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Where Have All the Cowboys Gone?

Harvey Sicherman

John Lewis Gaddis, *Surprise, Security, and the American Experience* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2004), 150 pp., \$18.95.

Owen Harries, *Benign or Imperial?* (Adelaide, Australia: ABC Books, 2004), 138 pp.

Richard A. Clarke, *Against All Enemies* (New York: Free Press, 2004), 304 pp., \$27.

Walter Russell Mead, *Power, Terror, Peace, and War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), 226 pp., \$19.95.

David Frum and Richard Perle, *An End to Evil: How to Win the War on Terrorism* (New York: Random House, 2003), 284 pp., \$26.95.

THESE DAYS, American foreign policy analysis revolves around two vast and far-reaching surprises. On the morning of December 25, 1991, the United States was one superpower in a two-superpower world; by day's end, as the Soviet Union dissolved, it became the sole survivor. At dawn, September

11, 2001, America was arguably the most secure of nations. By noon, it appeared among the most vulnerable. The first was an unalloyed American victory. The second was an unalloyed American defeat.

The American people reacted to these disturbances in most revealing ways. They

declined the invitation to empire offered by sole superpower status after they elected Bill Clinton in 1992, a man not only inexperienced in foreign policy but also fairly promising to ignore it (“It’s the economy, stupid!”). They remained oblivious to dangers from abroad, electing at the end of the decade the equally inexperienced George W. Bush, after a ferocious campaign dominated by domestic issues.

Neither Bush’s initial plans for his presidency nor American complacency survived 9/11. The United States has now pledged, through the War on Terror, to rehabilitate Afghanistan and Iraq as democracies and to transform the Middle East, among other things. The Bush Administration has compared this campaign to change the world with America’s historic efforts in post-1945 Europe and Japan.

What to make of it all? The books under review are eager to instruct Americans on the proper course of action. Authored by an eminent historian, a former diplomat and former editor of *The National Interest*, an analyst and several former officials, they focus on the war, or more precisely, Mr. Bush’s version of it. They are a contentious lot with contentious conclusions. Fortunately, most are short.

John Q. and George W.

JOHN LEWIS Gaddis, one of America’s most eminent diplomatic historians, reflects on American reactions to the burning of Washington in the 19th century, Pearl Harbor in the 20th, and 9/11 in the 21st. The book, a collection of lectures, sustains Gaddis’ reputation for eloquent yet affable prose, a skill honed no doubt by the vagaries of his student audience.

In discussing America’s experience with such surprises, Gaddis also aims to surprise. And so he does, discerning beneath George W. Bush’s Texas drawl

the formal New England accents of John Quincy Adams. He asserts that, after the 1814 disaster, John Q. developed what Gaddis terms a pre-emptive, unilateral and hegemonic foreign policy—although limited to the Western Hemisphere, given America’s very modest military power. George W. is pursuing a variation of Adams’ biggest achievement, the Monroe Doctrine, on a global rather than hemispheric scale. This comparison allows Gaddis to put Bush squarely into American diplomatic traditions.

Gaddis admires Bush but does not think he has gotten it entirely right. He advises the President to emulate FDR rather than Adams. Gaddis offers a brilliant analysis of Roosevelt’s post-Pearl Harbor blending of Wilson (whom FDR served as Assistant Secretary of the Navy) and his cousin Theodore, he of soft speech and big stick fame. By reconceiving the still-born League of Nations on a “cold-blooded, at times even brutal, calculation of who had power and how they might use it”, FDR made Wilsonian ideals practical.

Or so he hoped. I fear Gaddis has succumbed to Saint Frank’s charm (who has not?), mistaking the great improviser for a visionary statesman. Like most presidents, FDR’s foresight consisted largely of avoiding past disasters—he backed into the future with 1919 in mind. Great coalition builder that he was, he began (and ended) with one, Great Britain, and another, Stalin’s Soviet Russia, that hardly agreed with his plans. Still, Gaddis wants Bush to exercise hegemony the Roosevelt way, clothed in the disguise of coalitions and international organizations, the (sound) theory being that leaders of inferior powers still like to be asked and consulted. A kinder, gentler approach (as in George the father) makes it easier for others to agree.

“With Us”

BUT WILL these other leaders agree? We turn now to a book that offers advice not only on the war itself but also what to expect from allies.

When Bush announced his criterion for coalition in the war, he said in effect you’re either with us or against us. This omitted a group of significant states who were both with the United States on some aspects of the war and against it on others. Pakistan and Saudi Arabia come to mind. Russia is also among them, critical to the affairs of Central Asia and a unique source of nuclear technology for Iran. Most notoriously, of course, were the cases of France and Germany, opposed to the Iraq War at the UN but which facilitated America’s effort by allowing the use of their airspace, roads and ports, among other things.

Australia, however, offers an example of a country entirely with the United States. But do not take any allies, even Australia, for granted. This is the insistent warning of Owen Harries, founding editor of *The National Interest*, one-time Australian diplomat and now senior fellow at the Centre of Independent Studies in Sydney. *Benign or Imperial*, consisting of the Boyer Lectures plumped out by several reprints from this magazine, exemplifies Harries’s skill at concise, clear expression, and his ability to combine profound scholarship with sprightly prose. He, like Gaddis, finds Bush’s policy deeply rooted in American tradition. But he worries about exercises in naked hegemony, and he catalogues errors that could debilitate American policy. Among the most serious is to mistake transient episodes for permanent trends. Worse yet are exercises in “alleged cultural traits” whether Hindu or Muslim. Worst of all is to confuse cultural sentimentality with hard interests, such as the “Anglosphere”, a latter-day version of Churchill’s imaginary English-speaking union.¹ By these lights, it should not surprise us that

Harries holds a dim view of Tony Blair.

All of these lectures bear Harries’s call for caution and modesty. But for my money, the most interesting essay is “Punching Above One’s Weight”, a brilliant analysis of Australian foreign policy that addresses directly the question of just how much the country should be “with” the United States in the war against terrorism. Harries wants Australian statesmen to mind the country’s resources, its ratio of means to ends, and the real threats it confronts. By his lights, Canberra should concentrate on regional terrorism, not global; the Iraq War is “not compelling;” the Anglosphere will not guarantee gratitude for America; and the UN is useful for the Aussies and therefore not to be unduly weakened. In short, the ends-and-means ratio dictates that Australia side with the United States but not sign onto every American global initiative. This is a sober reminder that Washington should not expect lapdog obedience from its allies.

Traison de Clarke

AS AMBASSADOR Harries notes—no doubt outraging many multipolarists:

the really interesting and important debate is not between anti-American and pro-American; it is between two different American traditions concerning how the United States can best promote its values and ideals.

These are well represented here by the Mead and Frum-Perle books. But Harries has overlooked a third: the bureaucratic traditions whereby political ideals are wrestled into policy. In the absence of such skills, administrations are merely exercises in empty rhetoric.

¹See James C. Bennett, “Networking Nation-States”, *The National Interest* (Winter 2003/04) pp. 17–30.

Such a wrestler was Richard Clarke. Three administrations managed to overcome their distaste for his enemy-making personality because of his bureaucratic efficiency. Clarke took on the orphaned cause of anti-terrorism in the late 1980s and created a unique situation: Chief analyst on the NSC, he was also chief crisis action officer in the Counter-terrorism Coordinating Group. This gave him a seat at the top table.

Against All Enemies makes abundantly clear that Clarke preferred Clinton's top table to Bush's. The main charges are that Bush, unlike Clinton, gave the Al-Qaeda threat lower priority before 9/11, and then after 9/11, diverted to Iraq. In other words, Bush should have pre-empted Bin Laden and not pre-empted Saddam. The proof of priorities? Clinton (and his staff) held many meetings with Clarke in attendance; Bush but few. Clinton went after the danger vigorously; Bush had not even approved a strategy until September 4. And Clinton kept his eye on the ball while Bush strayed to Saddam's Iraq, a presidential fixation and a diversion from the War on Terror.

Clarke's pious hope that his efforts might result, as he wrote recently, in an "energetic and mutually respectful public discourse" is belied by the record. *Against All Enemies* often reads like the fury of a bureaucrat scorned, and Clarke himself turned the otherwise staid 9/11 Commission hearings into a political theater that compelled even Condoleezza Rice to take the stage. The idea that a meeting a day (with Clarke) would have kept Al-Qaeda away in summer 2001 is ridiculous, especially when Bush was getting his information directly from the CIA Director's daily briefings, a practice Clinton had discontinued. And Clarke's hyperventilation about Bush's action against Iraq ("an oil rich country that posed no threat to us, while paying scant attention to the Israeli-Palestinian problem") is factually incorrect.

Still, Clarke *was* wrestling with a problem that for thirty years had bedeviled U.S. counter-terrorism. How could one attack terrorists who enjoyed state-sponsored sanctuaries? Basically, once Bin Laden bought Afghanistan, the only way to get him was through a CIA assassination or war.

Clinton failed to do either, and much of Clarke's advice to Bush was to try both. But Clarke has admitted that by 2001, his ideas, even if they had sped through the interagency slow-motion machine, would not have prevented 9/11. For by that time Al-Qaeda had metastasized, and America's last line of defense was soon to fail.

Here lies the real peculiarity of *Against All Enemies*. The courageous, decisive Bill Clinton conjured by Clarke somehow cannot get his story straight to a suspicious and dispirited FBI director whose agency bungled its job. Clinton's directive to kill Bin Laden somehow never makes it down to CIA working ranks. Terrorism was such a priority that the CIA Directorate of Operations suffered serious budget reductions until 1996, after which it remained flat for the balance of Clinton's term. And then there was the "wall" separating the FBI and CIA on intelligence sharing, reinforced by Clinton's appointees at the Department of Justice; an INS that neglected its own rules; a JCS that balked at dramatic action; and an FAA and the airlines that only pretended to protect the airways. Either Clarke is fibbing about Clinton's priorities, or Clinton was an astonishingly ineffective president.

Bush, too, repeated Clinton's (and Clarke's) error of concentrating on some solution to the Afghan problem while doing little about the easily pregnable last lines of defense. Thus, Bush perpetuated for a few months the vulnerabilities he inherited. The sobering conclusions of the 9/11 Commission will presumably be "mutually respectful" unlike Clarke's polemic.

“Forward Containment”

THE MEAD and Frum-Perle books represent two distinct approaches important to any understanding of U.S. policy. Both are at war—with terrorism and with each other, including their respective writing styles.

Mead, the Kissinger Senior Fellow in U.S. Foreign Policy at the Council on Foreign Relations, has previously written on U.S. foreign policy traditions. Aided by a brigade of assistants and consultants, Mead spent the two years since 9/11 in quest of that Holy Grail, an American Grand Strategy for a world at risk. We need one, Mead argues, because 9/11, like Pearl Harbor, has taken us once more on a “terrible turn.” And we face a crisis because American foreign policy has gone off the tracks.

Like Gaddis, Mead grounds his observations in deeply rooted American traditions. Unlike another historian, Walter McDougall, who identified those traditions by theme (for example, “progressive imperialism”), Mead uses well-known American names (Hamiltonian, Jeffersonian, Jacksonian, Wilsonian) to symbolize the differences. But most of these men made their mark on domestic politics and, as one struggles to recall Mead’s distinctions, the author heaps on a whole new (and unfamiliar) lexicon. American power, for example, is hard, soft, sweet and sticky. The U.S. economy evolves from (Henry) Fordism to “millennial capitalism.” Human rightists and European realpolitikers are respectively the Party of Heaven and the Party of Hell. In the preface, Mead introduces himself as “an odd duck”, but this terminological quackery is too odd, too often.

Still, the author should be congratulated for his courage. He tackles economics, a rare subject among grand strategists. Mead warns us of confusing complexity, and certainly fulfills his promise. The new lexicon interferes again as he stretches it

too far—trying to make the case for the prevalence of Fordism. Consider this whopper: “. . . the years from about 1923 to 1973 saw an unusual degree of stability in American enterprise, except for the turmoil of the Great Depression.” He could have fooled most Americans.

On more recent events, Mead writes brilliantly about the French pratfalls on the eve of the Iraq War, and Franco-German relations. He extols most of Bush’s “hard power” (military) actions, but he thinks Bush has gone too far. Mead asks: “Is there a world order in which all states have an equal stake, or is it an American empire that the United States imposes on others?” And Mead answers:

In reality, the American project is and will remain an uneasy combination of the two. . . . Managing the balance . . . is one of the most delicate and critical tasks American policymakers must address.

Mead argues that this balance has been so badly fumbled by Bush that the “American revival” begun by Reagan could be jeopardized.

What then to do? As the book nears its conclusion, Mead’s rhetorical imagination fails him. He calls the new balance “Forward Containment”, not exactly a bell-ringer. He wants an international consensus against terrorism and a war of ideas against “Arabian fascism.” (Islamicism is too easily misunderstood). The United States needs more emphasis on softer power. International institutions such as the UN must be made more representative (more vetoes in the Security Council). He likes the idea of micro-capitalism (small loans for entrepreneurs) in the Third World, where injustice and explosive population growth are disasters in the making. Mead would also like the United States to lead a “buy-out” of the Palestinian refugees in lieu of an overall Arab-Israeli agreement if only to assure the Arabs that America cares about the Palestinian future.

Mead ends on a high note of American *noblesse oblige* to the rest of the world, quoting Endicott Peabody and, inevitably—you guessed it—FDR. Overall, Mead's book is an interesting try with a message similar to those of Gaddis and Harries, namely, that hegemonies need good manners to ease the friction of leadership.

DAVID FRUM, briefly a Bush speechwriter, and Richard Perle, a Reagan-era Assistant Secretary of Defense and more recently the former head of the Defense Intelligence Advisory Board, agree with Mead that America faces a crisis. But the problem isn't manners. Instead, "we can feel the will to win ebbing in Washington." They tell us "there is no middle way for Americans. It is either victory or holocaust." Their book is a "manual for victory."

Clearly, balance and containment are not their style for dealing with the evil of terrorism, and the prose reflects it. Occupying the simmering middle ground between indignation and outrage, the authors occasionally ascend to apocalypse or drop into a withering sarcasm. Indeed, the authors seem happiest when they flagellate the wimps, pimps and feeble-minded so well represented abroad (allies, Russians) and at home (State, Defense, CIA, academics, media). Nor do they fear to enter current controversies, attributing our postwar problems in Iraq to CIA-State sabotage of Ahmad Chalabi and his Iraqi National Congress, who presumably were ready to run the country after Saddam, thereby making occupation unnecessary. These expectations, popular among the Pentagon's civilian masters, may explain a policy that assumed the worst case going into the war and the best case coming out of it.

The biggest problem with this "manual for victory" emerges when one tallies the actual or potential hostilities advocated by an *End to Evil*, which includes, among other things, a military buildup to intimidate and blockade North Korea.

Outgoing Army Chief of Staff Eric Shinseki's words come to mind: beware of a twelve-division foreign policy with a ten-division army. The United States has already reached that point, to judge by our difficulties in sustaining manpower levels in Iraq. What Frum and Perle suggest would require a much larger military. After all, if we had 18 divisions (as we did in the Cold War), we wouldn't be hesitant about taking on Iraq, Iran, Syria or Korea, would we?

They may very well be right about the military needed to win this war their way. But recruiting and training such forces will take some time and lots of money. The authors, however, fail to correlate costs and force structures. It is true that wars are waged on borrowed money and that domestic spending should take a backseat to national security, as they argue. We have done 18 divisions before, even without a draft. But the president must ask for it, Congress must authorize it—and then the ranks must still be filled.

Meanwhile, what's an administration to do? When apprised of Al-Qaeda's presence in over sixty countries at the Camp David strategy meeting the weekend following 9/11, President Bush (or maybe "President" Woodward) supposedly said: Fine, one by one. That strategic wisdom means not opening too many fronts at once, especially if you have only ten divisions. But the Frum-Perle manual counsels taking on all of the fronts simultaneously and takes for granted that high technology can always substitute for boots on the ground. Well, sometimes not.

The book ranges far and wide, the authors never short of self-confidence. Many, many scores are settled here. When they are not dismantling or revamping State, the CIA, the Pentagon and Congress, they have many recommendations designed to protect our home front from terrorists (and, one suspects, to infuriate the ACLU). There are defenses of Israel and analyses of Arab outrage and modest

appeals for allied or UN help—"but we should not make the mistake of relying on it." They conclude with the ultimate accolade to America's sense of right. "America's vocation is not an imperial vocation. Our vocation is to support justice with power . . . the hope of the world." Certainly.

The Perils of Cheap Hawkery

THESE BOOKS are indeed variations on American traditions but not the tired realist versus idealist. Pearl Harbor and World War II taught Americans that the Germans and Japanese, if left alone, would do grievous harm to their neighbors and American interests. The great title deeds of U.S. leadership after 1945—the UN, the Marshall Plan, the Truman Doctrine, NATO, the U.S.-Japanese Security Treaty, the opening to China—were all intended to transform continents and regions. And they were also backed by large American forces, still deployed forward. It was a

reluctant imperium—maybe that explains part of its success—that kept the national interest crowd and the Wilsonians in tenuous balance at home.

Confronted by international terrorism, Bush has indeed fashioned a similar strategy. Unlike John Q., George W. has the power to project military force worldwide. Like FDR, he has a basic if fluctuating coalition that, if handled skillfully, adds real strength. But is it yet enough to win and transform or only to contain? How far are we prepared to go with a foreign policy doctrine that hails enforcing "a balance of power that favors freedom"? Must we do as we did after Korea, mobilize "for the duration" of a long war of attrition? Timidity will guarantee defeat. But so will cheap hawkery—excessive rhetoric supported by underwhelming force. □

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