Stuck in Customs

Oz Hassan was looking forward to an American cultural exchange programme. That was before he tried to actually enter the country.

The declared purpose of America’s cultural exchange programmes is to foster mutual understanding between the people of the United States and other countries, with the hope of establishing meaningful and long-lasting relationships. Such exchanges have a long history, and come with high praise from many that undertake them. As a result, I was delighted to be offered the opportunity to undertake such a programme at the John W. Kluge Centre in the Library of Congress. Believing it would reinforce my understanding of American culture, I seized upon the opportunity. Yet far from establishing a meaningful and long-lasting relationship, the excitement of achieving this accolade has now all but evaporated, a fact entirely due to the manner in which the US uses racial profiling in its visa system and within its airports. The excesses resulting from this are not only demoralizing, but demonstrate how America’s border controls fail to show nuance regarding issues of ethnicity, religion and counter-terrorism. What follows is a brief account of my experience going through these two processes and the way that profiling, when used in a blunt and highly discriminatory manner, provides an unwelcome cultural exchange.

To obtain the necessary visa for my fellowship, I headed to the US Embassy in London on November 7, 2007. My immediate impression as I waited for my interview was that the process had blended the unrefined features of going to the post office with shopping at Argos: numbers were called, counters filled up and people tried diligently to talk to embassy staff sitting behind secure glass. I had plenty of time to contemplate the comparison as I waited for over four hours, watching people who had arrived a considerable time before me complete the process. The end of the working day approached, and with the visa process having ground to a halt, I was one of the lucky ones ushered into an interview room fairly quickly. As these people began, finally, to get their interviews, I noticed a new behavioural pattern emerge. Rather than joining the queue for the Secure Mail Service, and therefore to complete the visa process, they began leaving the embassy immediately after their interviews. I failed to appreciate the significance of this behavioural shift until finally it was my turn to be interviewed. The interview lasted less than a minute. I fulfilled the requirement of answering two questions, only to be handed a pre-printed form telling me that my case requires “further administrative processing”. This would take eight weeks. At the time I was told I met all the criteria for a J1 visa, but would need to go through this formality. As a result, I was handed back my passport and told to leave the embassy. I had become part of the pattern previously observed.

I left the embassy concerned about the racial profiling I had just witnessed, but thought this to be a minor bureaucratic hassle. Although many of colleagues received their visas in less than five days, I was under the impression that the eight weeks would pass and the “further processing” would be undertaken, allowing me to depart mid-January. Alas my faith was misplaced. January came and passed. My attempts to contact the embassy by phone, e-mail and letter were met with an impenetrable wall of obfuscation and silence. I had been placed in bureaucratic limbo, with the embassy making no attempt to inform me what was happening, or when the situation would be resolved. In effect, the visa process had ground to a halt.

Accordingly I turned to my PhD supervisor to contact the Consular Information Unit on my behalf. In mid-March we finally received a reply, albeit referring to “Mr Hussian”, and – within the same letter – “Mr Hussain”. I point out these typographical errors not to poke fun, but because of the letter’s repeated misspelling of that name all the more disturbing. It would appear that fingerprints, a photograph, passport number and the copious other details I submitted were not enough to distinguish me from an individual on the ‘No-Fly List’ with a name similar to Hassan. This entire process remains unresolved after six months, my case adding to a growing trend of the visa processing taking so long as to render the original application void. This fact merely compounds growing fears that the visa system is being used as a method of discrimination.

That the visa issue was still pending in March 2007 left me in the precarious position of needing to travel to the International Studies Association conference in San Francisco, but having no idea of what awaited me as I tried to enter the US. Nevertheless I decided to go. Yet my experience at San Francisco International Airport paralleled what I had witnessed at the Embassy. Having arrived with my passport, we approached visa control. She was allowed through immediately. I handed over my passport and within moments the US visa control official told me that I would need “secondary processing”. After being escorted by an armed officer to secondary processing, I again noticed a pattern of entirely brown-skinned and dark-haired people sitting in rows of chairs. The exceptions to this were my partner, who chose to accompany me, and the mother of a small boy, whom I overheard arguing with the desk officer, trying to tell him that her ten-year-old child was not a terrorist. At this point I was one of the lucky ones ushered into an interview room fairly quickly for interview.

As I sat in a suspiciously low chair, looking up across the desk to answer the officer’s questions. The atmosphere became increasingly hostile. The interview began with the officer asking me whether I had ever been to Pakistan or the Middle East, the goal being to establish whether I had trained at a madrassa. My reply was that I had been to Morocco for a week’s holiday, and to Northern Cyprus to visit relatives on my father’s side of the family. This was followed by a bizarre exchange in which I sought to explain where Cyprus is, with my emphasis on Greece and Turkey rather than the surrounding Levant. I then explained that I was born in the UK and have only ever lived there, but...
that my father is from Northern Cyprus and mother is English. The complexities of multiracial couples were clearly lost on my interlocutor. As the interview progressed, he began constructing my identity so as to exclusion of my mother’s side, challenging any claims I had towards “Britishness”.

The phrasing of his questions made it increasingly obvious that as far as he was concerned I was “Islamic”, and therefore a threat towards the United States. As the interview progressed, the racial language became increasingly blunt and the questions more absurd. Once again, my name played a role, as I was told “you all sound alike”, and I was obliged to explain that religion has never played a part in my life, except for the fact that I went to a Catholic primary school in Essex.

This cat-and-mouse game went on for 45 minutes until suddenly the interview came to an abrupt and rather bizarre end. The officer tore my partner’s passport and entered her details on to the database record he had been compiling throughout the interrogation. I was finally allowed into the US, but under the insinuation that my ‘white’ partner would supervise my activities. Her ‘whiteness’ presumably enough to confirm her ‘with us’ credentials. I had broken through the wall; albeit stopped, interrogated, alienated and racially abused on the way.

I highlight these two situations in part because neither of my experiences is unique, but also because they demonstrate a tension between American public diplomacy efforts through cultural exchange programmes, and the absurdity that undertaking such programmes leads to an engagement with American institutions that are incompetent and overtly racist. Indeed both my cases are representative of a programme leads to an engagement through cultural exchange programmes, American public diplomacy efforts demonstrate a tension between part because neither of my experiences

leave the impression that the US is basing policy on a form of racial profiling that fails to achieve any sense of balance. The end result is that a level of structural violence is propagated along racial lines within the visa system and upon entry to the United States.

The extent to which this has been occurring has become extremely widespread since 9/11. The most prominent example thus far has been Shahid Malik MP for Dewsbury who, despite being the keynote speaker at a Department of Homeland Security meeting about counter-terrorism in October 2007, was detained at Washington Dulles Airport. He too was met with an ‘abusive attitude’ and witnessed that “after a few minutes a couple of other people were also taken to one side. We were all Muslims”. If this is happening to Members of Parliament, then it is easy to understand why Mr Malik’s assertion that “the US system does not inspire confidence”.

With Amnesty International estimating that 32 million people have been subjected to racial profiling, what needs to be seriously questioned is whether the current system needs to be reconfigured. Current experts on this issue, including the FBI Director Robert S. Mueller and Council on Foreign Relations expert Stephen Flynn, have in fact highlighted how dangerous casting such a wide net can be. Focusing on either race, ethnicity or religion, is a lazy method of law enforcement, based on fear, harassment rather than probable cause. The danger of this is that ‘behavioural profiling’, which is regarded as a much better indicator of intent, is ignored as officials become overwhelmed by the sheer volume of people they need to process. Furthermore, racial profiling runs against the Bush administration’s description of the “War on Terror” as a war of ideas in which the US wants to “win hearts and minds”. Indeed it does little to undermine extremist arguments that the US is at “war with Islam”.

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A Pact With The Devil: Washington’s Bid for Global Supremacy and the Betrayal of the American Promise - Tony Smith

Thomas Mills
Brunel University

There has certainly been no shortage of books critical of the Bush foreign policy doctrine and the ongoing war in Iraq. Blame in most of these studies is apportioned to the neoconservatives perceived to have been the dominant force guiding American foreign policy since the terrorist attacks of September 11 2001. While Tony Smith’s new book, A Pact with the Devil, has no sympathy with the neocons, they are not the principal target of this study. Rather, Smith seeks to show how the intellectual foundations for the Bush Doctrine, and the subsequent invasion of Iraq, were provided by left of centre academics, journalists, and politicians, a group that Smith collectively refers to as “neo-Wilsonians”, or “neo-neoliberals” (p.xii-xiii). In this way A Pact with the Devil provides a provocative and original interpretation of the current crisis in American foreign policy.

Smith’s central thesis is that liberal internationalism, as the traditional guiding ideal in American foreign policy, has been fundamentally transformed into a form of liberal imperialism. Spurred on by post-Cold War triumphalism, the Bush Doctrine has sought to exploit Washington’s unprecedented military superiority in order to promote market-based democracies the world over. In its most extreme form Smith characterises this ideology as a liberal fundamentalist jihadism that mirrors exactly the kind of Islamic fundamentalism it purports to oppose. This imperialistic turn represents a betrayal of America’s promise for Smith and is the first “pact with the devil” referred to in his title. The second is the support provided by the neo-neoliberals who worked throughout the 1990’s to provide the theoretical underpinning for the Bush Administration’s subsequent foreign policy.

In order for this transformation to take place Smith describes how neo-neoliberals developed three new concepts that would in turn prove fundamental to the Bush Doctrine. The first of these was democratic peace theory – the belief that democracies do not go to war with each other. Based on this assumption this theory holds that increasing the number of democratic states will ultimately improve the chances of lasting world peace. The second was to assert that democracy is a universal value, and therefore applicable to all societies the world over. Thirdly, neo-neoliberals sought to challenge traditional interpretations of international law by arguing that continued human rights abuses or a desire to acquire weapons of mass destruction (WMD) legitimised the use of military force against a sovereign state.

Smith proceeds to debunk each of these three concepts in turn. With regard to democratic peace theory, he points to its inability to take into account the role of the hegemon (the US) in securing the peace, and therefore, the possibility that the actions of the US could change course and thereby derail “the democratic zone of peace” (p.96). Tackling the universality of democracy, Smith notes the failure of this theory to take into account the individual circumstances and histories of the countries in which democracy has recently taken root. Finally, when challenging the new “militarised humanitarianism” (p.163) as a valid basis for war, Smith points to the danger of humanitarian concerns being deployed merely as a cover for more self-interested motivations.

Smith’s reconstruction of the neo-neoliberals updated version of liberal internationalism is both erudite and persuasive. Indeed, judged on its own terms, it is hard to fault the arguments advanced in A Pact with the Devil. But it is clear throughout Smith’s book that it was never meant to be a solely academic pursuit, intended for a limited scholarly audience. Rather, A Pact with the Devil is offered as a contribution to the ongoing “war of ideas” (p.xix) in the US concerning the role of the country in world affairs.

Assessed in terms of its contribution to this broader debate there are several questions that need to be asked of Smith’s book. Underpinning the central thesis of A Pact with the Devil is an assumption that it was an attempt to advance democracy around the world – the central premise of the Bush Doctrine – that led to the invasion of Iraq. As Smith eloquently puts it, “the Iraq War flowed like the mighty Mississippi out of the Bush Doctrine” (p.54). But why should we accept this assumption? Smith argues that the formulations of liberal internationalism developed by neo-neoliberals in the 1990’s were translated into policy by the Bush Administration, resulting finally in the invasion of Iraq. In this sense Smith describes a “conceptual food chain” that acted to “link academic thinking to public policy” (p.94). But Smith fails to offer substantive evidence that liberal academics did in fact play any prominent role in the formulation of the Bush Administration’s foreign policy, even by way of being the ‘other’ to be countered.

Smith’s principal source when demonstrating that an effort to promote democracy was the driving force that led to the Iraq War was Bush’s public speeches. But why should these be interpreted as revealing the true motivation for the war, rather than merely a justification to the American public and the wider world? There were many reasons given for the invasion of Iraq – Saddam’s possession of WMD not least among them. This claim turned out to be false, so why take public assertions of democracy promotion at face value?

While there is clearly a correlation between the ideas propounded by neo-neoliberals in the 1990’s and the public utterances of the Bush Administration when making the case for war, it does not necessarily follow that these ideas provided the true motivation for war. Smith insists that we must respond to the Bush Doctrine on its own terms and seeks to contribute to a debate concerning the benefits, possibilities, and legitimacy of the US placing the worldwide advance of democracy at the heart of its foreign policy. In so doing A Pact with the Devil offers a fertile and robust contribution to the theories of liberal internationalism recently advanced by neo-neoliberals. However, by accepting the assumption that these ideas were the salient factor that propelled the US into war in Iraq, A Pact with the Devil may ironically attribute undue significance to the very neo-neoliberals that it seeks to condemn (Kenberry, Huntington). Overall, students will be hard pushed to find a better core textbook to accompany their studies.

The three chapters in which Smith elucidates this tri-part argument are certainly the book’s strongest. The cross-fertilization between liberal and conservative thought is well illustrated. So, too, is the theoretical disarray into which foreign policy thought was thrown at the end of the Cold War. The 1990s were, indeed, a moment in which the world had to be thought anew, and the particular twists and turns of that decade established an intellectual environment in which the Bush administration could develop its extraordinary doctrine in the horrible aftermath of 9/11.

CONTINUES PAGE 4
Inderjeet Parmar
University of Manchester

This is a fascinating and controversial book. It is likely to make particularly uncomfortable reading for liberals (and perhaps somewhat to dismay those neocons – such as William Kristol - who believe that they were so influential in determining President Bush’s national security strategy) because Prof. Smith squarely assigns to neo-liberals intellectual responsibility for the ‘global war on terror’ and the War on Iraq. By ‘neo-liberals’ Smith means “liberal internationalists of the center and the left… or neo-Wilsonians” support to Democratic leaders such as Hillary Clinton, Joseph Biden, Joseph Lieberman and Richard Holbrooke, among others. His main argument is that they were neo-liberal scholars and activists who masterminded and championed the two principal theoretical breakthroughs that provided the intellectual case for democracy promotion and humanitarian intervention: ‘democratic peace’ theory and ‘democratic transition’ theory. Those lines of thought, these logics, when put into practice, provided the intellectual rationale for interventions in Kosovo and Iraq. To be sure, Smith does not let the neo-cons ‘off the hook’: he merely argues that as far as the theoretical innovation went, the neo-cons did not cut the mustard.

It is impressive, at a time when so many former left-liberal sceptics of US interventions abroad – like Christopher Hitchens, for example – that Smith, who has for years counselled a sort of selective policy of US interventions to promote democracy (in Latin America, for example, but not in the Middle East or Africa), did not back the Bush programme after 9-11. In 1999, Smith argued that “What liberalism must avoid are self-righteous, quixotic crusades” and, especially in the Muslim world, remember “the limits of our influence, the vulnerability of our interests, and the virtues of restraint.” Smith’s new book then is partly to be understood in the context of his having stuck to his guns while others from that camp, and even further to the left, abandoned ship and fell in with Bush’s hubristic imperialism, liberal jihadism. Smith is a Wilsonian with teeth – a Wilsonian realist? - who believes that he just did not go far enough. Citing the apocalyptic vision of Paul Berman – and many others – Smith argues, not too convincingly, that large-scale “utopian violence” is a possibility. What to do? Smith argues that the place to slay the “dragon of liberal imperialism” is in the intellectual priesthood – in the liberal IR and political theory communities – where “the core ideology” is elaborated and gives coherence to elite and popular discourses. Once elaborated by scholars in venues such as International Organization, International Security, and World Politics, scholars in academia – and the salient ideas to Foreign Affairs and Foreign Policy for consumption
CONTINUES FROM PAGE 4

by activists and policy elites. (This, of course, sounds curiously like Gramsci’s organic intellectuals though Smith makes no reference to the Italian Marxist). How the dragons are to be slain is not elaborated by Smith though presumably a counter-mobilisation of critical intellectuals would be required. But where would resources for such an enterprise come from? Smith does not address this problem.

The Smith’s book is an excellent account of the power of ideas in world politics and the actual and potential influence and role of intellectuals. The central argument is persuasive. The only points I would raise in (mild) criticism are these: perhaps Smith could have explored more deeply the sociology of knowledge and intellectuals, looked at the reasons why some ideas – like democratic peace theory – became influential and even hegemonic and why and how others are marginalised. But that might be, as Smith suggests, another book.

Secondly, Smith offers no solution, no strategy for challenging the continuing problem of liberal fundamentalism. Thirdly, Smith might have let the neo-cons off a little lightly. Surely, they played important roles as the attack dogs of the administration – the talking heads on TV, and the screamers on talk-radio. But maybe even that would not be enough to point up the sources of the war on terror and on Iraq. What about American conservative nationalists – the mainstream conservatives of the Heritage Foundation and the most senior people in the Bush administration – Cheney, Rumsfeld, Rice, and Bush himself: was it just liberal hawks and neo-cons – neither group occupying the most senior positions in the White House – who took America to war? Surely, the upsurge in conservative power and influence, so ably analysed by John Mickelethwaite and Adrian Wooldridge in The Right Nation, played a powerful role in taking the decisions that led to war; in using the neo-cons so ably; and in ratcheting to the right the neoliberalists themselves.

Timothy Lynch
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It is rare I am asked to review a book that I think I will dislike but actually ended up rather enjoying. Tony Smith’s A Pact with the Devil is his sixth book – and his most interesting. His starting point is the ‘certifiably megalomaniac’ (xii) Bush Doctrine and its ‘bid for world supremacy’. But his target is not ‘the devil’ – the neo-cons et al. of the title. Rather, it is the ‘pact’ made with them by various ‘neo-lib scholars, scholar-activists, and activists’. It was these men and women – largely Democrat-leaning – that helped generate the intellectual underpinnings of the Bush doctrine and of the Iraq invasion in particular. Smith ends, after tracing the metamorphosis of foreign policy liberalism through various stages of liberal imperialism (chs 2-6), with a warning about the perils of ‘liberal fundamentalist jihadism’ (ch. 7).

His thesis reflects the cooptation of realism that increasingly marks the liberal critique of US foreign policy. This form of liberal realism (Smith dishes out several labels but baulks at adopting one for himself) holds that liberal democracy is a discrete phenomenon, hard to achieve, difficult to maintain, impossible to spread. This is especially the case in what the author labels the ‘third zone’ (xiv), comprising, substantially, the Middle East, where anti-Americanism and anti-capitalism is rife. According to Smith, given its ‘pride in ancient ways’, this region, unlike post-1945 Germany and Japan (154-9), nations now firmly in the ‘first zone’, was never going to fall under the sway of a doctrine as foreign as liberal democracy when its experience for so long had been one of outside incursions made for strictly self-interest (xii). This argument about Arabs (it is the Middle East which remains the book’s central case study) is made by the Tufts professor over eight chapters, each offering an indictment of various manifestations of ‘liberal imperialism’.

In his preface, Smith makes his objections to the Bush Doctrine clear. Rather than fashioning ‘broad-based democratic governments’ – the Doctrine’s objective – its chosen means were more likely to create ‘a form of populism, militarist, nationalist neofascism’ even more antithetical to ‘American interests and values’ (x) than the regimes it replaced. His logic here is not difficult to grasp. Again, it conforms to the standard realist critique of American power in the current era. Great power, especially that for which unlimited military efficacy is claimed and universal moral purpose with the neo-cons, though Smith clearly deplores all three. Rather, he says, it is liberal internationalists who have created this state of affairs.

This dissection of liberal thinking is sustained throughout the book and makes for a terrific read. Liberal internationalism, he argues, encounters no problem which it has not itself created. The enemy is simply the logical consequence of neoliberal excess, contemporary and historical. I am persuaded by very little of this. If anything, America’s international problems stem today, as in the past, not from hubris but from its absence. American foreign policy is more the sins of omission than commission. The abandonment of Iraqi Kurds and Shiites by the first Bush administration after the Gulf War in 1991, applauded by realists, seems as likely to have sown the mistrust which Smith credits to American democratic realotory. This too limited war to liberate Kuwait gets no mention in the book. And yet it was this refusal to finish the job which made the Middle East a much more problematic region in which to engage when America finally chose to do so – by toppling Saddam Hussein. In fact, the Bush Doctrine was so ‘megalomanical’ in Iraq in 2003 that it sent too few troops and did too little planning.

But the target for Smith is not Bush and the neocons. And this is why the book is interesting and important. Instead, the author goes after wrong-thinking liberals – particularly IR theorists – who, he argues, have facilitated Bush foreign policy by misrepresenting and misunderstanding the efficacy of American power. The book offers a fascinating analysis of the various scholarly approaches to international relations – and their disastrous impact on US conduct. Space here precludes consideration of all the accused but they include Andrew Moravcsik, Larry Diamond, Francis Fukuyama, Paul Berman, Ian Buruma, Thomas Friedman, John Rawls and several more. His case against them is invariably as strongly worded as it is unproven.

This is all compelling if contentious stuff. Polemic does rather get the better of him, however. Whilst there is some effort to make the Bush administration less explanatory of foreign policy failure than is often the case in liberal analyses, Smith just can’t resist kicking it. Similarly, I think he compromises his scholarly tone and intent by concurring with the label ‘liberal fundamentalist Jihadists’ (195-235) to describe people who can see no real alternative to democracy promotion, by persuasion and/or coercion, as a central pillar of US grand strategy. This game of moral equivalence is best left to ideologues like Tariq Ali (see his Clash of Fundamentalisms: Crusades, Jhijads and Modernity, 2002). Smith’s constant allusions to all manner of religious imagery – serpents, Satan, God, the Apocalypse, Jihad, the Tower of Babel, and the books title itself – detract from his argument.

That said, this reviewer is left thoroughly refreshed by his approach, if not always his style. Any book written by a liberal scholar containing the line ‘it would be a serious mistake to exaggerate the importance of the neoconservatives’ (43) deserves a wide readership. If his purpose was to open up, rather than foreclose, debate he has succeeded.

Roundtable Review

Response to reviews

I very much appreciate the opportunity to appear in Argentina, especially because it gives me the opportunity to interact with British colleagues with whom I have unfortunately never had much interaction. Twenty five years ago, when I published a book with Cambridge University Press on the character of Anglo-American imperialism designed in part as an attack on Marxist constructions of this matter, I was briefly involved (but in Germany for some strange reason) with a spirited group led by Ronald Gallagher. Since those springtime days my contacts in Europe have been limited to France (where I have a great many colleagues). So let me thank you for the invitation to dialogue with such a fine set of reviews.

Thomas Mills most certainly gets the argument of my book right except for one major matter: its discussion of the role of ideas in the making of state policy (and hence history). He correctly maintains that it is inadvisable to take public pronouncements at face value, hence his skepticism, first, that the ideas of "liberal academics did in fact play any prominent role in the formulation of the Bush Administration's foreign policy," or, second, that to the extent they did that "these ideas provided the true motivation for war." Let me take each of these objections in turn.

On the first score, my answer is that the "food chain" linking academic thinking to public policy needs to be explored with more research than I was able to engage in; however, I am confident the tracks are there to be found. The neonconservatives, who most believe were the primary authors of the Bush Doctrine and who claim as much themselves, came to many of their principal ideas about the exportability of democracy during the Reagan years. But these ideas were rather inchoate, more sentimental and patriotic than based in anything like a rigorous theory or a philosophical argument. (The one exception is Francis Fukuyama, as I explain in the text.) Instead, the bones of these ideas germinated during 1990s in the fertile minds of those I call "neoliberal," for the most part left-leaning political scientists at major US universities (Yale, Princeton, Stanford, and Harvard especially). These concepts were transmitted in easy rough to the neoncons through conferences, journals, and personal contacts. As examples, I cite the case of Larry Diamond or Michael Ignatieff or the ways these ideas reached the best known foreign correspondent in America, Thomas Friedman of the New York Times. Thus, ideas generated over seminar tables in great universities were popularized and disseminated rather easily, percolating quickly from these institutions to the seats of power hungry for direction. Remember the times. Here was America triumphant. What would it now do with the vast power at its disposition? What was called during the Clinton administration "the enlargement of the zone of market democracies" was thus an historic moment for the reconfiguration of liberal internationalist thinking. The elaboration of a serious ideology for by other considerations? Mills is right to some degree. As I say in the book, a "will to power" disguised itself with these self-confident, self-righteous ideas as it marched to conquest. Yet to some extent, these ideas of themselves gave rise to the martial spirit. Certainly those in the land of Tony Blair can see 1990s. Put differently, all the terms of the Bush Doctrine were laid out before George W. Bush became president, in fact before he had even been nominated to that office by the Republican Party. Indeed the strength of the framework remains with us today, whatever the "lessons of Iraq." Take a look at an important paper by Professors John Ikenberry and Anne-Marie Slaughter, "Forging a World of Liberty under Law." These two academics are at Princeton, where Slaughter is Dean of the Woodrow Wilson School. Both are Democrats and Slaughter is widely considered a likely nominee as ambassador to the United Nations next year in the event of a Democratic victory this November. In "Forging a World," known also as the Princeton Project and based on interviews with a large number of intellectuals and policy makers many of whom are Republicans, we find a restatement of all of the major terms of the Bush Doctrine. To be sure, there are amendments. The Princeton Project insists that American military action to promote a better world be multilateral, and they talk of downplaying "democratization" of foreign peoples in favor of their "liberalization." But the essential argument they forward falls clearly, indeed dramatically, within the parameters set by the Bush Doctrine.

So, do ideas matter? Yes. Do they alone count? To some such as Tony Blair, apparently they do. To many others, they work in tandem with other motivations. And to some they are but cynical pretexts for actions they take based on other considerations altogether. So far as the Bush Doctrine is concerned, examples of all three possibilities may be noted. But without having the intellectual heft that it did, would the Doctrine have been as persuasive as it was? Without its argument, could the continuing appeal of its tenets to many still today? Lane Carothers makes two points, which if true would indeed be damaging to my argument. First, he contends that the Bush Doctrine is not such a new thing under the sun. He goes back to Manifest Destiny and other expressions of America's mission to show that such hubris has long been with us. But I agree! Pages 44-48 and elsewhere in the book talk about the influence of Christian missionary zeal on public policy. Second, the point is the universality of American political ways, and the manner that Woodrow Wilson stitched this all together between 1913 and 1919 into a distinctive tradition that the United States has employed ever since. The "advantage of continuity vs. change" is one that historians love to play with, but whose problem is readily apparent: usually both terms are true so it is better to avoid accepting one at the expense of the other.

Accordingly, I am careful to put the Bush Doctrine within the Wilsonian world peace (yes) was thus the order of the day. By the time we get to Natan Sharansky's book The Case for Democracy (a book distributed by President Bush on his own initiative to his foreign policy team), the Word had been made flesh. That is, the arguments had passed from elite production to popular consumption. Sharansky had contributed not a thing to the formulation of the theoretical position he espoused, but he put it convincingly. The implicit footnotes that gave his utopian rhetoric some grounding (to the extent there were any) were not to works by neonconservatives but to neoliberals. That the same set of ideas appeared simultaneously in the Progressive Policy Institute of the Democratic Party suggests how portable they had become. That is, the arguments can we explain the continued work in tandem with other motivations. So far as the Bush Doctrine is concerned, examples of all three possibilities may be noted. But without having the intellectual heft that it did, would the Doctrine have been as persuasive as it was? Without its argument, could the continuing appeal of its tenets to many still today? Lane Carothers makes two points, which if true would indeed be damaging to my argument. First, he contends that the Bush Doctrine is not such a new thing under the sun. He goes back to Manifest Destiny and other expressions of America's mission to show that such hubris has long been with us. But I agree! Pages 44-48 and elsewhere in the book talk about the influence of Christian missionary zeal on public policy. Second, the point is the universality of American political ways, and the manner that Woodrow Wilson stitched this all together between 1913 and 1919 into a distinctive tradition that the United States has employed ever since. The "advantage of continuity vs. change" is one that historians love to play with, but whose problem is readily apparent: usually both terms are true so it is better to avoid accepting one at the expense of the other.

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Response to reviews

tradition, that is to acknowledge its continuity with American traditions. Yet at the same time, credit where it is due: the neocons who invented the Bush Doctrine were coming up with a radically new statement of American greatness that reflected the country’s victory in the Cold War. Here the point is that both continuity and change must be seen as operative in its formulation.

As for its staying power, we shall see. Carothers seems to think its days are numbered. Would this were true! However, that would be news to John McCain, now the Republican nominee for the presidency. What aspect of the Bush Doctrine is McCain ready to jettison? As for the Democrats, I refer the reader back to the Ikenberry-Slaughter statement, which can easily be found on the web. As for me, as well as possibly you, you will find two prominent Democratic intellectuals who have multilateralized the Bush Doctrine but in no other way substantially modified it. (I should add that John Ikenberry has edited a volume on the ‘Bush Doctrine’ with Slaughter and I argue this very point, American Foreign Policy in Crisis: The Future of Wilsonianism in the 21st Century, Princeton University Press, October, 2008).

Inderjeet Parmar is quite right to suppose that I have been subjected to abusive messages from neo liberals who feel I have broken ranks with the movement, that I am a whistle blower telling tales out of school, a traitor, in a word, to the sacred mission of carrying the democratic flame worldwide. Yet as Parmar says (and I appreciate the effort involved to review my earlier writings), I have always believed that such efforts must be selective. The world of liberal democratic capitalism has limits to its power and to its appeal, as well as serious internal problems. It can make a bad situation worse by self righteous posturing, especially of the sort that gets it involved in imperialist ventures for the sake of redeeming humanity. My guess is that those of you in Blain land are as familiar with this kind of dangerous delusional thinking as we are in the United States. For Parmar is correct to point out that Iraq was only the beginning. The “Broader Middle East” was to be reformed under the terms of the Bush Doctrine—a plan who knew but that such a mighty cause might not sweep Russia and even China as well thereafter!

Parmar writes that the conquest of Iraq “threatens to descend into a Vietnamesque nightmare.” But in truth, it is hardly far worse. Perhaps as of yet not as many people have died as a result of the American invasion. But the consequences geopolitically of this megalamonia have yet to be fully assessed. It has already been complemented by terrible economic problems worldwide as the same kind of self-confident, self-righteousness that brought us the invasion of Iraq also brought us rampant economic deregulation and globalization. Then there is the possibility of a yet more utopian violence on the part of the United States as one can see clearly by the end of the first year. Here is Parmar’s summary of the neoconservatives, as well as the promptings of self-styled leftists like Paul Berman, but also in repeated statements by John McCain, for whom Iraq is not enough but who would take it on—and Russia too should it pretend to great power status once again.

If what we are seeing is the end of American hegemony, then the descent in to a new world order of frightening difficulties may soon enough be upon us. Read it at all carefully and we can do mischief today. If a stake will indeed be sure, but that it could be a “break” is more likely as Asia, and more precisely China, becomes more to dominate world affairs. In the late 1980s, we pondered the question of how Moscow would react to its relative decline in world affairs. That it would lash out to defend its position was widely believed to be likely. In the event, these guesses proved wrong. But what now of the United States as it faces its decline?

Parmar speculates on the intellectual food chain and invokes Gramsci. I have an earlier book on Marxist-Leninist intellectual thought (Thinking Like A Communist: State and Legitimacy in the Soviet Union, China, and Cuba, Norton, 1987) and perhaps should have gone in to this matter at more length (although I think Marx’s German Ideology had it all laid out long before Gramsci appeared on the scene at all). This being the case, my ambition was to get across the logic and power of a set of ideas, not to show just who learned what from whom, valuable as such a study might be.

As for a “counter mobilization of critical intellectuals” that Parmar calls for, yes, I agree. To my mind that would involve not only talking about the use of military power and waving the flag of human rights and democracy promotion, but also about questioning the virtues of economic globalization. The home countries and peoples who have profited handsomely from opening markets is obvious. Chile and China, India and Hungary, are only four cases in point, as well as the upper 10% of Americans who have grown far richer in the last twenty years. But most people around the world have enjoyed their share of benefits and peoples have rather suffered from the experience, including the United States, where the great majority of the population has seen its incomes actually fall at a moment when overall the economy has, until recently, been doing quite well. At the same time, the process has fed Chinese, far more than American, power (reminding me of Lenin’s observation, “the capitalists will sell us the rope by which we shall hang them”).

With the current crisis, based in large measure on deregulation and globalization and due quite clearly to Washington’s leadership of the world economy, a new order may be called for that critical intellectuals can articulate, a set of ideas that could link up with politicians and public policy making for a different framework for American foreign policy. This undertaking was not the mandate of my book, however, although such dismal thinking could, and perhaps should, prove the fodder for further writing.

For Timothy Lynch, however, it appears not that a new set of ideas but the more robust execution of what we already have on hand is what we should endorse. “If anything, America’s international problems stem today, as in the past, not from hubris but from its absence,” he writes. Certainly we hear this on every side in the United States too that it was not the mind-set that led to the invasion of Iraq that should be faulted but instead the war’s bungling. Here is the thinking we find in John McCain and the neoconservatives surrounding his bid for the presidency. They hope to expand the military, make it “smarter” (by which they mean to figure out the cultural and political character of the peoples to be conquered so as to make occupation policy more effective), and create “reconstruction teams” based on a “civilian surge” that can do for whatever peoples America next takes over what was accomplished decades ago in Germany and Japan.

Perhaps Dr. Lynch is a signatory of the Euston Manifesto or a member of the Henry Jackson Society—both British initiatives endorsing an Anglo-American military bid to spread the gifts of liberal democracy to Iraq and the Broader Middle East. Whatever the case, he offers evidence of a point made above: despite the calamities of the Iraq war, the tenets of the Bush Doctrine live on to do mischief today. If a stake will be put through the heart of this noxious hubris it will certainly not be at Lynch’s instigation.

I thank the four of you again for your thoughtful comments. Writing is a solitary task, one of whose principal rewards is an exchange such as this one has been for me. I appreciate the opportunity to appear in Argentina.

Tony Smith
Tufts University


Conference Reports

US Working Group conference, 16-17 November 2007, Durham University

John Dumbrell (Durham), co-chair of the working group, organised a two day conference at his home institution under the title ‘US Foreign Policy: Current Issues and Prospects, with special reference to East Asia. The event was hosted by the School of Government and International Affairs, and partly funded by the ESRC’s ‘New Security Challenges’ programme, directed by Stuart Croft (Warwick).

Amid a series of interesting panels addressing US relations with China, the Koreas and Southeast Asia generally, there were lectures from Robert Ross (Boston College), and Michael Cox (LSE). Participants included Inderjeet Parmar (Manchester), Lee Mardsen (East Anglia), Rosemary Foot (Oxford), Jurgen Haacke (LSE), Adam Quinn (Leicester), Liselotte Odgaard (Aarhus), Mark Beeson (Birmingham) and Hazel Smith (Warwick).

BISA Annual Conference, 17- 19 December 2007, Cambridge University

Lee Mardsen (East Anglia) organised a USFP working group panel at the BISA conference under the title The Bush Presidency and Bilateral Relationships. The paper-givers were Lee Mardsen, Mike Bowker (East Anglia), John Dumbrell (Durham), Faye Donnelly (St Andrews) and Adam Quinn (Leicester). Discussion focused on US relations with Europe, especially the UK and Russia, as well as relations with Israel and the broader theme of American foreign policy discourse regarding relations with allies.

American Politics Groups, 4-5 January 2008, Institute for the Study of the Americas, University of London

There were several panels on US foreign policy at the annual APG conference, on the topics of: Martin Durham (Wolverhampton), Tim Lynch (ISA) and John Dumbrell (Durham) delivered papers on “Contemporary Issues in US Foreign Policy”, including the special relationship, US-Iran relations, and the ‘War on Terror’. Jessica Gibbs (Reading), Elpida Katsavara (Kent) and Edward Smith (ISA) spoke on “Deconstructing ‘National Security’ – Foreign US Foreign Policy”, including policy towards Cuba, Congressional policy during the Kosovo conflict, and the role of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, with special reference to Senator John McCain. Petronella Haar (Maastricht) and Juraj Zelo spoke on ‘Theoretical Perspectives CONTINUES PAGE 9
Comment

Old Man On Horseback

John McCain’s selling point is his longstanding engagement with foreign affairs. He must hope that post-Bush America isn’t already tired of the message he has to deliver.

Adam Quinn

Back in the heady days when open opposition to the Iraq War was considered a political liability for Democrats, John McCain seemed a near-perfect candidate to succeed George Bush in 2008. A celebrated war hero, he was firmly behind the core principles of the Iraq project, but also opposed to torture and critical of the botched management of the occupation, he seemed on paper to be Bush without the flaws. A McCain foreign policy would be just as strong, but without the taints of incompetence and moral failure that had polluted the incumbent’s actions.

After pulling his presidential campaign through a near-death experience in the summer of 2007 – due to a mixture of financial mismanagement, bad news from Iraq and an intra-party argument over immigration – McCain has at last secured the run at the presidency he has wanted for the last eight years. In making it now, he must pray that time has not passed him by.

In recent months the American economy has plunged into what is a recession in all but official label, caused by the bursting of a massive credit bubble. This has forced Iraq from the front pages, where it had in any case been struggling to maintain its place thanks to the public’s intellectual exhaustion with coverage of the violence and political discord there. A self-confessed know-nothing (or at least know-little) when it comes to economics, McCain now faces the dreadful prospect of an election campaign focused on precisely the sorts of issues he has avoided needing to understand thus far in his political career. Such pronouncements as he has made – focusing chiefly on government’s limited role in alleviating economic depression – echo the grim demise of Herbert Hoover’s once-golden political career in 1932. Democratic strategists remain one of the signature issues of the intervening years remains unknown, but they will no doubt feel himself, have been by the grim failures of incompetence, advisors, or indeed the candidate.

Robert Kagan. How chastened such advisors on foreign policy include some of the neoconservatives who once vocally aspired to forge a ‘new American Century’ through the unashamed wielding of power, most prominently Robert Kagan. How chastened such advisors, or indeed the candidate himself, have been by the grim failures of the intervening years remains unknown, but they will no doubt feel less so if they win in November.

The Iranian nuclear programme remains one of the signature issues of the hawkish tendency within the...

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**Comment**

**The Endless Campaign**

Linda B. Miller

F or those observers wanting a fresh approach to America’s role in the world or to specific details on bilateral relationships that might follow the two-term Bush administration, the U.S. presidential campaigns have been disappointing at their best. Far from enlightening voters who actually follow such details closely, both Republican and Democratic candidates have allowed clichés and stale rhetoric to dominate the headlines during primary season. Could matters improve once the candidates are finally selected and begin challenging each other after the two late summer conventions?

Such a wish may represent the triumph of hope over experience if the surviving nominees take seriously the impact of their ill-considered foreign policy soundbites during the primary season. We should expect either Obama or Clinton to recycle the charge that McCain will keep U.S. troops in Iraq for 100 years, by which time he might understand the difference between Shia and Sunni. We should expect McCain to exploit the Democrats’ statements on NAFTA, China and the Olympics, with dubious credentials for the having the ear of the next leader of the Free World. Continuity with failed policies is therefore as likely as a break with the dysfunctional Bush administration.

This means that Congressional elections in 2008 may matter as much as the race for president. Here, too, voters will devote much attention to the stumbling U.S. economy as well as to Iraq. Here, too, they may react to placing the blame for lost jobs on trade rather than on a more subtle analysis of the connections between the U.S. economy and others in the globalization era.

What, if anything, could produce a change in this stagnant picture? A more informed electorate? Younger participants? Outside influences? Obviously, there is no quick fix to this depressing portrait. Rather it remains to observers to take up their critical pens and insist that the emperor may have clothes, but they are out of fashion with the rest of the world.

Old Man On Horseback

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Republican Party, and the latest focus of the interminable feud between the CIA and the office of the vice president. McCain has himself declared that the only thing worse than the consequences of war with Iran would be a nuclear Iran, implying that military action would be his preference if it were only way to check the clerical regime's technological ambitions. On the basis of this pronouncement and his ideological track record more generally, McCain would seem substantially more likely than a President Obama to approve any new military adventure in the Middle East. Given the biblical scale of the consequences flowing from any such decision, that must stand as a point of immense significance in anticipating what difference this election's outcome may make to the world's future.

As for the improvements in attitude that other nations may hope for from a change of president, there are limits on what it seems plausible to predict. President McCain could be relied upon to open his tenure with professions of friendship towards Europeans and with some more open words on the prospect of environmental deals. But as a conservative American – which he undoubtedly is, in spite of the fretting of some even more conservative commentators – there can be little prospect of McCain softening the line on any of the concrete issues, from the ‘war on terror’ (torture aside) to the sanctity of American sovereignty, that lie at the root of Bush’s transatlantic rows. McCain's well-known problem controlling his temper – a test that has merited lengthy features in the American press in recent weeks – might also add an interesting ingredient to oft-mentioned discussions with European leaders. One can only imagine how it might contribute to the ongoing struggle for mutual understanding with the Russians.

Present public hostility to the perceived failures of the Bush administration has established an unavoidable imperative for some degree of change. McCain can only achieve election by promising at least some measure of that. But however much he might wish to argue that his implementation of Bush’s policies would have been better, and the consequences rosier, many voters will judge him to be so deeply implicated in the central principles of the Bush era that a ballot cast for him is a vote – with an amendment or two – for continuity. Five years ago, that seemed a winning ticket. In 2008 it may yield entry only to the political graveyard.

Conference Reports

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on US Foreign Policy”, including “policy subsystems” and the coherence or otherwise of the realist school. Elizabeth Geralt (Independent), Adam Quinn (Leicester) and Jean-Marie Ruiz (Savoie) delivered papers on “US Foreign Policy After Bush”, discussing likely strategic trends after the president’s departure, as well as, more specifically, humanitarian intervention in Africa. Finally, Maria Oliva (ISA) and Mark White (Queen Mary) formed a panel entitled “Managing Domestic Consensus and Conflict over Cold War Foreign Policy”, which focused on the manipulation and de-escalation of the press in relation to Taiwan policy, and dissent on foreign policy within the White House during the first twenty years of the Cold War. The conference also included many papers on domestic US politics. The event’s host and chief organiser was Iwan Morgan of the ISA.

ISA Annual Conference, 26-29 March 2008, San Francisco

The USFP working group organised two panels at the ISA conference. Inderjeet Parmar (Manchester) organised a panel on The Legacy of the Bush Era and Future Prospects. Papers were delivered by Indrjeet Parmar, Bruce Jenkinson (Duke), James McCormick (Iowa State), David H. Dunn (Birmingham) and John Dunbrell (Durham). The other panel, organised by Simon Role and Adam Quinn (both Leicester), was entitled ‘US National Interest as Ideology’, and featured papers from Adam Quinn, Simon Role, Linda B. Miller (Brown) and Osman Hassan (Birmingham). The panel was chaired and discussed by Harold P. Smith (Berkeley), former assistant to the Secretary of Defense under the Clinton administration. Both panels were well attended, laying solid ground for future group panels at ISA.

The Transatlantic Relationship after Bush’, 10-11 April 2008, Launde Abbey, Leicestershire

Wyn Rees (Nottingham) and David Dunn (Birmingham) organised a conference at this picturesque venue focusing on likely changes and continuities in transatlantic relations after the US presidential elections in November 2008. Papers on aspects of this theme were delivered by Wyn Rees, David Dunn, John Peterson (Edinburgh), Richard Aldrich (Warwick) and Dieter Mahncke (College of Europe), John Dunbrell (Durham), Mark Webber and Mike Smith (both Loughborough), Dave Allen (Loughborough), Adam Quinn (Leicester) and Mark McClelland (Birmingham) served as discussants.
Review

The Idea that is America

Anne-Marie Slaughter;
“The Future of the American Idea”
in The Atlantic, November 2007

Matthew Sledge, Brown University

The US presidential race has attracted nearly as much attention abroad as it has at home, and for good reason. The Anglo-American ‘special relationship’ has come under increasing strain after years of a close relationship between Bush and Blair. What sort of a counterpart Gordon Brown—or perhaps David Cameron—has in the next president will greatly color his time at the top. Every remaining contender as of February—from John McCain to Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama—seems determined to break with the policies of the Bush years, and they have often cited their take on American values as the reason. Both Anne-Marie Slaughter and the editors of The Atlantic have stepped into the debate over American ideas. Thankfully, neither has attempted to offer a definitive answer, but the panoply of voices on exhibit may offer some intriguing clues about the American zeitgeist.

Anne-Marie Slaughter is not the first American to note that she “often feel[s] that I am in the midst of a bad dream.” Slaughter—the Dean of the Woodrow Wilson School at Princeton—has garnered considerable attention for her attempt to write her way out of that nightmare in The Idea That is America. The book is divided into chapters with abstract, unobjectionable titles: Liberty, Democracy, Equality, Justice, Tolerance, Humility, Faith. This many-headed table of contents is the first indication that Slaughter is hard-pressed to summarize the American idea in one sentence.

What America is not, says Slaughter, is a nation created by “blood, or soil, or skin color, or wealth”—even though Americans have failed miserably often in believing otherwise. She invokes heroes from Susan B. Anthony to Martin Luther King, Jr. to remind us what is best about the American idea in one sentence.

What’s most bewildering about the book is that its thesis, despite its title, is that the best political ideas are not exclusively “American,” even though they have frequently appeared there first. Is something as parochial as a distinctly ‘American’ ideal really a good basis for a universalist world order, especially after the dramatic international effects of the Iraq War? Not really, Slaughter acknowledges with some hesitation. In her strained metaphor, America is not a shining city upon a hill but instead a rather talented astronomer who has chosen the best “stars to steer by.”

Slaughter writes a much cleaner (and briefer) version of her basic argument in the 150th Anniversary Issue of The Atlantic. Her essay there is titled simply “Unexceptionalism.” The American idea is in trouble, she writes, because “the values that our Founders cherished as the universal inheritance of the Enlightenment are increasingly identified as American values—or worse still, as not real values at all, but simply a rhetorical blind for the advance of American power.”

Slaughter’s short piece appeared in the November 2007 issue of the Atlantic in a collection of essays on “The Future of the American Idea.” Many of the other entries are just as refreshingly direct, from George Will’s argument against the direct article “the” before “American idea” (“an excuse for, the missionary impulse that sleeps lightly, when it sleeps at all, in many Americans”) to Tom Wolfe’s broadside against aristocratic manners (“the American idea was born at approximately 5 p.m. on Friday, December 2, 1803, the moment Thomas Jefferson sprang the so-called pell-mell on the new British ambassador”).

The definitions of (the) American idea are marvelously venerated, as they are bound to be when contributors include Joseph Biden, William F. Buckley, John Edwards, Frank Gehry, Amy Gutmann, Sam Harris, James Q. Wilson, Ray Kurzweil, Bernard Lewis, Harvey Mansfield, Joyce Carol Oates, Nancy Pelosi, Robert Pinsky, Eric Schlosser, John Updike, Michael Walzer, and Edward O. Wilson, among many others. Some are even truly provocative, like Cornel West’s, on what he calls the present-day “niggerization” of the American people. David Foster Wallace proposes an unsettling thought experiment: what if, following Lincoln’s famous phrase, “we chose to regard the 2,973 innocents killed in the atrocities of 9/11 not as victims but as democratic martyrs, sacrifices on the altar of freedom”? In other words, what if we decided that a certain baseline vulnerability to terrorism is part of the price of the American idea?

Finding one or even a cluster of ideas in the being of a country composed of fifty states and more cultures, in a country that has so often resisted ideology—or, as critics from Dickens to Mencken have argued, intellectualism itself—is an impossible task. But the 150th Anniversary Issue of the Atlantic is a quilt of often-enlightening attempts. Maybe they should have called it “The Future of Several American Ideas.”