostly Shites and Kurds) at Abu Ghrabi but achieved less infamy in the Muslim world for doing so than did America’s temporary use of the prison.” (p.94) Are the authors implying that Iraq should not criticize American military depredations, so long as they do not meet the heinous standards set by Saddam? According to the authors, American actions (good or bad) are irrelevant anyway because “The Islamist world view is essentially immune to US behaviour” (p.95)

The book took on a truly disturbing tone when the authors endorsed Sam Harris’s assertions in The End of Faith, that “We are at war with Islam” and “Unless Muslims can reshape their religion into one that is basically benign—or outgrow it altogether—it is difficult to see how Islam and the West can avoid falling into a continual state of war...” Lynch and Singh fail to substantiate these bigoted claims with an explanation of how moderate Muslims (if they exist) will peacefully co-exist. By spreading war and chaos throughout the region, policymakers have persuaded many moderates that Islam and the West by quietly practicing their religion on a daily basis. (p.208, p. 225)

In their rush to condemn “Islamists” (a term which I loathe—imagine referring to “Christians” or “Judaists”) Lynch and Singh forget that the United States is in a struggle to undermine their support systems. Islamic fundamentalists cannot sustain their organizations without significant assistance from moderates in the Middle East. By spreading war and chaos throughout the region, policymakers have persuaded many moderates that violence is the only effective response to American aggression. Lynch and Singh are correct in their assertion that radicals cannot be converted with promises of peace, but policymakers can appeal to moderates and undermine the support systems that sustain radical groups.

The authors also use insulting terms to target their opponents in academia. They claim that those who call univness are “rarely schooled in economics” and that “Some of their professors continue to recycle the Marxism that, as students themselves, led them outside the pale without any numbers but with no greater wisdom, a generation ago.” (p.34-35) Lynch and Singh chastise the “self-doubting liberal left” for their “shrill anti-Bushism.” (p.86) This is hardly the language of objective scholarly discourse.

In conclusion, Lynch and Singh can be commended for attempting to broaden the scholarly discourse on the subject of the Bush Administration, but I believe their approach is heavy-handed with partisan language, unclear argumentation, and unsupported conclusions. Their work will doubtlessly inspire more revisionist accounts of Bush’s policies; I look forward to viewing these alternative perspectives as they become available.

Scott Lucas
University of Birmingham

Understanding Iraq's war on terror as a "Second Cold War" requires more nuance and less dogmatism. The authors persistently overlook the complexities of American foreign policy and its implications on the global stage. This work is deeply flawed on a number of levels.
transformation from “First Cold War” to “Second Cold War”, from Communism to “jihadist Islam”, from a geopolitical conflict with the Soviet Union to “a global war on terror” is not so much a point of departure as a point of reference. 

So much for the literal reading of Yoo’s rationalisation of Presidential power, skipping over the inconvenience that Yoo’s rationalisation of Presidential action from the sanctioning of torture to unchecked surveillance of American citizens has been ripped apart by almost everyone, even if, as Lynch and Singh argue, “that being liked” is the “key aspect of international strategy” (p.92)

I appreciate your reading for analysis rather than as a book to be read snappily. I hope the following summary of Lynch and Singh’s book will give some sense of the way it unfolds. I should stress, however, that I could not have written this commentary without the assistance of the refreshing new book by United States lawyers, history, and foreign policy specialists John Dean, Broken Government: How Republican activism and, by Iraqis, or by any other international frameworks and institutions. They might have considered Donald Rumsfeld’s concern, some might argue that “being liked” is the “key aspect of international strategy”. 

I strongly believe that the book has to be engaged - can only be engaged - as a polemic. Rather than an appreciation, let alone a consideration, of the critiques of Bush, the authors set up uni-dimensional caricatures that are a single incident, policy, or strategic concept except this: “In 1919 [Woodrow Wilson] warned the British government to abandon its separation of preferential treatment on the basis of kinship.” (p.36)

Can Lynch and Singh’s purported legal framework, set out in their chapter “The Constitution of American National Security”, be engaged? Possibly, but only after cutting through their twisting of legal and political precedent into an endorsement of “a series of constitutional coup d’etats” by the Executive. The authors first try out John Yoo’s “structural thesis” of executive power, skipping over the inconvenience that Yoo’s rationalisation of Presidential action from the sanctioning of torture to unchecked surveillance of American citizens has been ripped apart by almost everyone, even if, as Lynch and Singh argue, “that being liked” is the “key aspect of international strategy” (p.92)

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I find it impossible, on a critical level, to give any meaningful response to After Bush because there is nothing significant to respond to. I do, however, recognise the book for what it is: a macho, cheerleading division of the world into its saviour - the macho cheerleader who became the 43rd President of the United States - and those who would dare challenge him. For this accomplishment it is a niche, amongst other ephemera, as a pseudo-factual symbol of the fictional “Second Cold War”.

1. To be fair, some of Lynch and Singh’s most egregious historical errors did not make it into the final draft. Consider this from their website: “The most important military official serving George W. Bush is Dan Petraeus. Deto Harry S. Truman and Douglas MacArthur, Bush's successors will likely 'shake' the hands of the Bush Administration’s final draft. Consider this from their website: “The most important military official serving George W. Bush is Dan Petraeus. Deto Harry S. Truman and Douglas MacArthur, Bush's successors will likely ‘shake and knock down, that the Administration from its earliest days was trying to convert the “unipolar” mantra of ‘the long war’ and their explanation of what transpired and future victories.” (p.190) That project was not constructed by the Administration after 9-11 but eight months before it: “Imagine what the region would look like without Saddam and with US interests. It would change everything in the region and beyond.” (p.292)

Indeed, for Lynch and Singh, it is not just a case of obliterating the record before September 2001 but of ignoring it. Iraq - the alleged weapons of mass destruction, the ties to terrorism, the oil, ‘liberation’ - is discussed for 41 pages without a single reference to a meeting on strategy, any consideration of a specific policy before or after March 2003. This is important to Lynch and Singh’s narrative of the Administration’s actions. Lynch and Singh can be read for their assertions of “what ought to be”, but this is completely divorced from any explanation of what transpired and how it was perceived - by Bush and his officials, by Iraqis, by any other actors in the war - between 2001 and 2008. A similar claim can be made for Lynch and Singh on the Middle East as they proclaim, “It should be clear that in encouraging the growth of market democracies in the West is seeking a more enabling Arabs and Muslims to find their own path to remedy the deficiencies so comprehensively detailed by Arabs themselves” (228) (38 pages, 1 reference from Yoo’s rationalisation of Presidential power, skipping over the inconvenience that Yoo’s rationalisation of Presidential action from the sanctioning of torture to unchecked surveillance of American citizens has been ripped apart by almost everyone, even if, as Lynch and Singh argue, “that being liked” is the “key aspect of international strategy” (p.92)

The “left-liberal” camp, which for Lynch and Singh as Tariq Ali, Osama bin Laden, and “university and newspaper liberals”, march in [the] defense “of fascist dictatorships” (p.10). The voices of “European/Africanians”? “Diplomacy is not about wielding big sticks but big carrots. It is about appeasement.” (p.107)

This is enjoyable banter, suitable for the pub, the inter-aggregate debating society, or the Jeremy Kyle Show? 12 If he ever ventures from family counselling into political punditry Lynch and Singh might even claim to refine academic interpretation in the same way that Rush Limbaugh refined American radio, the New York Post refined recent journalism, and John Bolton refined American diplomacy.

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4. On the Bush Administration’s use of the National Security Agency for domestic wiretapping and surveillance, see also the 1978 Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act, see James Rosen, State of War (Simon and Schuster, 2000). An illuminating specific incident occurred when Attorney General John Ashcroft, semi- consciously in an intensive care unit, was pressed by White House counsel Alberto Gonzales to approve a warrantless programme (Dian Eagan, “FBI Director’s Notes Contradict Gonzales’s Version of Ashcroft Visit”, Washington Post, 17 August 2007).


7. Dersingh from the root word “fantasy”.


10. An incisive, if anti-Bush, analysis can be found in Michael Klare, Blood and Oil (Henry Holt, 2007).


Mitchell Lerner
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A s I sit at my desk to write this, I cannot help but notice the “Bush Countdown Clock” sitting on my shelf, ticking down the remaining seconds of the Bush presidency. I am more interested in being the only owner of such a device, a quick Google search reveals not only clocks but countdown keychains, watches, screensavers, stickers, magnets, coloring books, and more (my favorite is perhaps the “Final Countdown Keychain ‘Dance Saucers,’” which can be ordered for a mere $5.95 per bottle). The brisk sales of such items should come as no surprise to anyone who follows presidential politics; after all, George W. Bush currently sits with one of the lowest approval ratings in American history. But for the many Americans planning a party for his January 2009 departure, Timothy Lynch and Robert Singh warn you to be careful what you wish for; you might get it. For their book, America after Bush has “few compelling reasons to expect or want” (p.7) significant change in American foreign policy. In their approach to the current state of affairs, which they say has not been the failure under the current administration that so many allege. Their conclusions about the Bush presidency are strongly revisionist and likely to prove very controversial. I must admit that when I first heard about this book I expected much more, and I expected that when I finish much more. I find the larger thesis unconvincing. But, I should note from the outset, my critique should not be construed to suggest that After Bush is anything less than a thoughtful, provocative, and significant work. I have many serious disagreements with it but they are the type of disagreements one has with serious work done by serious scholars. It makes them no less serious.

To paraphrase the subject of their study, After Bush is a work that should not be “misunderstood.”

The book’s contributions are plentiful. The analysis of the flawed decisions that hindered the occupation of Iraq is thoughtful and well presented, as is the discussion of the serious consequences of the “unwilling” support of the Arab states that that nation would foster. I agree with many of their recommendations for future American policy, even if some are easier to put down on paper than they would be to implement. Declaring, for example, that the US should endeavor to convince all Arab states in the region to recognize Israel is as desirable as it is unlikely to be achieved, and the authors offer no real details as to how to accomplish it; I might similarly note that I should improve my social life by looking more like Brad Pitt. And their central thesis that subsequent presidents will likely continue many of Bush’s policies is logical and well-argued, although it strikes me as somewhat less controversial than they imply, particularly the case less than international two candidates for the White House has pledged to leave an American military presence in Iraq for as long as needed, indicated his willingness to strike terrorist targets inside Pakistan if necessary, and pledged to do “whatever it takes” to stop the Iranian nuclear program. I am aware, though, that this will be a much less exacting roundable if I continue to focus on the book’s many strong points, so let me instead emulate my nation’s current president by attempting to “interfere in the Americas” (p.27); it took almost 100 years for Theodore Roosevelt to add that plank to the original proclamation. America’s defeat in Vietnam is here attributed to “a defeat of George Bush’s ‘unilateral public,”’ (p.40) without noting that supporters of the War were actually in the majority until 1968. Describing American policy between 1966 and 1973 as isolationist is at best simplistic and at worst just wrong, one can only imagine Richard Nixon turning in his grave at such a depiction (p.21). And many of these oversimplifications are clearly designed to champion conservatives and discredit Liberals we learn, for example, that Ronald Reagan won the Cold War (p.143), a claim that has a modicum of truth, perhaps, but ignores so many other contributing factors and people that it is more polemic than historical position. At one point, the authors even make the shocking claim that America’s enemies in the early Cold War period were “appeased by liberals” (p.291) a statement that would likely spark a fistfight had it been uttered to Truman, Acheson, Kennan, Lilienthal, Nitz, Forrestal, Clifford, Harriman, or many others; the authors support this claim with a single reference to Henry Wallace, evidence so far off the mark that it calls into question their understanding of the political history of the era (in fact, when it became clear in 1944 that President Roosevelt was running for re-election, the Democratic candidate came together to have Wallace removed from the vice-presidency, at least in part because his views were so far from the party mainstream).

Such oversimplification struck me as most troubling when it appeared in one of the book’s fundamental arguments: the idea that Bush’s actions have conform to both recent American political norms and the intentions of the Founding Fathers. The first claim seems misguided, albeit not totally unreasonable. While it is true that American presidents since WWII have significantly expanded executive power, there remains a qualitative difference between this administration and those that preceded it; no previous administration has championed the right to imprison American citizens indefinitely, or required the CIA to manufacture evidence leading to war. In fact, the defining principle behind Administration policy is an expansive interpretation of the already expansive “unitary executive” theory, one that essentially argues that during wartime the President’s personal interpretation of the Constitution allows him to overrule Congress and the courts, an unprecedented claim that essentially abrogates separation of powers. The country’s existence of some evidence suggesting that the country’s abandonment of its nuclear program was a product of diplomacy and soft power, still conclude that the major role was played by the hard line of the Bush administration. But the evidence for such a claim is just not there. We simply do not know what lay behind Gaddaffi’s decision, and again the authors make no reference to the numerous experts who would attribute it to internal Libyan economic need or domestic political imperatives, and would stress the long-term diplomatic process that pre-dated the Bush administration. And once again their sources are troubling, as cite the opinions of the likes of Daniel Pipes, Kristol and Charles Krauthammer (and even quote Dick Cheney), but this hardly meets commonly accepted evidentiary standards. This is not to say that Singh and Lynch are wrong about Libya, of course. But it is to say that controversial arguments can only be credibly supported by legitimate evidence rather than a reliance on post-hoc ergo propter-hoc logic.

A more troubling example of such bias comes in their depiction of the Korean War. Instead of accurately reporting the facts, the authors were “not much different from that of Bill Clinton,” a conclusion they reach based largely on the fact that both men involved the international community in efforts to contain the regime (p.135). What’s more, the authors’ insistence that the Cold War period was “appeased by liberals” obscures the obvious differences in practice. The Clinton Administration took the lead in negotiating the 1994 Agreed Framework that, for all its flaws, saw the DPRK lock away its spent fuel rods at Yongbyon, and seal the reactor containing the plutonium reprocessing facilities for “not much different just wrong; one can only imagine Bill Clinton,” a conclusion they reach based largely on the fact that both men involved the international community in efforts to contain the regime (p.135). What’s more, the authors’ insistence that the Cold War period was “appeased by liberals” obscures the obvious differences in practice. The Clinton Administration took the lead in negotiating the 1994 Agreed Framework that, for all its flaws, saw the DPRK lock away its spent fuel rods at Yongbyon, and seal the reactor containing the plutonium reprocessing facilities for...
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IAEA inspectors. When Bush came to office he quickly moved in the opposite direction, repeatedly criticizing the DPRK government and suspending (despite the opposition of South Korea) the light-water reactor project that had been agreed to in 1994. When the agreement soon fell apart, the administration had gotten exactly what it wanted: a reversal of the Clinton policies. Subsequent claims of turning to multilateralism were an attempt by some to suggest that nothing would get done in Korea without active American leadership. And doing nothing is exactly what the neo-conservatives, convinced that the stick would work better than the carrot, wanted. Now, one might argue (although I would strongly disagree) that this approach was superior to Clinton’s. But the fact that both administrations talked about multilateralism does not mean they were the same. Even less credible is their claim that “Bush used multilateral diplomacy to build Pyongyang’s nuclear program” (p.243). When Bush came to office, the American intelligence community was almost unanimous that the DPRK had produced enough weapons-grade plutonium for one or two weapons, although they had not weaponized it, tested it, or developed the ability to deliver it to a target successfully. But by January 2003, the North had restarted the Yongbyon facility, expelled IAEA officials, and withdrawn from the NPT, and by 2006 they had conducted their first underground nuclear test, demonstrated a significantly improved delivery system, and reprocessed enough plutonium for as many as twelve nuclear weapons. Again, one might argue that this was not a reflection of poor policymaking by the Bush administration, but describe it as “forestall[ing] Pyongyang’s nuclear program” seems so far off the mark that I admit to being a bit baffled as to exactly what the authors mean.

Similarly one-sided is their optimistic depiction of American policies in the War on Terror. I happily confess that my gloomy view of this situation has been improved a bit by reading Lynch and Singh’s analysis, which offers some nuggets of information of which I was unaware. Still, I remain unconvinced that, as they write, “the war is working” (p.112). Al Qaeda may be weakened but is hardly beaten, as made clear by a 2007 National Intelligence Estimate that concluded that the group “has protected or regenerated key elements of its operational capability.” Moreover, while the situation within Iraq seems to have improved, one has to question whether the effort was worth the ramifications for the larger war against Islamic terrorism across the globe. Indeed, for many the US has drained American resources, diverted attention from more immediate threats, alienated many moderate Arabs whose assistance is vital in (among other things) intelligence efforts, and sparked a resurgence in anti-American sentiment across the world. It has also proven to be both a recruiting tool and a training ground for a new generation of jihadists (according to a recent study, the number of fatal terrorist attacks by jihadist groups has increased over 600% since the war began, and is up 35% even if one excludes attacks on targets inside Afghanistan and Iraq), and has left the American army near its breaking point by almost any measure. Lynch and Singh are repeatedly critical of those who opposed this war, which they see as a necessary step in the larger struggle against terrorism, what they ignore is that most critics (myself included) saw Iraq as a potential threat to be dealt with but only after more pressing ones were addressed. So while the US has lost 4,000 soldiers and $3 trillion in Iraq, Afghanistan has seen the re-emergence of Al Qaeda and the Taliban, the return of its opium industry, and suicide attacks that grew from two in 2003 to 137 in 2007, a recent study by the American government concluded that of the 433 police units trained by the US since 2002, not a single one is capable of handling domestic terrorist activities. The Iranian threat grows, both through its nuclear program, which had 160 centrifuges enriching uranium in 2003 but now has 3,300, and its support for terrorist groups. The Pakistani border regions has seen an explosion of anti-Western terrorist groups and jihadist training centers; the Council on Foreign Relations wrote that “In recent years, many new terrorist groups have emerged in Pakistan, several existing groups have reconstituted themselves, and a new crop of militants have taken control, more violent and less conducive to political solutions than their predecessors.”Meanwhile, US prestige wanes with every new revelation about an Abu Ghraib, a Guantanamo, a secret midnight rendition, or the existence of another CIA torture camp in Eastern Europe. Lynch and Singh are right to point out the hypocrisy of the many brutal regimes that condemn these practices, but when Canada places the US on its list of rogue nations, one has wonder about the future of America’s standing as leader of the “Free World.” Little wonder, then, that in a 2006 poll of over a hundred leading American intelligence and foreign policy officials, conducted by Foreign Policy, 84% concluded that the US was not winning the war against terrorism. There are other examples of a pro-Bush bias that undermine the work credibility. Abuse of prisoners, we are told, is an aberration rather than a government policy, despite the fact that a thorough Army study found otherwise; “The commander in chief and those under him authorized a systematic regime of torture,” concluded General Antonio Taguba. “There is no longer any doubt as to whether the current administration or the earlier contacts ever developed into a collaborative operational relationship. Nor have we seen evidence indicating that Iraq cooperated with Al Qaeda in developing or carrying out any attacks against the United States.” Similarly Lynch and Singh cite the Dueller Report to support their claim that Saddam planned to resume production of WMDs at the time of the America invasion, had been bereft of them since 1998, and had not taken steps to develop them since then. Saddam’s programs, the report concluded, had “progressively decreased,” and the regime “had no formal written strategy or plan for the revival of WMD after sanctions. Neither was there an identifiable group of WMD policy makers or planners separate from Saddam.”

These troubling moments of pro-Bush bias are exacerbated by the presence of my final objection: the occasionally petulant and shrill tone that marks the book. Singh and Lynch are impressive and accomplished scholars, who should be above the mean-spirited personal attacks on the political left that dot this book. Readers learn, for example, that “left-liberals rather want [America’s decline] to happen” (p.96). And that “the US is opposed by many on the left because...it is far worse than the opponents it provokes and creates” (p.96). And that a “descent into an infernal internationalism [would] please the academic left” (p.232). And that “the poverty of the left’s contribution is symbolized in an increasingly shrill anti-Bushism which has gone not much further than support for Cindy Sheehan, the Dixie Chicks, and the doomed senatorial candidacy of Ned Lamont.” (p.86). The authors are of course entitled to their opinions, even ones like these that are hyperbolic, insulting, or ridiculous (or all three). But such derisive harbs only impugn the impartiality of those who launch them, and do not belong in a serious work of scholarship. Simply, they are unworthy of two such distinguished scholars.

By now it is clear to anyone who has managed to muddle through this overly long commentary that I have serious concerns with After Bush. I do. None of these concerns, however, are meant to imply that it is not an important book. It is. And it will likely stand as the definitive voice for this position for some time. Future historians may not like it (I did) and they may not agree with it (I didn’t). But they will have to recognize its contributions and address the arguments it makes. In fact, for all of the objections I have voiced here, I would read the book with four simple words: “Lynch and Singh.” I do think, however, that the authors need to be more open-minded. An author, I believe, can earn no higher praise.
Response to reviews

We are grateful to these reviewers for, to paraphrase Scott Lucas, thinking themselves hard enough and having a go at our book. Provocation is easier than persuasion and we are cautious that if we have not achieved the latter in the book itself, how much less likely we are to do so here. The four reviews range widely and we will not attempt here to acknowledge all praise or defend against all attacks. We will take each review in turn – and do so in the spirit of debate rather than confrontation.

Oz Hassan articulates a reaction common to each reviewer here: that we have engaged in broad brush polemic obscuring our analytical and normative claims – some of which he is prepared to admit gave him pause. It is, of course, impossible to find a style – especially in a co-authored monograph about an inherently controversial subject – that will please all readers. Supporters condemn us for being insufficiently robust, opponents deride us as polemists propagating a ‘Hobbesian temperament’ rather than a ‘methodology’. Like persuasive analysis, polemic is invariably in the eye of the beholder.

Hassan expresses a valid and oft-mentioned concern that international law has been downgraded in a no-holes-barred effort to realize US security. But as we argue in chapter 1, a sturdy scepticism of the claims made by international lawyers did not begin in the United States on September 12, 2001. Any number of presidents have found the duty of self-defense greater than the morality of international law. Even presidents claiming to be acting on its behalf – observe Clinton in Kosovo – did so under duress. Neither Kosovo 1999 and Iraq 2003 commanded UN approval and yet each campaign was waged to make their targets more not less responsive to UN structures.

The reviewer claims we misunderstand power. We do not. We just believe that the efficacy of hard power has been underappreciated in the cosmopolitan rush to its softer forms. If Joseph Nye can get away with so amorphous a concept as soft power there is space in the debate for those who suggest the death of military power has been exaggerated. If anything, the fate of Iraq since 2003 was caused by the failure of hard power to secure an environment for soft power to work. We do not disavow diplomacy and, indeed, we do query their record in bringing lasting security to the United States and its allies or the nations it finds itself in conflict with.

The reviewer is wrong to suggest that we grant to the US military a transformational power to which the last eight years give the lie. We do not contend that hearts and minds can be changed at the barrel of a gun. We do argue, and agree with him, that poorly chosen military tactics can lose wars. Our remedy, though, is to craft better tactics rather than insist on a blanket rejection of violence as an inherently inappropriate tool. This reviewer has done us the service of reading our book with some care. However, his review indicates an appreciation of international

relations so at variance with our own that we are unlikely ever to convince him – though we are grateful to him for allowing us to try. American primacy is not American domination; though the reviewer conflates these terms and hears the echo of the latter in our use of former.

Clara Lutz Bunch is right to expect a consistent defence of the book’s concept of continuity. We contend we have offered this, the reviewer does not. Continuity does not mean that each and every president adopts the same foreign policy as his predecessor. If this were true the important differences between Bush Sr., Clinton, and Bush Jr. would quickly invalidate our claim. Rather, we argue in the book that national security strategy changes only very slowly and that, usually, one administration hands off to the one that follows. We simply do not agree with the reviewer on the consequences of US public policy is not a defence of President Bush. To indict the failure of American primacy was better for the US and the world than its absence. Where they fell short was in their pretense that they could ignore the continuities. Hence our problem with the narrow realism of Bush Sr., which left Saddam in power for a disastrous twelve years after Desert Storm, or the wishful liberalism of Bill Clinton, which left Rwanda dripping in blood. Both men were afforded a room for manoeuvre denied to George W. Bush who was forced to bridge the gap left by both approaches in the wake of 9/11.

We do take exception to accusations of bias, on behalf of George W. Bush or against Muslims – both are made by the reviewer and both are categorically rejected by us, whose record should speak for itself. To observe that crusades are basic and regularised phenomena in US public policy is not a defence of President Bush. To indict the failure of Arab governance and want its reform is not to be Islamophobic. Indeed, we argue that real, lasting change in the Middle East will come only when the vast majority of Muslims, quietly practicing their religion on a daily basis, are afforded the right to alter or abolish their governments.

The reviewer labels us polemicists propagating a ‘one-sided’ and ‘pro-Bush bias’. If anything, the fate of Iraq since 2003 has hardly earned Islamist approbation. If we are wrong about executive power in wartime, explain why. We make a series of arguments in the book but none is engaged in this review. For all the sound and fury of his outrage and despair the reviewer has not managed to join a debate, let alone win it. Indeed, he insists there is no debate to be had and merely offers a series of denunciations.

Mitchell Lerner’s review has many of the strengths of the foregoing assessments without their weaknesses. The common thread of his various criticisms is that a ‘one-sided’ and ‘pro-Bush bias’ undermines the book’s credibility. In one sense, of course, this charge is legitimate – while we carry no torch for the president we support the Bush Doctrine and believe that much of the conventional wisdom about unilateralism, the shredding of the Constitution, and the failure of the war on terror is simply wrong. But we hold this to be a disagreement of style and presentation across the book. The reviewer hopes to respond to responses that are not, the reviewer points out, those of the reviewers for, to paraphrase him, ‘we are grateful to these none is engaged in this review. For all the sound and fury of his outrage and despair the reviewer has not managed to join a debate, let alone win it. Indeed, he insists there is no debate to be had and merely offers a series of denunciations.

Tim Lynch
Institute for the Study of the Americas, University of London

Rob Singh
Birkbeck, University of London
Comment

The Singer and the Song

President Obama will bring far more change to the tone of American foreign policy than to its so-called ‘substance’. But in this business, that matters plenty.

As George Bush’s presidency is measured up for its coffin while Barack Obama’s limbers up in rule health at its starting line, much effort is being devoted, rightly, to discerning whether the change in American leadership will bring with it a change of course in US foreign policy. Those maloting the case for the affirmative point to the centrality of ‘change’ to Obama’s election campaign, and also note his public opposition – uniquely among the front rank of Democratic candidates – to the Iraq war, the symbolic centrepiece of the Bush approach to foreign policy. The perceived failure of the Bush administration to achieve many of its foreign policy objectives might also be cited as evidence that change must come. Moreover, at least one of those failures must surely be the counterproductive effect of its detain-and-torture campaign against Islamist terrorism, the barren harvest – flickers of hope in this final stage of the Iraq debacle notwithstanding – of the ‘freedom agenda’ for the Greater Middle East, and the apparently fruitless attempt to cow Iran and (until a recent reverse of course) North Korea into submission through a policy of rigid confrontation. ‘Ah, but,’ respond critics of the Coming Change thesis, ‘look past the rhetoric of the moment to the substance of his policies’. Has Obama not made it clear that he has no problem with war in principle, only with the ‘dumb’ war in Iraq? Has he not committed himself to redoubling the pace of his predecessor, it is clear that the perception between Bush’s policies and those of his unsung continuity in terms of ‘substance’ – flickers of hope in these final stages of Islamist terrorism, the barren harvest of its detain-and-torture campaign against American values as George Bush when it comes to the perceived failure of the the Iraq debacle notwithstanding – of the universal righteousness of American values and the virtue of democracy’s spread? A partial parallel to this misundertestimation of the importance of words and manner can be found in the course of the primary and general election campaigns. Both of Obama’s opponents, first Hillary Clinton then John McCain, sought to turn his gift for intelligent and inspirational speaking into an Achilles’ heel by accusing him of using rhetoric to mask a void of substance. ‘Mere words’, they argued, would be of scant use to Americans in the difficult time ahead. In place of eloquence, they sought to offer experience, practical skills and graft. Unfortunately, they failed to grasp – or conveniently forgot for the purpose of electioneering – the fundamental truth that the president’s power lies not in the words and manner can be found in the course of the primary and general election campaigns. Both of Obama’s opponents, first Hillary Clinton then John McCain, sought to turn his gift for intelligent and inspirational speaking into an Achilles’ heel by accusing him of using rhetoric to mask a void of substance. ‘Mere words’, they argued, would be of scant use to Americans in the difficult time ahead. In place of eloquence, they sought to offer experience, practical skills and graft. Unfortunately, they failed to grasp – or conveniently forgot for the purpose of electioneering – the fundamental truth that the president’s power lies not in the words and manner can be found in the course of the primary and general election campaigns. Both of Obama’s opponents, first Hillary Clinton then John McCain, sought to turn his gift for intelligent and inspirational speaking into an Achilles’ heel by accusing him of using rhetoric to mask a void of substance. ‘Mere words’, they argued, would be of scant use to Americans in the difficult time ahead. In place of eloquence, they sought to offer experience, practical skills and graft. Unfortunately, they failed to grasp – or conveniently forgot for the purpose of electioneering – the fundamental truth that the president’s power lies not in the words and manner can be found in the course of the primary and general election campaigns. Both of Obama’s opponents, first Hillary Clinton then John McCain, sought to turn his gift for intelligent and inspirational speaking into an Achilles’ heel by accusing him of using rhetoric to mask a void of substance. ‘Mere words’, they argued, would be of scant use to Americans in the difficult time ahead. In place of eloquence, they sought to offer experience, practical skills and graft. Unfortunately, they failed to grasp – or conveniently forgot for the purpose of electioneering – the fundamental truth that the president’s power lies not in the
Comment

America and the World: A New Beginning?

As redemption possible? After the disasters of U.S. foreign policy in the Bush era, will we see a revitalized American foreign policy and a welcoming reception from the rest of the world? Judging from the favorable reaction to Barack Obama’s election, we might feel safe now answering both these questions with a resounding yes. Yet dangers lurk; choices are complex.

As observers, what we may do is outline what might be necessary to give a more confident affirmative answer to these questions as the new administration gets organized, for personnel play a key role in image transformation and in the actual day to day conduct of international relations. The new economic and national security teams will have their hands full. And no matter how experienced and clever these teams may be, structural problems matter, too.

While punts of all stripes have praised the selections as “centrist” rather than “partisan” or “ideological”, citing especially the selections as “centrist” rather than too.

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Whether bilateral relations with Russia or Iran dominate the early days, or whether the economy overrides everything, the new administration still wants to do something about climate change and terrorism in large part to signal its differences with its predecessors. All admirable agenda items.

Yet unexpected events may tempt the calm, deliberate Obama approach into more frenzied activity, as the recent attacks on Mumbai suggested. The three days of chaos there put paid to the notion that only Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan were trouble spots in South Asia-the Middle East. It might really matter that the U.S. has fewer diplomats than musicians in military bands!

Down the road, pragmatic responses will be welcome to all the foreign policy challenges. Retreat from hubris will be a relief. Yet to carry through on his promises, Obama will have to delve into the ideas behind his assertions that Afghanistan is a “good war” as opposed to Iraq, just to take one example. Does the U.S. really comprehend nationalism and others’ domestic politics any better now than in the past? Do leaders grasp that concessions are not always appeasement?

Do they finally accept the view that the U.S. cannot remake the world in the American image? Fealty to nation-building in the service of a “global architecture” designed in Washington is no more likely to yield favorable outcomes for Obama and company than did for Bush and his entourage. A new beginning depends on such sober reappraisals once the expectation and expectations die down. The world will be watching.

Linda B. Miller

Editor’s Choice

Of Darkness And Light

F or those readers thoroughly saturated with tales of Bush-Cheney disasters, told by skilled journalists like Tom Richs (Fiasco), George Packer (Assassins’ Gate), and Barton Gellman (Angler), the temptation is to say “enough.” But it would be foolish to overlook one of the best of the lot: Jane Mayer’s The Dark Side. In elegant prose, she details how Dick Cheney had prepared for doomsday well before 9/11and how after the terrorist attacks, he was prepared to use or circumvent the law, all in the name of American national security.

By assembling equally committed colleagues pledged to deception and secrecy to attain their aims, Cheney was able to dominate the easily distracted Bush and his minions. So far, nothing revelatory.

Yet the impact of these attempts to extend executive power beyond previously accepted emergency norms will constitute a good part of Bush’s legacy, above and beyond the final outcomes of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Mayer is especially perceptive in making the Vice President’s attempts to work around other government players like the intellectually challenged Attorney General Alberto Gonzalez. These lesser lights often tried to explore multiple options for the treatment of detainees that still might well have skirted the law.

Whether bilateral relations with Russia or Iran dominate the early days, or whether the economy overrides everything, the new administration still wants to do something about climate change and terrorism in large part to signal its differences with its predecessors. All admirable agenda items.

Cheney’s disciplines had no such scruples as they “nonchalantly dismissed international law, suggesting that the President could abide by it or not, selectively.” (p. 83) So, too, the Constitution was easily ignored in times of unparalleled crisis, David Addington and others demonstrated.

Cheney was persistent in being the last person to tell Bush what he needed to know or do about the Geneva Conventions and the Talibain, about contentious Senators and energy security. The sheer breadth of his reach is unprecedented. No doubt, two terms of an Obama presidency will unearth even more instances of his meddling.

Closin Guantnamo will be a useful first step, but that will have to be followed by a wholesale housecleaning of the intelligence agencies, as well as the military bureaucracies. At the very least, the Bush officials will have to decide how far to retain the Bush practices on domestic spying that Congress ultimately voted to endorse.

What Mayer does far the general reader is to leaven the unremitting critique of Bush’s policies with empathetic accounts of the lives such policies ruined. The stories of individuals like Manadel al-Jamadi or Jack Goldsmith stay with us after we close the book and wonder how long it will take to rectify the damage done to America’s reputation and image in the world and at home. Mayer warns, “Seven years after Al Qaeda’s attacks on America, as the Bush Administration slips into history, it is clear that what began on September 11, 2001, as a battle for America’s security became and continues to be, a battle for the country’s soul.” (p. 327)

To turn from Mayer’s assemblage of colorful detail to the larger world in which such detail played out is to realize that others have moved on while the global superpower remained preoccupied with its own too narrow agenda. Fareed Zakaria’s The Post-American World, is the story of the unintended consequences of the follies and fantasies of the Bush and Clinton eras. Of course, the rest versus the West is hardly a new theme in the discussion of contemporary international relations. Zakaria infuses it with new life in a series of convincing tableaux. Writing in a breezy style similar to that of Newsweek where he is a contributing editor, Zakaria reviews the corrosive effects of the American fixation with dominance and imperial overstretch in a series of anecdotes and factual summaries that sharpen the distinctions between “rising” powers like India, China and Brazil, and “diva-like” powers including the U.S. and France.

What saves the book from a mere recital of familiar themes is Zakaria’s insistence that all is not lost, that by making shrewd choices in policies toward states, international organizations and non-state actors, the U.S. could refashion itself: “the chair of the board who can gently guide a group of independent directors is still a powerful person.” (p. 233) But he is realistic enough to know that domestic reactions to concessions seen as “appeasement” will serve as a brake on imaginative reinvention of U.S. foreign policy even if American political will is strong enough to move in a different direction. We should worry less about “poles” in international relations and more about a vigorous “ad hoc” world order we could “moderate”.

Such a prescription is on target as the Obama administration takes form and begins its rule not with a blank slate, as Mayer reminds us, but with a tarnished one. Yet a return to the legitimacy that Zakaria and others like Robert Kagan demand is not a hopeless goal, only a distant one. American political leaders drawn from a younger generation have already espoused such a goal, so now the tests begin.

Argentina’s audience will be paying close attention for the next four years.

Linda B. Miller
Comment

On The Election

‘Change and Constancy, Thankfully’

Of the features of politics that provides analysts and academicians alike with endless fodder for debate is that we can ask of almost any event whether it constitutes evidence of either change or constancy. That such questions can almost never be answered to the satisfaction of all, is to seem to both a fact of life and one for which we, as academics, should be eternally grateful. Unclearly, lasting solutions to the riddles of politics is the last thing that we need, especially in tough economic times.

During the past eight years, we in the field of US foreign policy analysis have been blessed with many opportunities to pose the constancy-versus-change question. The terrorist attacks of September 2001, the publication of the 2002 National Security Strategy with its emphasis on pre-emptive preventive warfare, the rise to influence of Neoconservatives in Washington, the invasion of Iraq these and other ‘events’ have allowed the wheels of the academic mill to grind. And we can rest easy because the recent election of Senator Barack Obama to the White House assures us of both the likely continuation of popular interest in matters American and the need for real change in the course of US foreign policy. Or does it...

For many, the answer to this ever-relevant question must be ‘yes’. The election of an African-American candidate, a North-Eastern liberal Democrat, an opponent of the Iraq War and a proponent of diplomacy and negotiation would seem to represent a moment of dramatic change in American politics and foreign policy. Yet one of the things that struck me at 5am on November 5th (as I lay cocooned on the lounge room floor) was a sense of constancy. This was not driven by the notion that the election of Senator Obama represents a sacrifice of the continued vitality and capacity for reinvention that represents, in the words of the outgoing president, ‘the enduring promise’ of the United States. Instead, what struck me were two things: the continued well-being of American global leadership and the continued universalism of American political rhetoric.

On what grounds can we proclaim the well-being of American global leadership? After all, many might take the opposite line and insist that, after eight years of George W. Bush, any claim to leadership by the US has been dramatically weakened. To do this line of argument is to confuse dissatisfaction regarding American leadership with the demise of that leadership. As Joseph Nye (2008) has rightly observed, effective leadership depends on the tacit acceptance of a relationship of authority by those who lead and by those who are led. That American global leadership is alive and well is evidenced by both the continued prevalence of the idea of American global leadership within the rhetoric of US politics and the avid reception of this vision of the role of the US by those living beyond its borders. Put simply, the vast majority of politicians, pundits and everyday people – both within and beyond the US – whose views were represented during the coverage of the election appeared to accept the fact of American global leadership.

In one sense, this is not surprising. The US is a powerful state with global reach, and what it does impacts on the lives of people in many parts of the world. This may explain the continued confidence of Americans for the result of the election, but by explaining this reaction as a mere consequence of the material power of the US we overlook the importance of this political dynamic to the US constitution of US power. Instead, we should see the tacit acceptance of US leadership as being a key element of US power. My point here is not merely that American power will be increased to the extent that the election of Obama makes others more willing to accept (or more attracted to) US leadership. Such arguments represent judgements of the quality of American leadership rather than explanations of its existence. Lying beneath such judgements was a more fundamental assumption, namely, that the US does and will continue to lead the world.

It is because of this that it was only natural that in his victory speech, President-elect Obama should seek to reassure those beyond the borders of the US that ‘a new dawn of American leadership is at hand’, as though they were ‘his’ citizens and not merely those of many other states. It was only natural that people should celebrate the election of Obama in cities around the world as though he were ‘their’ president, and not merely the soon-to-be-leader of a foreign country. It was only natural that an article in the Tehran Times, a leading English-language newspaper in Iran, should celebrate the election of ‘the world’s candidate’. Again, what was striking throughout the US presidential election was not that Obama should explain America’s future role in the world to foreigners or that people in non-America should prefer one US presidential candidate to another. What was striking was the symmetry between the claiming of the mantle of global leadership by America’s President-elect and the general acceptance demonstrated by many beyond the borders of the US that whichever candidate won the election would lead not only America, but also the world. American global leadership is alive and well. It will continue to be so when people within and beyond America cease to take such leadership for granted.

A second source of constancy in US foreign affairs was assured by the continued universalism evident in the rhetoric surrounding the presidential election. Both candidates continued the tradition of describing the US as being, by its very nature, of fundamental relevance to the rest of the world. Within such rhetoric the values of America are equated with those of the world and the pursuit of America’s national interests is understood as being synonymous with the promotion of the peace and security of all. We saw the former when Obama celebrated the ‘enduring power of [American] ideals: democracy, liberty, opportunity and unyielding hope’ and when John McCain defined America as being called still to spread liberty, to assure justice, to be the makers of peace. ‘We saw the latter when McCain, time and again, repeated the mantra that the United States is and ever should be a beacon of light on the global stage and when Obama asserted that America must lead the many millions who, living disconnected lives of despair in the world’s forgotten corners... want [America’s] beacon of hope to shine its light their way’.

Such rhetoric, as any observer of US foreign affairs will know, is nothing new. President Bush described freedom as a value cherished by Americans but also the equal promise of people in Sudan, Iraq, China and beyond. The Clinton administration described America as the ‘world’s most powerful force for... the universal values of democracy and freedom’. If we travel through the major foreign policy statements of almost any previous US president we will witness the centrality to American rhetoric of this universalist theme. Indeed, even John Quincy Adams’ famous suggestion that the US should not go abroad ‘in search of monsters to destroy’ – the quote most often used to challenge claims made regarding America’s universal right to foreign intervention – reinforces this same theme. For what Adams sought to do was not to challenge the universal validity of US values but to clarify the implications that America’s adherence to such values held with regard to its foreign policy.

What does all this mean with regard to the future of US foreign affairs? Firstly, the acceptance of US leadership by peoples around the world suggests that when crises or challenges emerge in world politics, we are going to continue to turn to the US for solutions and, just as probably, blame the US when such solutions do not arise. Secondly, the US seems likely to continue along the path that it has followed for at least the past century and, more probably, the past two centuries. The continued universalism of US political discourse assures us that it will remain possible for US politicians to link rhetorically the well-being of people around the world to the objectives and practices of US foreign policy. Furthermore, by assuming the mantle of global leadership, the administration of Barack Obama seems likely to continue to assert not only the right of the United States, but also its responsibility to intervene in the affairs of countries and regions around the world.

Ed Lock
The common theme throughout the conference will be the state of UK and USA relations. The idea is to test whether the Anglo-American relationship is enabling significant progress in each area under examination, whether this relationship is under strain, and/or whether it exists at all.

Friday 20 FEBRUARY 2009
Council Chamber, Singleton Abbey, Swansea University

8:30 Arrive and registration
9:00 - Introduction
9:30 - 11:00 NATO
Associate Professor Tom Lansford (University of Southern Mississippi) - NATO enlargement
Professor Michael Clarke (Royal United Services Institute) - International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) Afghanistan
11:00-11:30 morning coffee
11:30 - 1:00 Terrorism
Professor Len Scott (Aberystwyth) - Intelligence cooperation
Professor Sir Lawrence Freedman and Dr John Gearson (Kings College London) - Waging the “War” on terrorism
1:00-2:00 Lunch, Singleton Abbey
2:00 - 3:30 Nuclear Deterrence
Sir Michael Quinlan (International Institute for Strategic Studies) - The UK independent nuclear deterrent
Dr Jeremy Stocker (Royal United Services Institute) - Anglo-American views on Ballistic Missile Defence
3:30-4:00 Afternoon Tea
4:00 - 5:30 Countering Nuclear Proliferation
Professor John Simpson (Southampton University) - Anglo-American defence cooperation and WMD
Professor James Wirtz (Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, California) - Nuclear marginalization
6:00-8:00 Dinner, Sketty Hall

SYMPOSIUM

The Symposium will explore the themes and inter-relations of “Race, Religion and Empire in American Power and Identity” with a view to increasing our understanding not only of how those factors have helped to shape American identity and power, but also to consider ways in which these factors will combine and impact on American power and identity in the post-Bush era. Leading scholars from the US, Europe and Britain will examine the ways in which these themes might further transform under President Barack Obama, America's first African-American head of state.

Speakers:
Tony Smith (Tufts University – keynote speaker)
Mick Cox (LSE)
Stuart Croft (Warwick)
Sandra Halperin (Royal Holloway, London)
Des King (Oxford)
Mark Ledwidge (Warwick, Manchester, Edge Hill)
Lee Mansden (UEA)
Giles Scott-Smith (Roosevelt Study Center, Middelburg, Netherlands)
Kevern Verney (Edge Hill)
Srdjan Vucetic (Cambridge)
Angie Wilson (Manchester)

Details from Professor Inderjeet Parmar (inderjeet.parmar@manchester.ac.uk)
Indeed, this is the breadth of coverage by organising chapters under themes relating to the history of US foreign policy (section one), the institutions and processes by which such policy is made (section two), the regions (section three) and issues (section four) towards which it is directed and its likely future direction (section five).

The coverage of issues within these various sections is also impressive. Sections on ‘Historical Contexts’, three (‘The United States and the World’) and five (‘Futures and Scenarios’) are the most impressive parts of this book. Section one neatly and succinctly summarises the history of American foreign relations. Section three provides analysis of US foreign policy in terms of the regions towards which it is directed. The inclusion of a chapter on US policy towards Africa (chapter 21) and Anatol Lieven (chapter 22) help to conclude the text with interesting, though distinctive visions of the future of US foreign policy. These (and other) chapters build on their respective authors’ published research which is, no doubt, one of the key reasons why they are of such high quality. What is particularly impressive, however, is that none of the chapters feels like it is a mere reproduction of research published elsewhere, a problem that some other edited textbooks suffer from. Instead, the chapters are written in a fresh and engaging style that makes them accessible and engaging.

One of the bigger challenges in producing an edited textbook such as this is to ensure both breadth and depth of coverage. Breadth allows the inclusion of a diverse range of voices and perspectives whereas depth ensures the thorough coverage of ‘central issues’ within a particular field. While this textbook strikes a fine balance between these two criteria, it is the breadth of coverage that is most impressive.