the weekly Standard

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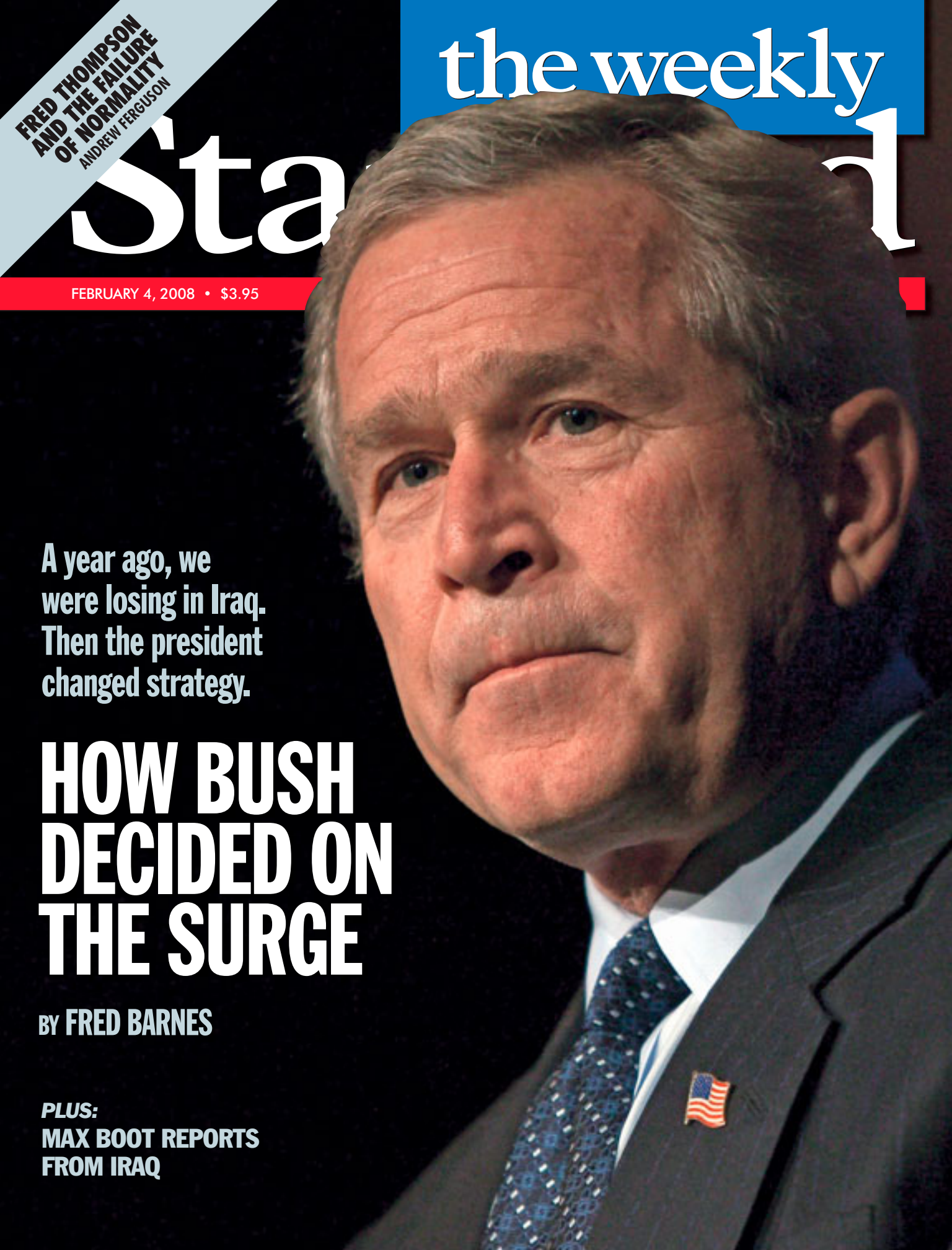
FRED THOMPSON AND THE FAILURE OF NORMALITY
ANDREW FERGUSON



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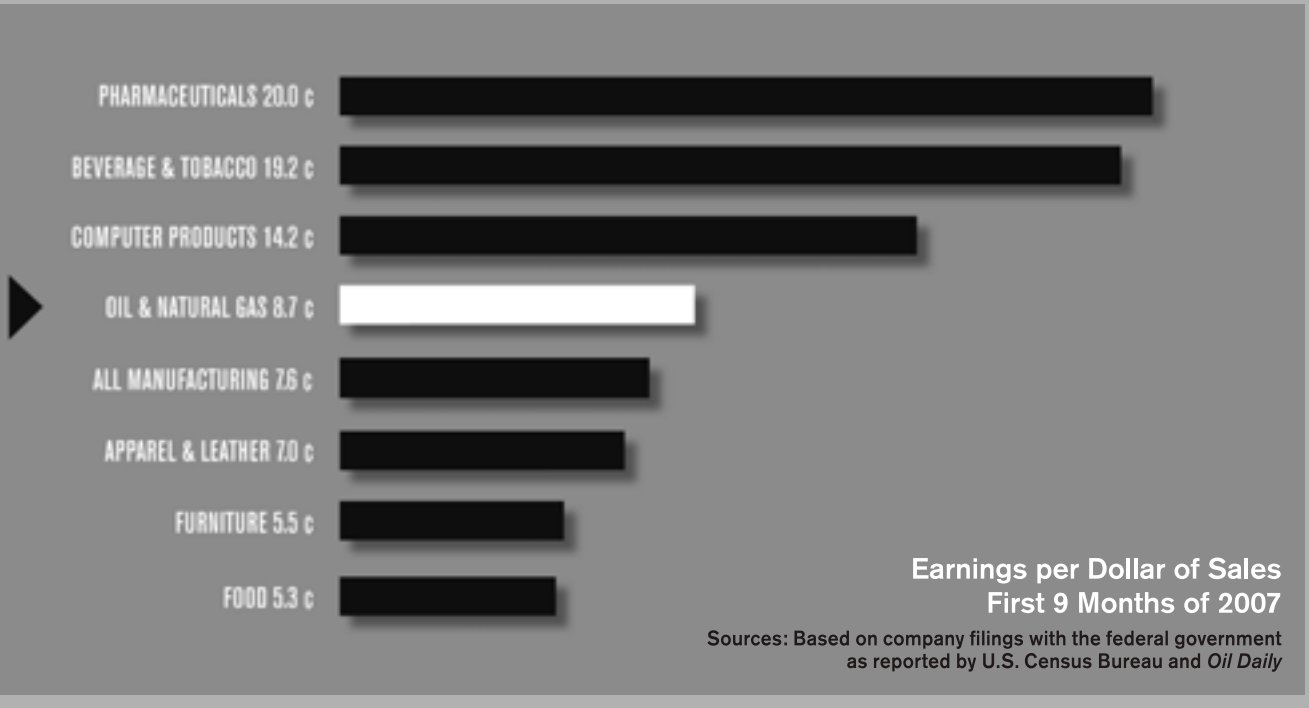
Straight talk on earnings



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the weekly Standard

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BPA INTERNATIONAL

Hear Them Roar . . . Not!

You may remember Christina Hoff Sommers's powerful indictment of the feminist establishment that was featured on our cover last May, "The Subjection of Islamic Women and the Fecklessness of American Feminism." Her stirring conclusion: "The women who constitute the American feminist establishment today are destined to play little role in the battle for Muslim women's rights. Preoccupied with their own imagined oppression, they can be of little help to others—especially family-centered Islamic feminists. The Katha Pollitts and Eve Enslers, the vagina warriors and university gender theorists—these are women who cannot distinguish between free and unfree societies, between the Taliban and the Promise Keepers, between being forced to wear a veil and being socially pressured to be slender and fit. Their moral obtuseness leads many of them to regard helping Muslim women as 'colonialist' or as part of a 'hegemonic' 'civilizing mission.' It disqualifies them as participants in this moral fight."

Well, Katha Pollitt certainly remembers the piece. She has been organizing a response for lo these many months—an "Open Letter from American Feminists" that begins: "Columnists and opinion writers from the *Weekly Standard* to the *Washington Post* to *Slate* have recently accused American feminists of focusing obsessively on minor or even nonexistent injustices in the United States while ignoring atrocities against women in other countries, especially the Muslim world. . . ."

We won't bore you with the rest. What's amusing is the email Pollitt, a columnist for the *Nation*, is circulating, trolling for signatures: "In only four days, over 650 people have signed the letter! Including Gloria Steinem, Lily Tomlin, Ursula leGuin, a sous-chef, a sergeant in Iraq, former gov. of Vt Madeline Kunin and lots and lots of writers, activists, public-health experts, representatives of feminist organizations, and 'just plain feminists.' I am hoping to get at least 1000 signatures."

We have to confess that the goal of "at least 1,000 signatures"—for an open letter circulated on the Internet—sounds underwhelming. But maybe that's a good turnout for the feminist movement these days. We were reminded, though, of the moment in *Austin Powers: International Man of Mystery* when international arch-villain Dr. Evil, having been frozen for 30 years, announces his fearsome plan to "hold the world ransom for . . . ONE MILLION DOLLARS!"

Also amusing is the class-consciousness of the feminist elite. Writes Pollitt: "If you'd like to sign, send me your name and how you would like to be identified. for example: writer, curator, Prof (with dept and U), activist, movie star." Hey, what about the "just plain feminists"? ♦

'Doubling Down in Iraq'

Elsewhere in this issue Fred Barnes reports in captivating detail on George W. Bush's decision a year ago to change the U.S. strategy in Iraq to the counterinsurgency doctrine of Gen. David Petraeus. It would be hard to overstate how radically this course veered from the Washington establishment's expectations of a U.S. withdrawal in the aftermath of the debacle for Bush's party in the 2006 elections.

But, if we can toot our own horn just this once, one person who quickly grasped the logic of the surge was William J. Stuntz, the distinguished criminal procedure expert at Harvard Law School. His prescient short essay arguing for a surge appeared in the first issue we published after the midterm elections. It was called "Doubling Down in Iraq" (www.weeklystandard.com/Content/Public/Articles/000/000/012/933jaydy.asp). Here was the heart of his argument:

> Willingness to raise the stakes often wins the game. Why do insurgent gangs, who have vastly smaller resources and manpower than the American soldiers they fight, continue to try to kill those soldiers? The answer is, because they believe they only have to kill a few more, and the soldiers will leave. They need not inflict a military defeat (which would be impossible, given the strength of the American military)—all they need to do is survive until American voters decide to throw in the towel, which might happen at any moment.
>
> The proper response to that calculation is to make emphatically clear that the fight will not end until one side or the other wins, decisively. That kind of battle can only have one ending, as Abraham Lincoln understood. In a speech delivered a month after his reelection, Lincoln carefully surveyed the North's resources and manpower and concluded that the nation's wealth was "unexhausted and, as we believe, inexhaustible." Southern soldiers began to desert in droves. Through the long, bloody summer and fall of 1864, the South had hung on only because of the belief that the North might tire of the conflict. But Lincoln did not tire. Instead, he doubled the bet—and won the war. . . .
>
> Send just enough soldiers and guns and tanks to do the job, and you may soon find you have sent too few. . . . On the other hand, send vastly more soldiers and materiel than required to the battlefield, and the enemy soon decides that the fight is hopeless. ♦

(Classic Steiner, reprinted from our issue of December 6, 1999)

Bush: An Oliver Stone Film

First there was *JFK*. Then came *Nixon*. Now comes, you guessed it, *George W. Bush: The Motion Picture*, directed by Oliver Stone. At least that is what the crackpot filmmaker hopes to do and have ready sometime after the election. But before we get carried away at what could be an unbelievably bad hit job against the president, the director tells *Daily Variety* that "I'm a dramatist who is interested in people, and I have empathy for Bush as a human being, much the same as I did for Castro, Nixon, Jim Morrison, Jim Garrison and Alexander the Great."

As for his current thoughts on Bush, said Stone, "I can't give you that, because the filmmaker has to hide in the work. Here, I'm the referee, and I want a fair, true portrait of the man. How did Bush go from an alcoholic bum to the most powerful figure in the world? It's like Frank Capra territory on one hand, but I'll also cover the demons in his private life, his bouts with his dad and his conversion to Christianity, which explains a lot of where he is coming from. It includes his belief that God personally chose him to be president of the United States, and his coming into his own with the stunning, preemptive attack on Iraq. It will contain surprises for Bush supporters and his detractors."

We can only imagine. ♦

The Blessing of Abortion

The Albany *Times Union* reports on a unique ceremony marking the 35th anniversary of *Roe* v. *Wade*. The Planned Parenthood chapter in Schenectady invited several local members of the clergy to bless its new 18,000 square-foot "clinic." According to the *Times Union*, the blessings included one from "Rev. Larry Phillips of Schenectady's Emmanuel-Friedens Church [who] declared the ground 'sacred and holy . . . where women's voices and stories are welcomed, valued and affirmed; sacred ground where women are treated with dignity, supported in their role as moral decision-makers . . . sacred ground where the violent voices of hatred and oppression are quelled.'"

No, we're not making this up.

Over at the *First Things* blog, Anthony Sacramone pondered the question of "who or what" the clergypersons would be blessing, and "decided to help them out, in the event they were at a loss for words." We found Sacramone's version decidedly more, um, inspired. A sample:

O Ba'al, God of Thunder:
We beseech Ye in the name of science
In the name of self-actualization and personal autonomy
That the procedures and terminations wrought on this choice piece of real estate
Permit no hope
Silence all screams
And leave no child behind. ♦

Casual

Eastern Promises

PATRICK FRASER / CORBIS

During a recent visit to Shanghai I found myself strolling in Xujiahui park, a few blocks from one of the city's busiest shopping districts. It was a cold, clear day, and school had just let out.

I watched as children flooded the park. One of them, a little boy probably no more than eight years old, wearing a blue school uniform with a red neckerchief, approached me. His grandmother walked a few paces behind him. As they passed, the little boy squared himself, craned his neck so he could address me directly, and said, as though he were an ambassador in a diplomatic exchange, "Good afternoon!" in perfect English.

"Good afternoon," I replied.

The proud little boy, who seemed as if he had been waiting forever to speak English to a Westerner, smiled widely. His grandmother laughed. And we all went on our way.

I recalled that moment the other day, when I read another story on Americans' growing pessimism about the future. Just as large majorities of Americans say their country is headed in the wrong direction, much of the world is moving in the direction of America.

I read in my guidebook that close to a quarter of the world's construction cranes operate inside Shanghai city limits. You can walk along the Bund, the old imperial cantonment on the banks of the Huangpu River, and stare across the water at the crystalline towers of Pudong, a neighborhood that less than 20 years ago was farmland. Soon Pudong will be home to two of the ten tallest buildings in the world. The Shanghainese are building a thoroughly postmodern megalopolis that doesn't look or feel anything like the Forbidden City. It doesn't look or feel like a Soviet industrial center either. It looks and feels like New York.

American kitsch culture is there, too. One night we had dinner with Chinese friends who were about to get married. As the conversation turned to the upcoming festivities the bridegroom produced a laptop from his backpack and placed it on the table. He wanted to show us a slideshow they had made for the wedding. The slickly produced display featured the happy couple in Western wedding costume, frolicking against computer-generated backgrounds to the tune of the California R&B group All-4-One's "I Swear." The bride-to-be bobbed her head to the music. "I like this song," she said in Mandarin.

You go shopping and feel like you never left home. At a DVD kiosk in the former French Concession I bought the first season of *Lost* for—between you and me—$20. When I handed the DVD to the clerk he nodded in approval and said, in English, "Good show."

"That's what I hear," I said.

He paused and said, "You watch *Prison Break*?"

A friend recommended I visit Plaza 66, a gleaming new mall in the heart of the city. Its several floors are filled with luxury goods from across the globe, though most of the brands are Western: Louis Vuitton, Hermès, Zegna, Hugo Boss, Jean-Paul Gaultier, Celine, and Prada, to name a few. For Shanghai's wealthy, Western goods mean status.

But it's not just the super-rich who like Western things. On the outskirts of People's Park is a franchise of Häagen-Dazs ice cream (founded in the Bronx) that had a line out the door on a bone-chilling New Year's Eve. Nearby is a Starbucks, one of half a dozen I saw in Shanghai. Across the way from Starbucks is a McDonald's. Not far from that is a Pizza Hut. Why anyone would eat at Pizza Hut when you can get fresh *xiaolongbao* (dumplings) and *baotze* (steamed buns with vegetable or pork filling) for next to nothing is a mystery to me. Yet each of the U.S. franchises was packed with young Shanghainese.

Not everything is Western and brand new, of course. Turn off a busy street into a seemingly empty alleyway, and you soon find yourself in the middle of a community of Chinese, some of whom are reading the paper, or doing the wash, or plucking the feathers from ducks. Old men gather in circles around tables watching their friends play checkers. The alleys are gray and dirtier than the boulevards. The old apartment buildings there will likely be demolished.

A lot of history will vanish with them. One day after lunch, walking down an alley, we came upon a section of concrete wall on which many years ago someone had scrawled in red, "Long Live Chairman Mao!" The flaky graffito summoned up China's tumultuous past. But at that moment the only people in the alley who betrayed the slightest interest in this political relic were two Americans bundled up in winter coats and gloves.

Matthew Continetti

the weekly Standard

A Bush Rally

The Associated Press reported last week that a left-wing group, Americans United for Change, plans to spend $8.5 million to ensure that President Bush's public approval rating doesn't improve in his final year in office. The group points out that President Reagan recovered politically in 1988. "All of a sudden he became a rallying cry for conservatives and their ideology," Brad Woodhouse, the group's president, lamented. "Progressives are still living with that." Woodhouse added that another reason his group wants to insure against a Bush recovery is that it could help the GOP presidential nominee this year.

As Jules Crittenden commented on his excellent eponymous blog: "Apparently the Iraq war, Gitmo, trampling of constitutional rights, failure to catch bin Laden, bipartisanly despised immigration bill, Plamegate . . . heck, I can't remember all of it, but seven years of Bush bumbling and Bush lies and Bush looking like a chimp just didn't do it. . . . It's nice of them to worry that Bush will have a decent legacy. . . . Maybe they're afraid someone will notice we're winning in Iraq, America hasn't been attacked again, Katrina had more to do with inept Democratic leadership in Louisiana than it did with inept Republican leadership in Washington . . . we've had decent job growth and it isn't likely to be much of a recession. . . . I'm sure I missed a few, but it's been a long 7 years."

Crittenden's response was the right one: to mock the effort, and to adduce the easily adduce-able evidence that Bush has been a pretty decent president. Yet the Republican National Committee's reaction was different from Crittenden's. "Why would liberals want to spend good money refighting the battles they lost yesterday?" asked RNC spokesman Alex Conant. He continued, "The 2008 election will be about the future and which candidate is best able to lead during a time of war and economic challenge."

This is the conventional GOP response to concerns about Bush's low approval rating: 2008 won't be about Bush. He's not running for reelection. Nor is his vice president. And the leading GOP candidates have a very limited association with the Bush administration. What's more, 2006, an off-year election, was a retrospective verdict on Iraq and Katrina. This year's election will be forward-looking. Rahm Emanuel can repeat all he wants that "George Bush is on the ballot in 2008." But that's just Democratic spin.

That's what most Republicans are saying. But the truth is that Emanuel isn't all wrong: It is important to Republican prospects in 2008, and to conservative prospects beyond, how the Bush administration is judged. Continued progress in Iraq is paramount. That's all the more reason not to risk the progress produced by the surge by prematurely drawing down American troops. Stabilizing the situation in Afghanistan is a priority, too. On other fronts, the administration, unfortunately, seems determined to drift with respect to North Korea and Iran. Meanwhile it is engaged in wishful thinking with respect to Russia and the Palestinian question. Absent a crisis, it may be that all conservatives can do is mitigate the damage—and focus on making sure Iraq and Afghanistan are in reasonably good shape.

It is also a good idea to win a few big congressional fights—on eavesdropping on foreign communications, for example. And it was sensible to take some issues off the table—cutting a quick and pretty harmless bipartisan agreement on a stimulus package, for example. It would also be smart to deploy some of the not-too-partisan and not-too-tainted (whether the tainting was fair or unfair) faces in the administration to defend its policies and explain its successes. It would be smart for Americans to see more of Attorney General Michael Mukasey, Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson, Federal Reserve chairman Ben Bernanke, CIA director Michael Hayden, and Generals David Petraeus and Ray Odierno over the next year.

It would also be useful if Americans learned that under the direction of drug czar John Walters teen drug use is down 25 percent over the past six years; there are 860,000 fewer teens using illegal drugs than in 2001. Health and Human Services Secretary Mike Leavitt should be on television explaining that the Medicare prescription drug benefit has been a success. It has enrolled 24 million seniors and premiums for the basic drug benefit are running about 40 percent below the projected cost. And perhaps the president himself should take some time to explain that his politically courageous August 2001 decision on stem cells, balancing scientific progress and moral concerns, has been utterly vindicated.

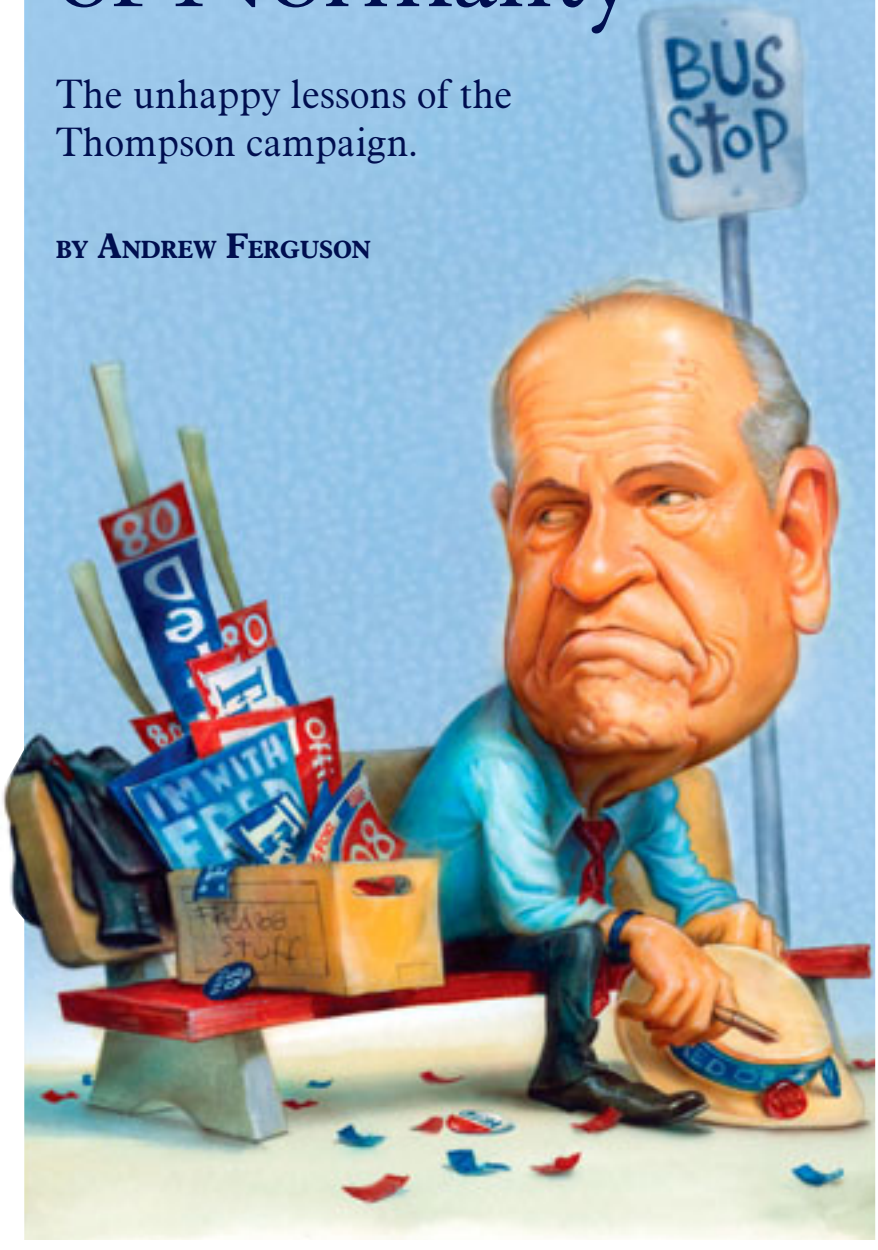
Bush's approval numbers may not change much over the next year. It may be that his administration will end up winning a war, keeping the country safe, and presiding over decent economic growth—and people will still disapprove of Bush. It may be Republicans will lose the White House in any case. But it would be nice to watch the left gnash its collective teeth at the Bush administration, as it governs competently and makes its case, and its approval numbers climb.

—William Kristol

The Failure of Normality

The unhappy lessons of the Thompson campaign.

BY ANDREW FERGUSON



GARY LOCKE

In his recent memoir, Alan Greenspan says he's been pushing a constitutional amendment of his own devising. It reads: "Anyone willing to do what is required to become president of the United States is thereby barred from taking that office." If the Greenspan amendment is ever enacted, it will at last clear the field for Fred Thompson, who might then become president. But not until then.

Thompson withdrew from the presidential race last week. He ended his campaign as he had conducted it, with a minimum of fuss and no wasted words. He released a withdrawal statement over the Internet. It was three sentences long, and he hasn't been heard from since. My guess is we'll be missing him dreadfully by spring.

The charge against Thompson, who entered the campaign last September when polls showed him a favorite among Republican voters, was repeated so often it became a cliché. Like most clichés it tells us more about the people who used it than about the state of affairs it was supposed to describe. His campaign lacked "energy." He didn't get out enough on the campaign trail, and, when he did, he didn't hold enough events. His speaking style was too low-key, and his speeches were too long, and more often than not his "performance" in televised debates was lackluster. *He just didn't have the fire in the belly.*

Fire in the belly: For those of us who suffer from acid reflux, this is a phrase full of meaning. In the world of politics, however, the meaning is vaguer. William Safire's *New Political Dictionary* defines "fire in the belly" as "an unquenchable thirst for power or glory; the burning drive to win a race or achieve a goal." It's bad, apparently, not having fire in the belly. The premise seems to be that vein-popping ambition, unrestrained avidity, is a necessary if not sufficient quality for someone who wants to hold the highest political position in a democratic country. Thompson himself seemed puzzled by the phrase and the premise underlying it. He was asked about it at a town hall meeting in Burlington, Iowa, in late December.

"Nowadays, it's all about fire in the belly," he said, with a touch of sarcasm. "I'm not sure in the world we live in today it's a terribly good thing that a president has too much fire in his belly."

He pointed out that he'd made financial sacrifices to run for president—he quit his various high-paying jobs and went without income for nearly a year—which should, he said, demonstrate his earnestness about the task before him.

And yet: "I'm not consumed by this process. I'm not consumed with the notion of being president. I'm

Andrew Ferguson is a senior editor at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

simply saying I'm willing to do what's necessary to achieve it, if I'm in synch with the people and if the people want me or somebody like me. . . . I'm only consumed by very, very few things and politics is not one of them."

Thompson didn't give off the usual political vibe : the gnawing need to please, the craving for the public's love. A few voters and journalists found this refreshing, many more found it insulting. Some just found it fascinating, in a clinical sort of way: What kind of politician isn't consumed by politics—and what kind of campaign would such a politician run? Well, now we know. If Thompson could plausibly avoid an overnight campaign trip, he did, preferring to return home to his wife and children in suburban Virginia. He spent an inordinate amount of time with his briefing books. And his response to the chore of raising money—the chief occupation of every office-seeker in this era of campaign finance reform, which was intended to reduce the role of money in politics—seemed nearly pathological. Fundraising events scheduled to last two or three hours often guttered out when the candidate departed after twenty minutes. High-end donors complained of being uncourted, unpampered, unloved—even unphoned. At one party in a private home last year, Thompson made the rounds of money-shakers, delivered brief remarks, and then slipped into a bedroom to watch a basketball game on TV by himself.

Having become famous as an actor in TV and movies, Thompson might have been expected to be a showman. But he was resolutely prosaic. Only with the greatest reluctance did he agree to a photograph with the Iowa State Fair's "Butter Cow," and when a fireman in Waverly asked him to wear a helmet, he said he didn't wear "silly hats." As the critics charged, his public speeches really were unusually long, even at drop-bys along the trail, because he insisted on mentioning details of his plans to recalibrate the benefit formulas for Social Security, inject private incentives into Medicare, and develop an optional, two-tiered flat tax. So nobody should have been surprised that when it came time to film his final pitch to voters before the Iowa caucuses, the broadcast speech ended up being 17 minutes long—Homeric by the standards of political ads. Crowds did not go wild.

Now, you can overstate the intellectual heft of a campaign that was launched by the candidate during an appearance on *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno*. He was a different kind of candidate but not an incompetent one. Indeed, his finest moment came in a debate before the Iowa caucuses, when the moderator asked the assembled candidates for a show of hands if they believed human activity caused climate change.

"Well, do you want to give me a minute to answer that?" Thompson said. When the moderator said she didn't, he said: "Well, then I'm not going to answer it. You want a show of hands, and I'm not going to give it to you."

The moderator looked as though Thompson had suddenly sprouted daffodils from his ears. So did his fellow candidates. After a stunned silence, they all courageously announced their refusal to show hands, too. They looked like the Little Rascals, hitching up their britches and flexing their biceps after Alfalfa clocked the neighborhood bully.

It's telling that his most notable moments were negative—marked by his refusal to follow some custom of the modern campaign. (From another debate: "Should government step in and help Chrysler and the other auto makers?" Thompson: "No.") Asked about education reform, he said: "It would be easy enough for someone running for president to say: I have a several-point plan to fix our education problem. It's not going to happen. And it shouldn't happen from the Oval Office." When journalists and candidates, with their typically childlike enthusiasm, suddenly began gumming the word "change" after the Iowa caucuses, Thompson pointed out the obvious: "Change has been part of every election since the dawn of elections, if you weren't an incumbent." He noted how easy it was "to demagogue" the issue of federal spending by dwelling on relatively insignificant earmarks: "All these programs that we talk about in the news every day are a thimbleful in the ocean compared to the entitlement tsunami that's coming to hit us."

Views like these might have earned another candidate a reputation for "straight talk"—maybe even the title of "maverick." But Thompson was more subversive than that; he was an existential maverick, and his campaign was an implicit rebuke to the system in its entirety. He was a man out of his time. With its reduced metabolism and procedural modesty, his campaign still might have served as an illustration of what politics once was like and—if we have the audacity to hope—might be again. After all, by the standards of a century ago, Thompson was a whirligig.

Political campaigns have always been boisterous affairs, but candidates themselves rarely took center stage till well into the 20th century. The first presidential candidate even to make an appearance on his own behalf was William Henry Harrison in 1840. When he showed up in Columbus, Ohio, to give a speech extolling his (exceedingly thin) record, the political world was scandalized. An opposition paper, the *Democratic Globe*, counted his uses of the pronoun "I"—there were 81 of them in his text—and pronounced the speech "a prodigy of garrulous egotism." The *Cleveland Adviser*, a nonpartisan paper, asked: "When was there ever before such a spectacle as a candidate for the Presidency, traversing the country advocating his own claims for that high and responsible station? Never!"

"The precedent thus set by Harrison," concluded the *Adviser*'s editorialist, "appears to us a bad one."

But it wasn't much of a precedent. Active campaigning didn't catch on for another half century or more. (The exception was Stephen A. Douglas in 1860, the only one of the four presidential candidates that year to leave

town to deliver a speech.) Candidates stayed home, receiving visitors and maintaining a quiet dignity while occasionally uncorking a speech in the neighborhood so the newspapers had something to report. Meanwhile surrogates scattered around the country, leading parades, holding rallies, and telling lies for which the candidates themselves couldn't be held responsible. Even the appalling Theodore Roosevelt, who would smooch babies at a train wreck if he thought it would get him votes, managed to contain himself and keep off the hustings when he ran for reelection in 1904. Eventually barnstorming became marginally acceptable, but only as the last recourse of candidates who, like Harry Truman in 1948, were so far behind they could risk looking desperate and undignified.

As late as the 1970s, the constant motion that modern presidential candidates subject themselves to was still of recent enough vintage that Nelson Polsby and Aaron Wildavsky, in their great book *Presidential Elections*, felt the need to account for it. "Everybody does it because it is the fashion," they wrote, "and the spectacle of seeing one's opponent run around the country at a furious pace without following suit is too nerve-wracking [for a candidate] to contemplate. It is beside the point that no one knows whether all this does any good."

The traditional restraint of old-time presidential candidates wasn't arrogance or sanctimoniousness, the twin accusations that wised-up politicos made against Thompson during the campaign. There was a philosophical component to it too: By not seeming overeager—no matter how eager they were—candidates paid tribute to the democratic idea that political power is best sought, taken on, and used reluctantly. It was also a matter of seemliness, and Thompson, alone among recent candidates, felt its pull. In his stump speech he often mentioned George Washington, once a staple of political rhetoric for his willingness to walk away from the power that was thrust upon him. Today Washington's restraint seems nothing more than an archaism. And by extolling it Thompson sounded merely odd.

"If people really want in their president a super type-A personality," Thompson said at that Iowa town hall meeting, "someone who has gotten up every morning and gone to bed every night thinking for years about how they could achieve the presidency of the United States, someone who could look you straight in the eye and say they enjoy every minute of campaigning—I ain't that guy."

But does "super type-A personality" really describe the kind of person who runs for president nowadays? It's not pleasant to think of the life they lead, these Americans who would be president, from the first hints of dawn to well past midnight, this life of endless demands, this succession of superficial sociability, in which you smile and smile and pop your eyes wide open in delighted wonder at the ever-shifting kaleidoscope of faces and places that circles before you, and you haven't the time or leisure to settle on a single one. Charming countryside, pretty little towns, sprawling centers of commerce and industry fly by and you haven't a moment to enjoy them or learn their tales. You rush to meet hundreds of people a day and never have a meaningful exchange of words with any of them.

The traditional restraint of old-time presidential candidates wasn't arrogance or sanctimoniousness, the twin accusations that wised-up politicos made against Thompson. There was a philosophical component to it, too.

From the backseats of freezing cars and vans you're hustled into overheated coffee shops and those packed school gymnasiums with the stink rising to the rafters and then the oppressive hush of corporate meeting rooms, where your nose starts to run and a film of sweat forms under your wool pullover, and you press the outstretched hands that carry every bacterial pathogen known to epidemiology. You open your mouth and you release the same cloud of words you recited yesterday and the day before. And in the Q&A, when you stop to listen, you hear the same questions and complaints from yesterday, the same mewling and blame-shifting, all imploring you to do the impossible and through some undefined action make the lives of these unhappy citizens somehow edifying, uplifting, and worth living. And you always promise you will do that; you have no choice but to tell this kind of lie.

There's no rest, because there's not a moment to waste: The handful of minutes away from the kaleidoscope are spent chatting with the scorpions of the press, the ill-dressed, ill-mannered reporters from the prints and the pretty, preening peacocks of TV, each of them either a know-it-all or a cynic or a dope, take your pick, and each of whom, for professional and other reasons, will deploy all his energies and cleverness to the task of trapping you into a misstatement or ungenerous remark or expression of irritation so he can convey to his editors and the world that—at last!—you've made a gaffe; and if you won't make a gaffe then he will convey to his editors and the world how "scripted" and "over rehearsed" you sound; kind of slick, almost robotic, *inauthentic*.

When the scorps are dismissed, in the seconds before you pass from the freezing van to the overheated gym or boardroom, a sycophant whose name you can't remember hands you a cell phone that connects you to a rich man whose face you dimly recall from another boardroom last summer and you beg him to give you money, or more often—considering the grinding pressure you feel for cash, always for cash—you beg him to assemble a circle of other rich men that he can

beg on your behalf, and when you sign off you don't have time to be grateful. There will be more calls before dinner and after dinner, and dinner is a cold thigh of chicken in a sump of clotted gravy served from a steam table in a freezing cinderblock banquet room at the Lions Club, and a hundred pairs of eyes fix themselves on you—*a celebrity, someone they've seen on TV*—as you dribble the gravy on your shirtfront. And after you release the same words and hear the same complaints you go to bed in a Hampton Suites for five hours of sleep on starchy sheets with dimly visible stains whose origins are impossible to discern, and from the corner the digital display on the microwave flashes 12:00 12:00 12:00 . . .

And you do all this so you can wake up the next morning and do it again. Because you like it.

The man or woman who seeks out such a life and enjoys its discomforts is not normal. Not crazy necessarily, but not normal, and probably, when the chips are down, not to be trusted, especially when the purpose of it all is to acquire power over other people (also called, in the delicate language of contemporary politics, "public service" or "getting things done on behalf of the American people"). The case is made, in defense of the contemporary campaign, that this is an efficient if unlovely way to choose leaders: It winnows out those who lack the stamina and discipline necessary to lead a rich, large, powerful, and complicated country. By this argument, Thompson failed because he deserved to.

But the opposite case is easier to make—that the modern campaign excludes anyone who lacks the narcissism, cold-bloodedness, and unreflective nature that the process requires and rewards. In his memoir Greenspan remarks that of the seven presidents he has known well, the only one who was "close to normal" was Jerry Ford. And, as Greenspan points out, Ford was never elected.

Fred Thompson probably feels terrible at the moment, but he should be honored to be in Ford's company. ♦

Letter to Our European Friends

Everything you need to know about our presidential campaign. BY P. J. O'ROURKE

America is in the midst of an all-important electoral campaign. But, talking to Europeans, I've discovered that there is puzzlement and misinformation on your continent about what's happening on ours. Europeans feel an understandable confusion when faced with a political system consisting of two houses of Congress and a White House, and nobody is home in any of them.

Also, America's political parties are indistinguishable to the European eye. A British journalist once described the situation thus: "America is a one-party state, but just like Americans they've got two of them." (I forget which British journalist said that. But there are so many British journalists who should be forgotten. Maybe it was Alexander Cockburn.)

The difference between American parties is actually simple. Democrats are in favor of higher taxes to pay for greater spending, while Republicans are in favor of greater spending, for which the taxpayers will pay. In foreign policy, Republicans intend to pursue the war in Iraq but to do so with a minimal number of troops on the ground. This is not to be confused with the disastrous Bush/Cheney/Rumsfeld policy of using a minimal number of troops on the ground to pursue the war in Iraq. Democrats intend to end the war, but they don't know when. Democrats are making the "high school sex promise": *I'll pull out in time, honest!*

There are two factors in American politics that may seem strange to Europeans, race and religion. You, of course, don't have any religion. Except every now and then someone who came to Europe lately and is a Muslim blows himself to bits. But I understand that you have EU funding to address these social problems and help Muslims build bombs that release fewer pollutants and less carbon dioxide, reducing the threat of global warming.

After the events of the 20th century, God, quite reasonably, left Europe. But He's still here in the United States. The majority of Americans are Christians, and Christians can be divided into two kinds, the kind who think you should get Jesus and the kind who think Jesus is going to get you. Mike Huckabee is one of the latter. Then there are the Mormons such as Mitt Romney who believe some unusual things—things that no sensible European like Jean-Paul Sartre, Martin Heidegger, Benito Mussolini, Karl Marx, Emanuel Swedenborg, or Cherie Blair would ever believe.

The question of race in America is supposed to be a matter of what one looks like. But it is difficult to comprehend how a political interest group that contains both Al Sharpton and Halle Berry could be based on looks. Barack Obama looks like he was raised in Hawaii. He may have just a good tan.

The number of American presidential candidates varies with the sunspot cycle and the phases of the moon. Being a Republican, I'm backing Hillary Clinton. Because she could lose. The reason is not that she's a woman. The reason is that she's the particular woman who taught the 4th grade class that every man in America wished he were dead in. Hillary Clinton is

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Lucy holding the football for Charlie Brown. Hillary Clinton is "America's ex-wife."

A man can be a Democrat to the core, going into the voting booth to pull the lever with the donkey label no matter what. Then he sees Hillary's name on the ballot. And it all comes back to him . . . the first marriage . . . the time he came home a little late, it wasn't even midnight, and he'd only had four or five beers, *and she threw his bowling ball down the storm sewer*.

The Republicans will have a hard time coming up with someone who *can't* beat Hillary Clinton. But I don't put it past them. You may remember Senator Bob Dole in 1996.

At the moment Republicans seem inclined to John McCain. Everyone loves John McCain. Everyone respects John McCain. He's tough. He's consistent. He's wrong. Not that I personally agree with you Europeans that John is wrong, but the voters do. John thinks the war in Iraq is a good idea. The electorate doesn't. John's campaign slogan is "Strong and Wrong."

Mitt Romney is supposed to be my own type of candidate, a true conservative. But Mitt was governor of Massachusetts. This is like applying to be pope and listing your prior job experience as "Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem."

Mitt Romney is also the "corporate candidate," promising to bring the organizational skills and fiscal discipline of corporate America to Washington. But we are in the midst of a global credit collapse and all the air is hissing out of the world's equity market balloons. We've had big corporate scandals—Enron, WorldCom, Tyco—in the not too distant past. We may have a deep recession in the not too distant future. Is this the moment to be pitching the voters on "business savvy"?

Rudy Giuliani is a wonderful person to have around during a tragedy. His campaign promise is that there will be a tragedy every week.

As for Fred Thompson, he didn't have much impact. Yes, he's a Republican who was seen on TV a lot. But so was Scooter Libby.

Mike Huckabee lost some support among the hard-core fundamentalists when Bible Belt denizens realized that John McCain was the only candidate with enough guts to really handle rattlesnakes at church. The rest of the public remains alert to the fact that evangelical Christianity, as a movement, has two faces—the Moral Majority face and the Tammy Faye Bakker face.

Let us not forget Ron Paul who is very popular—with people who stay up all night in Ayn Rand chatrooms, bury Krugerrands in the yard, and think the Trilateral Commission causes subprime mortgage foreclosures.

Incidentally, there's a balanced position that all of America's presidential candidates could take on the controversial abortion issue. If they want votes they shouldn't campaign to make abortion illegal *or* legal. They should campaign to make it retroactive. If a kid reaches 25 and he or she is still jobless, feckless, and sitting around Starbucks acting like a—no offense—European, then *whack*.

Meanwhile, in the Democratic field, Barack Obama may be altering our national political equation. Obama is an indication that America has reached an important benchmark in race relations. In America it is now officially more important to be cute than to be white. Barack Obama is cute, and he's nice. It's been a long time since any political party in America had the cute, nice vote sewn up. Rudy Giuliani? Not so nice. Bill Clinton? Don't get cute.

The problem for Obama is that, as yet, he doesn't have much political stature. However, there is a "Disney factor" is American politics. Think of America's politicians as the Seven Dwarves. They're all short—short on ethics, short on experience, short on common sense, short on something. But we keep thinking that one of these dwarves is going to save our snow white butt.

We've got Dopey right now. We had Sleazy before him. Grumpy lost in '04. Sleepy was great in the 1980s, but he's dead. How about Obama?

Who else do the Democrats have? There is, of course, Nobel Peace Prize-winning Al Gore. May I ask you Europeans, are your Norwegians crazy? What does the Nobel Peace Prize have to do with global warming? Did Al forge a truce in the war with the penguins? I'm trying to lead a carbon-neutral lifestyle myself. I've given up cigars. I think Al Gore should give up blowing smoke out his . . .

John Edwards is a personal injury lawyer, the sort of fellow who covers North Carolina with billboards reading, "Y'all May Have Been Malpracticed on by a Doctor and Not Even Know It. Call (800) S-H-Y-S-T-E-R." One of the remaining virtues of European civilization is that you aren't overrun with his ilk. John Edwards should go sue Krispy Kreme doughnuts for making his supporters too fat to get into the voting booths.

Dennis Kucinich swept the Mars caucuses.

Then there are the Democrats who're actually qualified to be president—Bill Richardson, Joe Biden, and Chris Dodd. All three have dropped out of the race. Before they did, they managed, between them, to raise almost $1,000 (2.79 euros) for their campaigns.

This leaves the Democrats with Hillary Clinton. She's going to reform America's health care system. Memo to Hillary: You *already* reformed America's health care system, 15 years ago. Just the outline of Hillary's 1993 health care plan was 1,400 pages long, almost as long as that equally successful reform document, the EU constitution.

Many political analysts say that the failure of Hillary's health care plan almost destroyed Bill Clinton's first term. You'll recall that Bill Clinton had to seek help from a different woman to almost destroy his second term.

But no matter who is elected America's next president—whether Barack Obama, John McCain, Hillary Clinton, or even Ron Paul—it is important that Europeans be reassured that ordinary Americans will not change the way they think about Europe. They will continue to think they aren't sure where it is on the map. ♦

Enemies to the Right of Him

Charge of the anti-McCain brigade.

BY STEPHEN F. HAYES

West Palm Beach

John McCain spoke through gritted teeth. "I respect Rush Limbaugh," he said, days after America's most influential talk radio host proclaimed that his nomination would ruin the Republican party.

Straight talk?

For two weeks, as the Republican presidential race moved south and he notched important victories in New Hampshire and South Carolina, John McCain has been subject to a series of withering attacks from the stars of talk radio and other prominent conservatives. Some of the criticism is warranted. McCain seems to delight in taking positions that upset conservatives, as he did at virtually every campaign stop in New Hampshire by going out of his way to talk about global warming. The argument, which he repeated in the debate here last Thursday, goes something like this:

> My friends, I believe global climate change is real, and I think it's a major issue worldwide and in this country. I have been at odds with the Bush administration on this issue for a long time. Suppose that there's no such thing as climate change and we adopt clean technologies. We go to nuclear power. We develop automobiles that go 200 miles before you have to plug them in. We go to hybrids. We use ethanol. There's a broad array of steps we can take to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Suppose we do these things and we're wrong about global warming. Then all we've done is given our children a cleaner world. But suppose we are right—that climate change is an urgent issue—and we do nothing. I think the consequences are obvious and would be devastating.

To a conservative, the consequences of the government mandates required to accomplish these things should be equally obvious and only slightly less devastating. Think of the vast tangle of new regulations that will cost American companies and consumers untold billions, potentially crippling the economy. It is not difficult to understand why this galls McCain's critics.

There are other concerns, many of them well known. McCain did not support George W. Bush's tax cuts in 2001 and 2003 and often used left-wing class warfare arguments to voice his opposition. Rather than simply fight for conservative jurists, McCain joined the so-called Gang of 14 that sought to find compromise on judicial appointments. He led Senate opposition to Bush administration policies on detainee interrogation, practices that even administration critics acknowledge have prevented potentially catastrophic attacks. Then there was illegal immigration. And campaign finance reform.

Add them up, the critics argue, and you have John McCain, the Anti-Conservative.

"McCain is not only not conservative enough," writes David Limbaugh, Rush's brother, "he has also built a reputation as a maverick by stabbing his party in the back—not in furtherance of conservative principles but by betraying them."

Like so many McCain critics, Limbaugh turned to former Senator Rick Santorum—"whose conservative credentials are beyond question"—as an expert witness. "I don't hardly agree with him on hardly any issues," Santorum said.

Really? Santorum's lifetime rating from the American Conservative Union is 88. John McCain's is 82.3. One would suppose there might be some overlap. The difference between a real conservative and a phony one apparently lies in those six points.

Although many others have been as critical of McCain, perhaps no one has been as hypocritical. In 2006, when Santorum was running for reelection, he asked McCain to come to Pennsylvania to campaign on his behalf. When McCain obliged, Santorum put the video on his campaign website, listing it first among "key events" of the year. That's gratitude, Santorum-style.

Other conservative politicians—or former politicians—have taken their anti-McCain arguments to absurd lengths. Take Tom DeLay, for instance, whose K Street pandering led to numerous indictments and contributed greatly to the Republican losses in 2006. The former House majority leader said, without a trace of irony in his voice, that John McCain "has done more to hurt the Republican party than any elected official I know of."

Mark Levin, a longtime confidant of both Rush Limbaugh and Sean Hannity who now hosts his own increasingly popular talk show, took the anti-McCain argument a step further on his show last Wednesday. "At this point, anybody who supports John McCain and claims to be a conservative, let me be blunt: You're not a conservative."

Which came as a surprise to Jack Kemp, the ardent supply-sider who was the conservative alternative to George H.W. Bush in 1988. "That's just so preposterous," said Kemp. "I don't agree with McCain on several things. He's gotten right on the economy. He's right on foreign policy. And he's right on the war on terror."

And no doubt a surprise also to Phil Gramm (lifetime ACU rating of 95), whose presidential campaign was

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endorsed by *National Review* in 1996. And to Sam Brownback, a stalwart conservative and one of the most outspoken pro-life politicians in America today. And to Tom Coburn from Oklahoma, arguably the most conservative member of the Senate.

"John McCain and I have stood side by side on many issues," Coburn said in endorsing McCain last week. The most important, he added, are "fiscal responsibility" and the "sanctity of human life."

Most of the rank-and-file conservatives supporting McCain point to his leadership on Iraq and his leadership on defense issues. Richard Allen, national security adviser to Ronald Reagan, made this point in an email he sent January 3, the night of the Iowa caucuses, to a small group of longtime conservatives.

> I was early on a Fred Thompson supporter, worked with him, thought he would have the capacity to grow to a major force. Won't go into the details, but I was impressed. For all sorts of reasons, I suspect, there has been no policy bloom there. Not an issue of fine character, because that he has—it has to do with policy.

Allen continued:

> John McCain is our best and safest choice. Some cannot forgive past transgressions on campaign finance or other matters. But when you stop to reflect on the matter, with whom—among all those out there—are we really going to be more secure, and who has the understanding of BOTH foreign policy issues and national security issues we face? I've spent all my adult life, more than five decades, in these vineyards. They matter to me, as I know they do to all of you. I say it's McCain.

So what if Republican primary voters say it's McCain? Can there be a rapprochement with some of his conservative critics?

Levin, who has been as critical of McCain as anyone, has not ruled out supporting him. "If he does squeak through, I'll have to figure out what I'm going to do about it. We'll see. We'll see." ♦

The Casualties of War

The *Lancet* study of Iraqi deaths is further discredited. BY MICHAEL FUMENTO

That the new World Health Organization-Iraqi government study of war-related Iraq deaths reached wildly different conclusions from two much-hyped reports in the British medical journal the *Lancet* is no surprise to anyone who has followed the issue. But the new study highlights the fanaticism of the *Lancet* and its defenders and illustrates yet again the bias of mainstream media coverage of the Iraq war.

In late October, 2004 *Lancet* published a report estimating 98,000 war-related deaths in the first 18 months of the conflict. Two years later, the *Lancet* updated that figure to a stunning 655,000 Iraqis dead by July 2006 as a consequence of the March 2003 U.S. invasion. The media stood at attention and saluted. "Within a week, the study had been featured in 25 news shows and 188 articles in U.S. newspapers and magazines, including the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and the *Los Angeles Times*," according to an excellent investigative report in the January 4 *National Journal*. CBS News called the 2006 *Lancet* report a "new and stunning measure of the havoc the American invasion unleashed in Iraq."

Inevitably, the World Socialist website demanded: "Why is the American press silent on the report of 655,000 Iraqi deaths?" Too bad it wasn't—silence (or at least a modicum of skepticism) is what should have greeted the *Lancet* report.

The latest study, called the Iraq Family Health Survey (IFHS), was published in the January 9 issue of the nation's most prestigious medical journal, the *New England Journal of Medicine*. It found an estimated 151,000 excess violent deaths from the U.S-led invasion in March 2003 through June 2006, when compared to violent deaths in the prewar period. This is roughly one-fourth the war-related deaths found by *Lancet* in 2006. Further, for the most recent comparable reporting time periods for both surveys, it found the *Lancet* 2006 number to be more than *seven times* that of its own survey. And other estimates indicate the IFHS figures themselves may be too high.

One estimate that's far lower even than the IFHS figures comes from IraqBodyCount.org, the antiwar website which at the time of *Lancet* 2004 reported 14,000-16,000 war-related deaths. Even now Iraq Body Count tallies fewer than 90,000 fatalities. Its figures, according to its website, include "individual or cumulative deaths as directly reported by the media or tallied by official bodies (for instance, by hospitals, morgues and, in a few cases so far, NGOs), and subsequently reported in the media." It doesn't, however, include combatant deaths among Iraqis, which would be picked up by household surveys like that of the IFHS. (Osama bin Laden himself in his preelection 2004 video used the Iraq Body Count figures to decry the volume of blood spilled by the infidels.)

Then there's the U.N-conducted Iraq Living Conditions Survey 2004 (ILCS). Using a dataset significantly larger than that of either of the *Lancet* studies—22,000 households versus

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988 for *Lancet* 2004 and 1,849 for *Lancet* 2006—it found 24,000 war-related deaths from the opening of the war until May 2004. That's only the first 14 months of conflict compared with 18 in *Lancet* 2004, but it does stretch the imagination that in those ensuing four months the numbers of deaths somehow quadrupled.

Only one source found higher numbers than either *Lancet* paper—a poll by the British Opinion Research Business (ORB). It claimed in a September 2007 press release that "more than 1,000,000 Iraqi citizens have been *murdered* since the invasion took place in 2003." (Emphasis added.) The polling ended in August 2007, and the actual alleged death toll was over 1.2 million.

"Murdered" isn't the language of the staid, neutral polling organization that its defenders claim ORB to be. Yet surely only a hardened cynic would assert that ORB's purpose was to make the *Lancet* figures seem to be in the ballpark despite all other studies showing otherwise.

Or perhaps it wouldn't take a hardened cynic. "The key importance of the [ORB] poll," claimed one leftist British "media watch" organization, "is that it provides . . . strong support for the findings of the 2006 *Lancet* study, which reported 655,000 deaths."

Big numbers can be hard to wrap your mind around. Fortunately, the IFHS paper breaks the figures down so they are more comprehensible, and so doing utterly damns the *Lancet* assertion.

"The IFHS data," states the paper, "indicate that every day 128 persons died from violence from March 2003 through April 2004, 115 from May 2004 through May 2005, and 126 from June 2005 through June 2006. The Iraq Body Count numbers were 43, 32, and 55 civilian deaths per day for the same periods. In the [*Lancet* 2006 study] there was a much higher rate of death from violence and a sharp increase during the 3-year period, with 231, 491, and 925 deaths per day, respectively."

So for that last period, while the IFHS daily figure was 2.3 times higher than that of Iraq Body Count, the *Lancet* 2006 daily figure was a stunning 7.3 times higher than that of the IFHS and 17 times higher than that of Iraq Body Count. As to how high the ORB figure would be, for obvious reasons the IFHS doesn't bother with it. Assuredly, though, it lies somewhere that could only be spotted with a powerful telescope.

Put another way, those 925 *Lancet* deaths extrapolated to the U.S. population would be 10,763 killings each day. Doesn't that seem just a bit implausible? Moreover—and this one figure alone is enough to entirely damn the *Lancet*'s claims—the 2006 study says 18 percent of the deaths during the period in which those 925 killings occurred resulted from car bombings. That's an amazing average of 166 daily. These bombings are fastidiously reported in the U.S. media and Wikipedia keeps a comprehensive list of major car bombings in Iraq. Yet the *highest* single-day total it has for that period is 114, or 42 short of the alleged *average*. Iraq Body Count could hardly miss any of these deaths; yet remember their *total* average of killings from all war-related causes for that period was 55.

For a massive number of other red flags having nothing to do with the actual numbers, you will want to read the *National Journal* article "Data Bomb" by Neil Munro and Carl M. Cannon (it's available even to nonsubscribers at news.nationaljournal.com/articles/databomb/index.htm). But here's one: While it's widely known that the *Lancet* authors refused to release their data to be evaluated by outsiders, there has been little talk about Riyadh Lafta.

Lafta was the man in charge of the actual collection of numbers, while another *Lancet* author was in Iraq but holed up in a hotel. As *National Journal* notes, Lafta was also a high-ranking official in Saddam Hussein's ministry of health and there authored some of the agit-prop papers about the vast number of small children dying from U.N. imposed sanctions after the Gulf war. The assertion that half a million Iraqi children had been killed by sanctions was criticized by no less than the *Nation* magazine, which noted that in the autonomous Kurdish region in the north child mortality rates actually fell. It opined that laughable assertions that blamed the results of Saddam's cruelty on the U.N. could only undermine efforts to lift the sanctions.

So Lafta doesn't exactly fit the definition of a trustworthy researcher except in the sense of trusting him to come to the "proper" conclusions. (Richard Garfield, a coauthor of *Lancet*'s 2004 study who kept his name off the 2006 paper, told the *National Journal* he personally had studied "how Saddam had pilfered cash [intended] for the health care system.")

At most scientific journals, alarm bells might have gone off over the likely biases of a Riyadh Lafta. But the editor of the *Lancet*, physician Richard Horton, has unapologetically used the journal for advocacy on other issues, including a notorious 1998 paper that created an international panic over the safety of the childhood vaccine for measles, mumps, and rubella—linking it to autism and bowel disease. That paper became a full-fledged scandal, with 10 of its 13 authors demanding their names be withdrawn from it. The other three are fighting to keep their medical licenses. Horton's reaction? He proudly said he had "no regrets" and pompously declared: "Progress in medicine depends on the free expression of new ideas." (The British press reported "an unprecedented surge of measles cases" this summer, probably traceable to unwarranted fears of the vaccine. Some progress.)

Horton spoke at a rally in 2006 sponsored by Stop the War Coalition, a British group set up on September 21, 2001, which is to say its purpose was to oppose punishing and defeating the perpetrators of the 9/11 attack. At the rally, Horton shouted about the "mountain of violence and torture" in Iraq—and no, he wasn't talking about Saddam. "This axis of Anglo-Ameri-

can imperialism extends its influence through war and conflict, gathering power and wealth as it goes, so millions of people are left to die in poverty and disease," he angrily added. This is not your father's medical journal editor.

As *National Journal* revealed, *Lancet*'s 2006 study was about half funded by antiwar billionaire George Soros, who in a November 2003 *Washington Post* interview said that removing President Bush from office was the "central focus of my life" and "a matter of life and death." This no doubt explains the release of the *Lancet* study four weeks before the 2006 midterm elections, just as *Lancet*'s 2004 study was released days before the presidential election. Even the magazine's ardent defenders don't claim the timing was a coincidence.

The 2006 *Lancet* report states only, "Funding was provided by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the Center for Refugee and Disaster Response of the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health." Soros is known for concealing his massive political donations, and the *Lancet* was complicit on this occasion.

Not that any of these revelations appears to have fazed the authors or editor of the *Lancet*. Just as defenders of *Lancet* 2006 claim that the ORB poll, with its far higher death rate, was somehow "consistent" with *Lancet* 2006, so does the coauthor of both *Lancet* studies, Les Roberts, astonishingly insists that the much-lower IFHS numbers are also consistent with *Lancet* 2006. There is "far more in common in the results than appears at first glance," he has said. Or at second or third glance, he might have added. As if there could possibly be anything consistent with one survey that finds more than seven times the deaths as another survey over the same reporting period.

It therefore appears that we can expect, just before this year's national election, a new *Lancet* survey in which the American imperialist troops and their Iraqi puppets will be shown to have killed every single Iraqi. Twice. ♦

Ehud Olmert's Israel

It's doing better than you've heard.

BY PETER BERKOWITZ

Herzliya Pituach, Israel

According to recent opinion polls, roughly 70 percent of Israelis—and about 70 percent of Palestinians—believe that two states living side by side in peace is the just solution to the conflict between them. Yet no solution is at hand. Indeed, a major address delivered by Prime Minister Ehud Olmert last week—and, even more, the political circumstances and climate of opinion in which he delivered it—dramatized not only the remoteness of any resolution but also Israel's ability to prosper even as the Palestinians remain unable to establish a state of their own.

To be sure, Israelis face a formidable array of national security threats. Weapons continue to flow from Egypt into the Gaza Strip (and thanks to Hamas's demolition of the wall that forms the border on the Sinai side, tens of thousands of Palestinians last week flowed from the Gaza Strip into Egypt). Hamas continues to rain down Qassam rockets on the civilian residents of the Israeli town of Sderot, five miles northeast of Gaza, and on surrounding kibbutzim. In the West Bank, Israeli security forces operate around the clock to foil terrorist operations before they cross over into Israel. In the south of Lebanon, Hezbollah has rearmed.

Slightly farther afield, satellite photographs show that Syria has begun to reconstruct what all the world believes to have been a nuclear facility destroyed by Israeli aircraft on September 6. And then there is Iran. Israelis are unimpressed by last month's U.S. National Intelligence Estimate assertion that Tehran suspended its nuclear weapons program in 2003.More in keeping with the same document's assertion that Tehran proceeds apace in its efforts to produce enriched uranium—the crucial ingredient in nuclear weapons—Israelis believe that Iran is determined to become a nuclear power and, should it succeed, would present a grave danger to Israel, the region, and the international order.

As if those threats were not enough, Prime Minister Olmert acts and speaks from a position of weakness. His approval rating makes President Bush's look sterling. He suffers from prostate cancer. He has been subject to a prolonged investigation for graft. He labors under the widespread perception, bolstered by the Winograd Commission's preliminary report last April on the government's conduct of the second Lebanon war, that Israel's failure to achieve its stated objective—to inflict a crushing blow on Hezbollah—was significantly due to his poor leadership. And on January 30, the Winograd Commission will release the second and final component of its report, which knowledgeable Israelis expect to include a damaging assessment of Olmert's wartime decision-making.

So ask Israelis about the state of the nation, and they will tell you that things are grim and growing worse. But, observes political strategist Eyal Arad, chairman of the Euro Israel Group and former adviser to Prime Ministers Sharon and Olmert, ask Israelis about their personal prospects and many will tell you they have never had it better.

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In fact, since recovering in 2003 from the Second Intifada, the Israeli economy is booming, particularly in high-tech industries. The stores are stocked with the latest European fashions and electronic gadgets from around the world. Newer, taller, more glistening buildings distinguish the Tel Aviv skyline. In addition, the health care system boasts excellent facilities, superb physicians, and universal coverage. Literature, music, theater, and filmmaking flourish. Radio and TV feature lively, loud, and nonstop discussion of issues great and small.

But it was Israelis' despondency about their nation's prospects, including apprehensions about their prime minister's integrity and judgment, that Olmert sought to dispel in his January 23 address, the culminating event at the eighth annual Herzliya Conference on Israel's national security.

While acknowledging mistakes, failures, and disappointments, Olmert insisted that the nation is sound, beginning with the 18 months of peace that northern Israel has enjoyed since the end of the second Lebanon war—the longest such period in the 25 years since the launch of the first Lebanon war in 1982.

He confirmed that, thanks to Syria and Iran, Hezbollah has rearmed; it possesses not only more rockets and missiles but newer and more dangerous weapons today than on the eve of the 2006 war. Yet, insisted Olmert,

> The unarguable fact is that the Hezbollah is not deployed along Israel's border in the North; its fighters do not come into contact with our soldiers, and not one Hezbollah missile or rocket has been fired towards Israel for a year and a half. For the first time, the Lebanese Army is deployed on the border with Israel. For the first time, there is an effective international force serving as a buffer between ourselves and the Hezbollah.

Moreover, from his government's failures and mistakes, "lessons were learned, shortcomings were rectified, patterns of action were changed." Meanwhile, the quiet in northern Israel, contended Olmert, reflects the reestablishment of deterrence, central to Israel's national security doctrine.

Concerning the war in the south, the prime minister stressed his full approval of Defense Minister Ehud Barak's decision to impose a partial blockade on Gaza. While Israel would not allow "a humanitarian crisis to develop," it would also not continue to supply all the energy Hamas needed to run a terrorist state:

> We will not stop food for children, medicine for those in need nor fuel for institutions tied to saving lives. However, there is no justification or basis to demand that we allow the residents of Gaza to live normal lives, while mortars are fired and missiles are launched from their streets and the courtyards of their homes towards Sderot and the communities in the South.

Olmert pointed to the 18 months of peace that northern Israel has enjoyed since the end of the second Lebanon war—the longest such period in the 25 years since the launch of the first Lebanon war in 1982.

Israel, Olmert declared, would not relent in the fight against Hamas, either in Gaza or in the West Bank.

But at the core of Olmert's speech was a commitment to the process the Bush administration launched at Annapolis. Despite the serious objections and genuine risks, there was, Olmert argued, no contradiction in taking advantage of a "historic opportunity"—consisting in the "deserving Palestinian leadership" of President Mahmoud Abbas and Prime Minister Salam Fayyad, "a sympathetic international community," and "an American president committed to the security of Israel and the unmistakable Jewish character of the country, at a level which is unprecedented in our history"—to achieve a political agreement with the Palestinians.

Many Israelis—and not a few well-informed Americans—believe that Olmert is engaged in a fool's errand. Supplementing the general consensus concerning the shape of a just solution to the conflict is a consensus among Israelis that the conditions for implementing that solution do not now exist and are not likely to come into being anytime soon. Despite the intentions of Abbas and Fayyad, Fatah is too corrupt, the Palestinian educational system is too poisonous, Jerusalem too sensitive an issue, and Hamas too appealing to too many Palestinians. Most important, any political agreement would require the Israeli army and internal security forces to leave the West Bank, but few in Israel believe that can be done without paying an intolerable price—exposing Tel Aviv and environs, the center of the country's commercial life and home to half its citizens, to constant rocket attacks.

The unlikeliness of a political agreement with the Palestinians is to be regretted, but by no means is it cause for despair. Chastened by 40 years of occupation and committed to a two-state solution the moment circumstances permit, a significant majority of Israelis are more than ready to turn their back on the Palestinians, to continue to orient their economy globally, and to contain the Palestinians without solving the conflict that divides them. This builds on the consensus forged by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon in the wake of the Second Intifada.

The evolving consensus includes both the repudiation by an important segment of the Israeli right of the dream of an Israel that stretches from the Mediterranean to the Jordan River, and the repudiation by significant segments of the left of the conviction that Israel is at fault for all the pathologies of Palestinian society and could correct them, if only its heart were in the right place.

Because it faces up to harsh realities without losing sight of the demands of justice, the evolving consensus reflects the strength of the nation. ♦

He Didn't Give at the Office

Remember that picture of Yasser Arafat, blood donor? BY SCOTT W. JOHNSON

Charles Enderlin is the *France 2* Jerusalem correspondent who broadcast the incendiary account of the death of 12-year-old Muhammad al-Dura at the hands of Israeli troops operating in the Gaza Strip in September 2000. Based on film footage provided by a Palestinian cameraman, Enderlin's report has become infamous among students of Arab propaganda both for its destructive effects and for its probable falsity. The al-Dura affair now bids to join the Dreyfus affair in the French hall of shame.

Flogging his new book on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (*The Lost Years*) at Harvard's Center for European Studies on January 17, Enderlin himself exposed a probable Palestinian media hoax in which he had no involvement. The story exposed by Enderlin involved widely circulated reports by the Associated Press, Reuters, and the BBC. As Joel Pollak recounted online at the site *Guide to the Perplexed*, Enderlin told his Harvard audience "that Yasser Arafat had faked his blood donation to the victims of the September 11th attacks. Enderlin said the event had been staged for the media to counteract the embarrassing television images of Palestinians celebrating in the streets after the World Trade Center and Pentagon attacks."

The story of Arafat's blood donation was reported around the world in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, usually accompanied by photographs depicting Arafat in the apparent act of giving blood at the Shifa Hospital in Gaza City. Enderlin elaborated on his contention that the scene depicted in the photographs was staged. According to Pollak's account of Enderlin's remarks, "Arafat didn't like needles, and so the doctor put a needle near his arm and agitated a bag of blood. The reporters took the requisite photographs."

ADEL HANA / AP

Should we take his word for it? Enderlin is certainly an experienced and knowledgeable reporter on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. But taking Enderlin's word for the hoax is a bit like trusting the paradoxical assertion of Epimenides, the Cretan philosopher who famously declared that all Cretans are liars. At the least, we should demand to see what Othello called "the ocular proof." Do the photographs conform to Enderlin's description of them? In short, the anwer is yes.

Two photographs of a reclining Arafat are credited to the AP's Adel Hana. Both photos ran with a caption that reads like a press release: "Arafat, along with hundreds of Palestinians, participated in a blood drive for the victims of the deadly airline hijackings in the United States, which he condemned as a 'horrible attack.'" We all know how much Arafat disliked horrible attacks by Arab terrorists.

In neither photo is a needle in evidence. In the first AP photo, Arafat is prostrate. His blood has not yet been drawn and no blood is in evidence. Rather, Arafat stares warily at the tourniquet placed around his bare arm. The donation is about to be made. A nurse with a head scarf is about to search for the chairman's vein, Arafat looking on at his arm.

In the other AP photo, Arafat has apparently given his blood. The nurse with the head scarf is nowhere to be seen. In her place, a kneeling male medical official with his back to the camera jointly holds a nearly bursting bag of blood together with a uniformed security officer. With Enderlin's gloss, the photo takes on a comic aspect. Heavy lifting is required; it takes two hands to hold all the blood donated by the chairman to the beloved American people!

Reuters photographer Ahmed Jadallah also took a widely disseminated photograph of Arafat giving blood on September 12. Jadallah's photograph provides a wider view of the scene depicted in Hana's second photograph, with the male medical official displaying Arafat's voluminous blood donation with the assistance of the uniformed security official. The Reuters caption also reads like a press release covering talking points: "Palestinians said they sym-

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Yasser Arafat's Kodak moment at Shifa hospital, September 12, 2001: It was staged, says Charles Enderlin, correspondent for France 2.

AHMED JADALLAH / REUTERS

pathized with the victims of the attack in the United States despite their criticism of U.S. support for Israel during the Palestinian uprising."

So Enderlin's description of the photos as staged comports with "the ocular proof." But what about the photographers? What does the record reveal about them?

Among the work of AP photographer Adel Hana is a 2006 photograph claiming to show a Palestinian girl killed by an Israeli airstrike against "Islamic militants" being carried into the Shifa Hospital by a grieving relative surrounded by armed men. It is a heartbreaking photograph. The AP subsequently updated the caption to indicate that "doctors said that the 5-year-old Palestinian girl initially believed to have been killed by an Israeli military strike Wednesday apparently died after sustaining head injuries during a fall from a swing in the same area before the strike."

Reuters's Ahmed Jadallah, for his part, is clearly on the team he's covering. Reuters itself helpfully advises visitors that Jadallah "shoots reportages of Palestinian funerals and Israeli violence" almost daily. Israeli authorities have barred him from going to Reuters's main office in Jerusalem. Reuters also ingenuously discloses: "He sees it as his mission to have the world see the despair of the Palestinian people." And, we can fairly assume, the benefactions of their late chairman.

So we can perhaps be grateful for Enderlin's retrospective, however tardy, on one of Yasser Arafat's trivial deceptions, foisted on readers all over the world by credulous news services. Nevertheless, it should be noted that sophisticated consumers of news from that part of the world didn't much need Enderlin's help to tumble to this particular Arafat hoax. At the time the photographs were published in 2001, Middle East Forum scholar Ronni Gordon Stillman observed in a column for *National Review Online*: "Can journalists really be fooled by these Kodak moments? It's difficult to imagine. And yet, Arafat's condolences to the American people were broadcast far and wide, with no mention that on that same day the Palestinian Authority's newspaper praised suicide bombers as 'the noble successors of their noble predecessors . . . the salt of the earth, the engines of history . . . the most honorable people among us.'"

Unfortunately, Saul Bellow's epigram looks like an eternal verity: "A great deal of intelligence can be invested in ignorance when the need for illusion is deep." ♦

Religion and the Death Penalty

Can't have one without the other?

BY WALTER BERNS

The Supreme Court agreed on Friday to decide whether the Constitution allows the death penalty for the rape of a child.
New York Times, January 5, 2008

The best case for the death penalty—or, at least, the best explanation of it—was made, paradoxically, by one of the most famous of its opponents, Albert Camus, the French novelist. Others complained of the alleged unusual cruelty of the death penalty, or insisted that it was not, as claimed, a better deterrent of murder than, say, life imprisonment, and Americans especially complained of the manner in which it was imposed by judge or jury (discriminatorily or capriciously, for example), and sometimes on the innocent.

Camus said all this and more, and what he said in addition is instructive. The death penalty, he said, "can be legitimized only by a truth or a principle that is superior to man," or, as he then made clearer, it may rightly be imposed only by a religious society or community; specifically, one that believes in "eternal life." Only in such a place can it be said that the death sentence provides the guilty person with the opportunity (and reminds him of the reason) to make amends, thus to prepare himself for the final judgment which will be made in the world to come. For this reason, he said, the Catholic church "has always accepted the necessity of the death penalty." This may no longer be the case. And it may no longer be the case that death is, as Camus said it has always been, a religious penalty. But it can be said that the death penalty is more likely to be imposed by a religious people.

The reasons for this are not obvious. It may be that the religious know what evil is or, at least, *that* it is, and, unlike the irreligious, are not so ready to believe that evil can be explained, and thereby excused, by a history of child abuse or, say, a "post-traumatic stress disorder" or a "temporal lobe seizure." Or, again unlike the irreligious, and probably without having read so much as a word of his argument, they may be morally disposed (or better, predisposed) to agree with the philosopher Immanuel Kant—that greatest of the moralists—who said it was a "categorical imperative" that a convicted murderer "must die." Or perhaps the religious are simply quicker to anger and, while instructed to do otherwise, slower, even unwilling, to forgive. In a word, they are more likely to demand that justice be done. Whatever the reason, there is surely a connection between the death penalty and religious belief.

Perhaps the religious are simply quicker to anger and, while instructed to do otherwise, slower, even unwilling, to forgive. In a word, they are more likely to demand that justice be done. Whatever the reason, there is surely a connection between the death penalty and religious belief.

European politicians and journalists recognize or acknowledge the connection, if only inadvertently, when they simultaneously despise us Americans for supporting the death penalty and ridicule us for going to church. We might draw a conclusion from the fact that they do neither. Consider the facts on the ground (so to speak): In this country, 60 convicted murderers were executed in 2005 (and 53 in 2006), almost all of them in southern or southwestern and church-going states—Virginia and Georgia, for example, Texas and Oklahoma—states whose residents are among the most seriously religious Americans. Whereas in Europe, or "old Europe," no one was executed and, according to one survey, almost no one—and certainly no *soi-disant* intellectual—goes to church. In Germany, for example, leaving aside the Muslims and few remaining Jews, only 4 percent of the people regularly attend church services, in Britain and Denmark 3 percent, and in Sweden not much more than 1; in France there are more practicing Muslims than there are baptized Catholics, and a third of the Dutch do not know the "why" of Christmas. Hence, the empty or abandoned churches, or in Shakespeare's words, the "bare ruined choirs where late the sweet birds sang."

As for the death penalty, it is not enough to say that they (or their officials) are opposed to it. They want it abolished everywhere. They are not satisfied that it was abolished in France (in 1981, and over the opposition at the time of some 70 percent of the population), as well as in Britain, Germany, and the other countries of Old Europe, or that—according to a protocol attached to the European Convention on Human Rights—it

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will have to be abolished in any country seeking membership in the European Union; and its abolition in Samoa was greeted by an official declaration expressing Europe's satisfaction. (To paraphrase Hamlet, "what is Samoa to them or they to Samoa that they should judge for it?") In fact, their concern, if not their authority, extends far beyond the countries for which they are legally responsible.

Thus, the European Union adopted a charter confirming everyone's right to life and stating that "no one may be removed, expelled, or extradited to a State where there is a serious risk that he or she would be subjected to the death penalty." They even organized a World Congress Against the Death Penalty which, in turn, organized the first World Day Against the Death Penalty. They go so far as to intervene in our business, filing *amicus curiae* briefs in Supreme Court capital cases.

What explains this obsession with the death penalty? Hard to say, but probably the fact that abolishing it is one of the few things Europeans can do that make them feel righteous; in fact, very few. Nowhere in the new European constitution—some 300 pages long, not counting the appendages—is there any mention of religion, of Christian Europe, or of God. God is dead in Europe and, of course, something died with Him.

This "something" is the subject of Camus's famous novel *The Stranger*, first published in 1942, 60 years after Nietzsche first announced God's death, and another 60 before the truth of what he said became apparent, at least with respect to Europe and its intellectuals. The novel has been called a modern masterpiece—there was a time, and not so long ago, when students of a certain age were required to read it—and Meursault, its hero (actually, its antihero), is a murderer, but a different kind of murderer. What is different about him is that he murdered for no reason—he did it because the sun got in his eyes, *à cause du soleil*—and because he neither loves nor hates, and unlike the other people who inhabit his world, does not pretend to love or hate. He has no friends; indeed, he lives in a world in which there is no basis for friendship and no moral law; therefore, no one, not even a murderer, can violate the terms of friendship or break that law. As he said, the universe "is benignly indifferent" to how he lives.

It is a bleak picture, and Camus was criticized for painting it, but as he wrote in reply, "there is no other life possible for a man deprived of God, and all men are [now] in that position." But Camus was not the first European to draw this picture; he was preceded by Nietzsche who (see *Zarathustra*'s "Prologue") provided us with an account of human life in that godless and "brave new world." It will be a comfortable world—rather like that promised by the European Union—where men will "have their little pleasures for the day, and their little pleasures for the night," but no love, no longing, no striving, no hope, no gods or ideals, no politics ("too burdensome"), no passions (especially no anger), only "a regard for health." To this list, Camus rightly added, no death penalty.

This makes sense. A world so lacking in passion lacks the necessary components of punishment. Punishment has its origins in the demand for justice, and justice is demanded by angry, morally indignant men, men who are angry when someone else is robbed, raped, or murdered, men utterly unlike Camus's Meursault. This anger is an expression of their caring, and the just society needs citizens who care for each other, and for the community of which they are parts. One of the purposes of punishment, particularly capital punishment, is to recognize the legitimacy of that righteous anger and to satisfy and thereby to reward it. In this way, the death penalty, when duly or deliberately imposed, serves to strengthen the moral sentiments required by a self-governing community. ♦

How Bush Decided on the Surge

A year ago, we were losing in Iraq. Then the president made a momentous decision.

By Fred Barnes

The date: December 13, 2006. The location: a windowless conference room in the Pentagon known as the Tank. It was an inauspicious place for President Bush to confront the last major obstacle to the most important decision of his second term, perhaps of his entire presidency. And the president chose not to deal with his hosts, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, as a commander in chief would address subordinates. He hadn't come to the military brass's turf simply to order the five chiefs and two combatant commanders to begin a "surge" of additional troops in Iraq and to pursue a radical change in strategy. For that, he might have summoned them to the Oval Office or the Situation Room in the basement of the White House. He had come to the Pentagon to persuade and cajole, not command.

The president was in a weak and lonely position. After Republicans lost the Senate and House in the midterm election on November 7, nearly 200 members of Congress had met with him at the White House, mostly to grouse about Iraq. Democrats urged him to begin withdrawing troops, in effect accepting defeat. Many of the Republicans were panicky and blamed Bush and the Iraq war for the Democratic landslide. They feared the 2008 election would bring worse losses. They wanted out of Iraq too.

Inside his own administration, Bush had few allies on a surge in Iraq aside from the vice president and a coterie of National Security Council (NSC) staffers. The Joint Chiefs were disinclined to send more troops to Iraq or adopt a new strategy. So were General George Casey, the American commander in Iraq, and Centcom commander John Abizaid. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice favored a troop pullback. A week earlier, the Iraq Study Group, better known as the Baker-Hamilton Commission, had recommended a graceful exit from Iraq.

> In late 2006, panicking Democrats and Republicans in Congress were clamoring for withdrawal from the growing mayhem in Iraq. But retreat was the furthest thing from the president's mind. 'This is very trite,' he told me. 'Failure was no option. . . . I never thought I had to give up the goal of winning.' He wanted one more chance to win.

The presence of former secretary of state James Baker, a longtime Bush family friend, on the commission was viewed in Washington and around the world as significant. It was assumed, correctly in this instance, that Baker wouldn't have taken the post if the president had objected. (At least one top Bush adviser faulted Rice for not blocking the amendment by Republican representative Frank Wolf of Virginia that created the commission in the first place.) Baker was seen as providing cover for Bush to order a gradual retreat from Iraq.

But retreat was the furthest thing from Bush's mind. "This is very trite," he told me when I interviewed him recently. "Failure was no option . . . I never thought I had to give up the goal of winning." He wanted one more chance to win.At the Pentagon, Bush listened sympathetically to the complaints and worries of the chiefs. He promised to ease the strain the war had put on the military. Bush knew the idea of deploying more troops and changing the strategy would be a tough sell. It had been hatched outside the Pentagon. Co-opting the chiefs was "tricky busi-

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President Bush is joined by his top advisers during a two-day conference on the war in Iraq at Camp David on June 12, 2006.

WHITE HOUSE PHOTO BY ERIC DRAPER

ness," an aide said. It "would be the most demanding civil-military challenge the president would face."

Some of the president's aides feared the chiefs would raise such strenuous objections to a surge that Bush would back off or, worse, they'd mount a frontal assault to kill the idea. Neither fear was realized. The session in the Tank lasted nearly two hours. When it was over, the chiefs were unenthusiastic. Weeks earlier, when Bush aides had asked them to draft a plan for what a surge would look like militarily, the Pentagon had dawdled. Now, with Bush doing the asking, the chiefs agreed to produce a surge plan. Bush had gotten all he needed from them—acquiescence. The surge was on.

It wouldn't be announced until Bush addressed the nation on January 10, 2007. In the meantime, important details had to be worked out, such as getting assurances from Iraqi prime minister Nuri al-Maliki that he wouldn't interfere to protect Shia friends or militias. And when the Pentagon said one or two more Army brigades would suffice, the White House consulted General David Petraeus, whose selection as the new commander in Iraq had yet to be made public. Petraeus said he'd need a minimum of five and that's what he got. "I decided to go robust," Bush said. A senior adviser added: "If you're going to be a bear, be a grizzly."

For an unpopular president facing a Democratic Congress ferociously opposed to the war in Iraq, it was a risky and defiant decision. Now, a year later, it's clear the surge has been a success. Violence is down, Baghdad mostly pacified, many Sunni leaders have abandoned their insurgency, and Al Qaeda in Iraq has been crushed (though not eliminated).

The war is not over, nor have the Iraqi government's steps toward sectarian reconciliation between Shia and Sunnis amounted to much. But should progress continue to the point that American troops begin coming home in large numbers and Iraq emerge as a reasonably secure democracy, a possibility arises: that because of his surge decision, Bush not only won the war in Iraq but saved his presidency.

The summer before Bush's visit to the Tank, success in Iraq had seemed unattainable. As sectarian conflict mushroomed and violence in Baghdad lurched out of control, the president had reluctantly concluded the war in Iraq was being lost. His hopes for a stable Iraq, buoyed by three elections there in 2005 and the installation of a democratic government, had

been dashed. "There was just a constant stream of reporting about an impending civil war or innocent people being just run over by lawlessness and armed gangs," he told me. "The cumulative effect of the rise in violence suggested to me we were going to have to do something different."

By early November, the president had a pretty good idea what that something should be. On November 5, the Sunday before Election Day, he met with Robert Gates, deputy national security adviser and eventually CIA director in the administration of Bush's father, at his ranch in Crawford, Texas. Bush was looking for a replacement for Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, whose departure was to be announced the day after the election. Gates, president of Texas A&M University at the time, was his first choice.

President Bush walks through the Pentagon with the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Peter Pace, and Secretary of Defense Robert Gates in May 2007.

Gates "informed me in the course of the conversation that, as a member of the Baker-Hamilton Commission, he favored a surge of additional troops in Iraq," Bush said. This matched the president's own view. "I was thinking about a different strategy based upon U.S. troops moving in there in some shape or form, ill-defined at this point, but nevertheless helping to provide more security through a more robust counterinsurgency campaign," he said.

The president had been impressed by a plan developed by his NSC aides with advice from a loosely knit group of retired and active duty Army officers and civilian experts. It called for adding troops, protecting Iraqi citizens, securing Baghdad, and eventually pacifying the country. Bush received a daily written report on Iraq, and as conditions worsened in the fall he began to question NSC staffers informally about his options in Iraq. "Not every meeting in the White House is a formal meeting," Bush told me. "A lot of times decisions can be formulated outside the formal process."

The surge decision certainly was. By the time a formal NSC review began in October, followed by an "interagency" task force that met from mid-November to early January, Bush was quietly but solidly pro-surge. Had another credible plan for victory in Iraq come to his attention, Bush might have latched onto it. None did.

National security adviser Steve Hadley knew the president was single-mindedly committed to winning in Iraq. "He knew my anxiety and . . . knew my intensity on the issue," Bush said. "He read me like a book." Though the president hadn't requested it, Hadley's deputy J.D. Crouch assigned NSC aide William Luti, an ex-Navy officer, to prepare a surge blueprint. When Meghan O'Sullivan, the 37-year-old Oxford Ph.D. who ran the NSC's Iraq desk and was an early advocate of a surge, dropped by, Bush casually questioned her about Iraq. He also grilled Hadley, Crouch, and NSC official Peter Feaver about conditions in Iraq. "Any chance I had, when I was alone with them, I would probe, get their sentiments."

He was never alarmed, Bush said, by the opposition to a surge from nearly everyone in the political community, the media, and the foreign policy establishment—everyone, he pointed out, "except for the people inside the White House I trust. We've been in this foxhole now for seven years, and we're battle-tested, hardened veterans of dealing with the elite opinion in Washington, D.C."

Though Bush had all but decided on a surge before the formal "interagency review" began looking at new options on Iraq, the process wasn't a charade. It forced the president to consider alternatives. And it also involved agencies besides the White House—the Defense

D. MYLES CULLEN / DOD

and State departments, the CIA, the Joint Chiefs. "At a very minimum," the president said, it made them "feel they had a say in the development of a strategy." In this case, a small say.

The military, in Bush's view, has to be treated with special deference and tact. "One of the most important jobs of a commander in chief, and particularly in a time of war, is to be thoughtful and sensitive about the U.S. military," he said. Bush believes in persuading the military to embrace his policies rather than simply imposing them. In fact, a senior Pentagon official said Bush hoped the military would use the interagency review to push for a surge on its own. That didn't happen. The chiefs preferred the status quo, which meant sticking to a strategy of training the Iraqi army and leaving it with the job of defeating the insurgency.

The military, in Bush's view, has to be treated with special deference and tact. 'One of the most important jobs of a commander in chief, and particularly in a time of war, is to be thoughtful and sensitive about the U.S. military,' he said. Bush believes in persuading the military to embrace his policies rather than simply imposing them.

This was the attitude Bush sought to mollify when he went to the Tank, the regular meeting place for the Joint Chiefs. He sat across a table from them: chairman Peter Pace, Army chief Peter Schoomaker, Marine commandant James T. Conway, chief of naval operations Michael Mullen, and Air Force chief T. Michael Moseley. Casey and Abizaid, the combatant commanders, were also present. Two defense secretaries sat, a bit awkwardly, on Bush's side of the table, the outgoing Donald Rumsfeld and his successor, Robert Gates, who was confirmed the following week.

In September, Rumsfeld had rejected the idea of a surge when retired general Jack Keane, a former vice chief of staff of the Army and a member of the advisory Defense Policy Review Board, met with him and Pace. Keane insisted the "train and leave" strategy, as Bush referred to it, was failing. He proposed a counterinsurgency strategy, the addition of five to eight Army brigades, and a primary focus on taking back Baghdad. Rumsfeld was unconvinced. But now, with Bush favoring a strategy nearly identical to Keane's, he didn't object. "Rumsfeld was never a lose guy," a Bush adviser said. "He always wanted to win."

With Bush's connivance, Cheney asked the chiefs a series of questions designed to ease their qualms about a surge. What would be the consequences of losing in Iraq? Was the Iraqi army capable of quelling the sectarian violence without substantial help from American troops?

The chiefs had real grievances to air, and they didn't hold back. Schoomaker cited the stress on combat forces from repeated tours of duty in Iraq and Afghanistan. That, Bush told me, was "the main thing I remember from that meeting. That was clearly a factor in some of the people around the table's thinking . . . if you sustain our level, much less increase the level, you could, Mr. President, strain the force, which is an important consideration."

Bush agreed that strain was a problem. Then he delivered a sharp rejoinder, touching on a theme he returned to in nearly every meeting on Iraq. "The biggest strain on the force would be a defeat in Iraq," he said. Winning trumped strain. To alleviate the strain, the president committed to enlarging the Army by two divisions and increasing the size of the Marine Corps. The chiefs had two more complaints. The military, practically alone, was carrying the load in Iraq. Where were the civilians from the State Department and other agencies? Again, Bush agreed with their point. He promised to assign more civilians to Iraq. (The number of provincial reconstruction teams was soon doubled.)

Their final problem was the unreliability of Iraq's Shia government and army. Would Iraqi forces show up and do their part in the surge? And would they act in a non-sectarian manner, treating Sunnis the same as Shia? Bush said he'd get a public commitment on both counts from Maliki before making a final decision on the surge. And he did.

In early 2006, Bush was positive about prospects in Iraq. "First of all, 2005 was a fascinating year," he said. "You know, elections were held, the country looked relatively calm." The president wouldn't have been as hopeful if he'd talked to colonels and majors and captains on the ground in Iraq. As news traveled up the military chain of command in Iraq, then to the White House, it tended to get more optimistic. Bush's confidence about Iraq would soon be shattered.

On February 22, 2006, the golden dome of the al-Askari Mosque in Samarra, one of the holiest Shia mosques in Iraq, was bombed. That single act of violence would change everything. For several weeks, Iraqi Shia and their militias didn't react, and Bush and his advisers thought they'd dodged a bullet.

Then in April, violence exploded with a fury unseen in Iraq in the nearly three years since American troops had deposed Saddam Hussein. Shia militias hadn't responded to earlier al Qaeda and Sunni provocations. But now they erupted in a killing spree. Shia death squads slaughtered thousands of Sunnis. Baghdad became a free fire zone. Iraq was on the verge of an all-out civil war.

At the White House, officials began to question the military strategy in Iraq and the assumptions behind it. Americans forces had been pursuing a "small footprint." Its rationale was that Americans were an occupying force whose presence stoked the Iraqi insurgency. So the strategy was to keep U.S. troops out of Iraqi neighborhoods as much as practicable. They were camped instead in large installations, mostly outside Baghdad, and deployed on missions to destroy al Qaeda terrorists and insurgents.

Secretray of State Condoleezza Rice, Vice President Dick Cheney, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Peter Pace watch from Camp David as President Bush takes part in a teleconference from Baghdad on June 13, 2006. Bush had traveled to Iraq secretly the night before.

MATTHEW CAVANAUGH / EPA / CORBIS

There was another crucial assumption shared by American military leaders: Iraqis had to step up first. Violence wouldn't subside until the new Iraqi government took tangible steps toward reconciliation between Sunnis and Shia. Reconciliation was a precondition for security. And while the American military could train and equip an Iraqi army, it couldn't win the war. If Bush was skeptical of the small footprint, he never expressed it. He accepted the assurance of his commanders that the strategy was working—until Samarra.

After the bombing, NSC officials were increasingly dubious. They weren't alone. General Keane kept in contact with retired and active Army officers, including Petraeus, who believed the war could be won with more troops and a population protection, or counterinsurgency, strategy—but not with a small footprint. At the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) in Washington, a former West Point professor (and a current Weekly Standard contributing editor), Frederick Kagan, was putting together a detailed plan to secure Baghdad. But the loudest voice for a change in Iraq was Senator John McCain of Arizona. He and his sidekick, Senator Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, traveled repeatedly to Iraq. McCain badgered Bush and Hadley with phone calls urging more troops and a different strategy. Together, McCain, Keane, Petraeus, the network of Army officers, and Kagan provided a supportive backdrop for adopting a new strategy.

White House thinking about Iraq changed quickly, at least at the staff level. The reigning assumptions about the conflict were discarded. American troops weren't seen as targets and catalysts for violence anymore. Iraqis wanted their protection. Nor was the insurgency the biggest threat to stability. Sectarian violence, fueled by Al Qaeda in Iraq, was. To tamp it down, a new strategy was required.

The counterinsurgency option, with its emphasis on protecting people, was soon popular with NSC officials. At O'Sullivan's request, Army general Kevin Bergner was assigned to her staff. He had conducted a small counterinsurgency operation in Mosul in 2005 that succeeded in reducing violence and restoring normal life. Around the same time, Colonel H.R. McMaster had led a successful counterinsurgency effort to secure Tal Afar in northwest Iraq.

To stimulate fresh consideration of Iraq strategy, the NSC staff organized a panel of experts to address the president and his war cabinet at Camp David in mid-June. The two-day meeting at the presidential retreat loomed as a potential turning point in the Bush administration's approach to Iraq.

The four-man panel wasn't stacked. Kagan spoke in

favor of additional troops and outlined his plan for pacifying Baghdad with a "clear, hold, and build" strategy. American soldiers, along with Iraqi troops, would do the holding, living in Baghdad and guarding its citizens, Sunni and Shia alike. Robert Kaplan, the foreign correspondent and military writer now teaching at the Naval Academy, talked about successful counterinsurgency campaigns in the past. (Kaplan's books are among Bush's favorites.) Kaplan neither advocated a troop buildup nor opposed it.

Countering Kagan, Michael Vickers, a former Green Beret and CIA operations officer, explained how Iraq could actually be won with fewer troops, not more. Vickers is now an assistant secretary of defense. The fourth panelist was Eliot Cohen, now a State Department adviser. Bush had read his book on wartime leadership, *Supreme Command*. Cohen reemphasized its theme: Leaders should hold their generals accountable if a war is being lost or won.

Bush's reaction to the panel offered no hint of his thinking. After the first day's session, he secretly flew to Iraq to attend the inauguration of Maliki's government. Bush's advisers, still at Camp David and expecting to see him in person, were surprised when he spoke to them by teleconference from Baghdad.

To stimulate fresh consideration of Iraq strategy, the NSC staff asked four experts—Robert Kaplan, Frederick Kagan, Michael Vickers, and Eliot Cohen—to address the president and his war cabinet at Camp David in mid-June. Bush's reaction to the panel offered no hint of his thinking.

Rather than a turning point, the events of June prompted a fleeting moment of optimism. The week before Camp David, Abu Musab al Zarqawi, the al Qaeda leader in Iraq, had been killed. (Cheney has a piece of the house where Zarqawi died on display at his residence.) And not only was Iraq getting a new and presumably more effective government, but American and Iraqi forces were jointly beginning an initiative to curb violence in Baghdad.

Organized by Casey, Operation Together Forward embraced the essence of counterinsurgency—clear, hold, and build—on paper. But in the field, it was counterinsurgency-lite with no additional American troops. Americans and Iraqis were to together drive out al Qaeda and the insurgents and take over Baghdad neighborhoods, with the Iraqis then staying behind to keep them secure. But many Iraqi units failed to show up. Those that did refused to stick around. The operation fizzled, as did a second attempt dubbed Together Forward II.

Bush, not heeding Cohen's advice, didn't blame Casey. The strategy "was unable to work because the clear, build, and hold was not complete," he said. "We would clear, we would somewhat build, but we wouldn't hold. And the sectarian violence that I thought had been avoided right after the Golden Mosque bombing began to spiral and neighborhoods were being cleansed."

The president, normally upbeat, was growing worried. At almost every meeting on Iraq, he emphasized "winning." It was Bush's mantra. But now he was losing the biggest gamble of his presidency. Another recurring theme was the consequences of defeat for America, Iraq, and the Middle East. "I was constantly trying to think about what do we need to do to succeed, what was it that was necessary," he said.

> And so the first thing we did, here in the White House, with a very small group of people, was work on whether a different strategy was needed. And there were competing strategies. One was to keep it the way it was. Two was clear, build, and hold with a counterinsurgency strategy, empowering the Iraqis, but at the same time having enough troops there to make sure that the security situation changed, primarily in the capital as well as Anbar province, where the Sunnis were being harmed greatly by al Qaeda.
>
> The other one was kind of the burnout strategy—step back, let it burn out, contain it, go to the borders, encampments outside the city, let them fight it out, and eventually it will fade out, and then we'll make sure it doesn't get totally out of hand, but out of hand albeit to a certain extent.

In the NSC's inner circle, Bush's partiality was clear. He liked option two, what later became known as the "surge." He got plenty of reinforcement for that position. Hadley and Crouch traveled to Iraq in late October and early November: Hadley to talk to political leaders, Crouch to spend time with military units. On his return, Hadley sent a memo to Bush and his war cabinet that criticized Maliki, but also pointedly hinted at a surge of additional troops in Iraq. The memo was leaked to the *New York Times*.

"We might also need to fill the current four-brigade gap in Baghdad with coalition (American) forces if reliable Iraqi forces are not identified," Hadley wrote. And the president should "ask Secretary of Defense and General Casey to make a recommendation about whether more forces are needed in Baghdad."

Crouch visited Anbar and found what O'Sullivan and others had also discovered in Iraq: American soldiers were now welcomed. Anbar, once controlled by Sunni insurgents

Vice President Cheney, Deputy National Security Adviser J.D. Crouch, and National Security Adviser Stephen Hadley look on in the Rose Garden on June 8, 2006, as President Bush discusses the death of terrorist leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi.

and Al Qaeda in Iraq, had turned. The Sunnis had revolted against their al Qaeda allies and joined forces with Americans. With more troops, U.S. officers said they could gain control of the entire Anbar region.

On November 30, the day after Hadley's memo became public, Bush met with Maliki in Amman, Jordan. He had "a couple of important factors" to work out before committing to a surge. "One was, would I have a partner to deal with in the prime minister of Iraq," Bush said. "I went out to the region to have a little sit-down with him, to get a sense of his intensity in dealing with killers, whether they be Sunni or Shia. In other words, there had to be Iraqi buy-in to any new strategy in order for it to be effective."

The second issue was whether the Iraqi troops would participate in a surge and perform better than they had in Together Forward I and II. Maliki claimed the Iraqi army could handle the job of securing Baghdad alone. His attitude, the president said, was, "We need you there for a while, we can do this, we'll take care of it." But "after the meeting, General Casey said they can't." Bush believed Casey.

It was weeks before Bush got satisfaction from Maliki on the two points, weeks that included numerous phone conversations and talks by teleconference. Finally, in a speech four days before Bush announced the surge, Maliki gave public assurances that Iraqi troops would be fully engaged in pacifying Baghdad and would act in a nonsectarian manner.

In Washington, the president got little satisfaction from the interagency review of Iraq policy. Instead of a surge, the State Department favored a strategy of pulling troops out of Baghdad and allowing the Sunnis and Shia to finish their bloody struggle. When Bush heard about this idea, he rejected it out of hand. "I don't believe you can have political reconciliation if your capital city is burning," he said.

The Pentagon was on Bush's side, arguing that American troops shouldn't be ordered to stand by while people were being massacred. But, as Bush was to hear firsthand during his visit to the Tank, the military wasn't favorably disposed to a surge either. During the review, Joint Chiefs of Staff representatives stuck to the line that political reconciliation, not a troop buildup, was the key to reducing violence in Iraq. They also said a greater civilian effort was needed in Iraq. As for the U.S. military, the status quo in Iraq was fine.

Bush wasn't buying that. On December 11, Bush had five military experts to the Oval Office to talk about the Iraq war. Keane, a friend of Cheney but almost unknown to Bush, made the strongest impression, arguing that "train and leave" wasn't a strategy for winning. He laid out a case for the surge, reinforcing Bush's strong inclination. Retired generals Wayne Downing and Barry McCaffrey opposed the surge. (McCaffrey later changed his mind.) Stephen Biddle of the Council on Foreign Relations, a Democrat, criticized the gradual retreat urged by the Baker-Hamilton Commission. And Eliot Cohen talked about civil-military aspects of the Iraq war and said Bush should talk to younger officers, not just the generals.

That afternoon, Keane and Frederick Kagan gave Cheney a full briefing, including a slide show, on their surge plan. It had been developed at AEI with help from Keane's network of officers. Cheney didn't need much encouraging. Bush told Cheney biographer (and Weekly Standard senior writer) Stephen F. Hayes last year that the vice president had always been a "more troops guy." The surge neatly fit Cheney's specifications. Keane and Kagan became a sought-after pair in Washington, a gravelly voiced general and a young professor with a plan to win in Iraq. They gave briefings to Hadley and Pentagon officials, among others.

Bush was originally scheduled to deliver a nationally televised speech on Iraq the second week in December, a day or so after the Tank session. But the president wasn't ready. He wanted to give Gates time to visit Iraq. And a key decision—about sending troops to Anbar, home of the Sunni Awakening—was still to

UPI PHOTO / MARTIN SIMO

be made. The speech was put off until after New Year's.

When Gates returned from Iraq just before Christmas, he brought Casey's recommendation for a surge of one or two brigades—a mini-surge. Bush felt that wouldn't work. He had agreed with Hadley and Crouch that Anbar was an opportunity worth seizing. He didn't want to "piecemeal the operation" by tackling the province later. Once he'd "made the decision to cleanse Anbar and settle down Baghdad at the same time," Bush said, it had to be five brigades.

By this time, Petraeus was a factor in the decision-making. Both Gates and Rumsfeld had recommended him. He was already a favorite of Cheney, who'd spent a day at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, with Petraeus while the general was writing the new Army counterinsurgency manual. Petraeus gave a pre-publication copy of the manual to Cheney.

Though he was replacing Casey and jettisoning his strategy, the president didn't want to embarrass him. Bush admires Casey and rejects the Lincoln analogy: that like President Lincoln he fired generals until he found one who would win the war. When I raised the analogy, Bush interrupted. "McClellan and Casey," he said. "That's not accurate." Lincoln fired General George McClellan and ultimately made Ulysses Grant his top commander. According to the analogy, Petraeus is Bush's Grant. "I wouldn't go there," Bush told me. He promoted Casey to Army chief of staff.

The Petraeus factor strengthened Hadley's hand in working on Bush's speech. Words matter in presidential addresses, even a single word. The Pentagon wanted Bush to announce a surge of "up to" five brigades. Hadley urged the president to be more specific and forceful. Bush agreed and said he was "committed" to sending five brigades.

And if a question lingered about his intentions on Anbar, Bush answered it in his speech. "I have given orders to increase American forces in Anbar Province by 4,000 troops," he declared.

The 20-minute speech on January 10, 2007, was not Bush's most eloquent. And it wasn't greeted with applause.

WHITE HOUSE PHOTO

President Bush prepares to announce the surge in an address to the nation from the White House library on January 10, 2007.

Democrats condemned the surge and Republicans were mostly silent. Polls showing strong public opposition to the war in Iraq were unaffected.

But the president, as best I could tell, wasn't looking for affirmation. He was focused solely on victory in Iraq. The surge may achieve that. And if it does, Bush's decision to spurn public opinion and the pressure of politics and intensify the war in Iraq will surely be regarded as the greatest of his presidency. ♦

We Are Winning. We Haven't Won.

America has a chance at a historic victory in Iraq, but only if we don't pull out too many forces too soon.

PHOTOS BY MAX BOOT

By Max Boot

Baghdad

Nine months ago, when I was last in Iraq, the conventional wisdom about the war effort was unduly pessimistic. Many politicians, and not only Democrats, had declared the surge a failure when it had barely begun. Today we know that the surge has succeeded: Iraqi and American deaths fell by approximately 80 percent between December 2006 and December 2007, and life is returning to a semblance of normality in much of Baghdad. Now the danger is that public opinion may be turning too optimistic. While Iraq has made near-miraculous progress in the past year, daunting challenges remain, and victory is by no means assured.

I saw many achievements and an equal number of obstacles during 11 days touring the American brigades spread across central and northern Iraq. (I was traveling in the company of my friend and fellow author Bing West at the invitation of General David Petraeus.) In broad strokes, the picture that emerged was of an Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) organization that is on the run but not yet fully eliminated. AQI has been largely chased out of the capital and its southern and northern belts, but the terrorists have taken refuge

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The lead Humvee from Colonel Keith A. Barclay's column after it was hit by an IED January 15 at 12:02 P.M. in Mosul. No one riding in the Humvee was hurt, though an Iraqi passerby was hit by shrapnel.

in the rural areas of Diyala, Salahaddin, and Ninewa provinces, where, as part of a new operation called Phantom Phoenix, American and Iraqi troops are starting to root them out. Likewise, the Jaysh al-Mahdi, the Shiite extremist group headed by Moktada al Sadr, has seen its influence curbed and its ranks splintered, but it remains a threat.

If any city has replaced Baghdad as a hub of AQI operations, it is Mosul, a metropolis of 1.8 million people that, until just a few weeks ago, was garrisoned by only one American battalion—less than a thousand soldiers. In the month preceding my visit on January 15, Mosul had been hit by 153 IEDs (improvised explosive devices) and had 260 incidents of gunfire. The growing security in Baghdad allowed U.S. commanders to move a second battalion up to Mosul to address the threat. Now U.S. forces are pushing into west Mosul, a predominantly Sunni Arab area that has become an al Qaeda stronghold. (Eastern Mosul, with a heavily Kurdish population, is more peaceful.)

As we drove the streets of west Mosul in a Humvee, I saw IED-scarred roads flooded from broken water mains—something I had last seen in Ramadi in April 2007. In many areas, shops were closed and no people were visible on the streets.

While getting a briefing on the security station at Combat Outpost Eagle, a fortified building located in the heart of west Mosul and jointly manned by Iraqi and American troops, we heard an explosion in the distance. It was an OH-58 Kiowa helicopter firing a Hellfire missile at a truck that was stuffed with munitions. Five of the seven men inside the vehicle were killed in the initial strike, but two man-

As critical as more troops have been to Iraq's dramatic turnaround, no less important was General Petraeus's decision to focus on securing the safety of the Iraqi population—a basic tenet of counterinsurgency strategy that had never been implemented on a large scale in Iraq. Iraqis in turn responded by ratting out the terrorists hiding in plain sight.

MAP: THE WEEKLY STANDARD

aged to get out and take refuge in a neighboring building. U.S. troops arrived on the scene, and missiles and tank shells poured into the building. One of the terrorists was shot while trying to sneak out, while the other one blew himself up with a suicide vest.

Our little convoy—four Humvees led by Lieutenant Colonel Keith A. Barclay, commander of the 3rd squadron (the cavalry term for a battalion) of the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment—headed over to check out the scene of the fighting. As we were driving through a giant puddle, I heard from inside my armored Humvee a dull roar, and smoke started rising ahead of us. The lead Humvee had hit an IED that sheared off the engine compartment. As soon as the bomb went off, insurgents in a building to our left opened fire with automatic weapons. An Abrams tank coming to our assistance hit another IED that tore off its tracks. The soldiers in our group refrained from shooting because they could not see any targets. As soon as the firing stopped, we got out to assess the damage and to tow the damaged Humvee back to base. Luckily no one in our convoy was injured, but flying shrapnel tore off the arm of an Iraqi man standing nearby, leaving him screaming in agony.

My bleak impressions of northern Iraq were reinforced the next day while visiting Bayji, site of an important oil refinery in Salahaddin province. There are too few American and Iraqi troops stationed here to control a city with a population of 140,000, and it shows.

Led by Colonel Scott McBride, commander of the 1st Brigade of the 101st Airborne Division, we toured the marketplace. The first vendor we talked to informed us that he had been a lieutenant colonel in the Iraqi army and was not happy to be reduced to selling vegetables. His view of the current government is bleak, but his face lit up when asked his opinion of the preceding regime. "Saddam good!" he proclaimed, giving the dead dictator an enthusiastic thumbs up. (I pointed out through an interpreter that one of the benefits of the change of regime is that he is able to freely express his feelings about the current government, something that he admitted was not possible in Saddam's time.)

In the next store we stopped at, McBride asked a merchant how he was doing. "How am I doing?" the man replied. "There is no fuel, no electricity, no hope. I'd rather be dead." I didn't hear the end of his litany of woe because I was too busy ducking after someone across the street took a potshot at us. As we walked out of the marketplace, we didn't see a single Iraqi policeman on duty. An American officer explained that this was because the police took heavy casualties anytime they ventured into this market.

A good deal of work obviously remains to be done before northern Iraq is pacified—the region now accounts for 61 percent of all attacks in Iraq (Baghdad Province is second with 17 percent). But even here you find pockets of normality. We were told that Tal

Afar, which had been occupied by the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment in 2005-06, remains relatively stable. We saw for ourselves the resounding success in Kirkuk, a city made up of Kurds and Sunni Arabs. While Bayji has been hit with nine major VBIEDs (vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices) in the past two months, Kirkuk has gone four months without any successful such attacks. The Kirkuk marketplace is bustling and full of Iraqi police. The vibe here was as friendly as it had been hostile in Bayji. No one shot at us. The highlight of my visit was buying a small mountain of delicious baklava for less than $5 from a friendly storekeeper.

The security situation is just as good in western Iraq. Anbar Province, the scene of the heaviest fighting from 2003 to 2007, has become so quiet that Marines are complaining of boredom and their inability to earn combat action ribbons. The transformation in the southern Baghdad belt is less complete but in many cases just as dramatic. We visited the Yusufiya area, formerly known as the "Triangle of Death." Until 2007, there were few American troops here, and those were under siege. Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Rohling, commander of the 3rd battalion of the 101st Airborne Division, told us that the battalion which had garrisoned the area in 2006-07 had lost 29 men; their battalion commander had been wounded twice; and two of their men had been kidnapped by AQI. By contrast, Rohling's battalion had suffered only one death and 18 wounded since arriving in November. "The enemy has become very weak," an Iraqi army officer who works closely with the Americans told us. "They are breathing their last breath."

Similar sentiments were expressed in the Dora district of western Baghdad. A predominantly Sunni neighborhood, Dora had been the scene of heavy fighting in 2006, which turned it into a ghost town. The American-led offensive of 2007 produced a dramatic turnaround. Concrete walls were erected to limit access to the neighborhood while American and Iraqi security forces, working out of small bases, confronted the militants. The cumulative impact of such steps has been dramatic: Multi-National Division-Baghdad calculates that 75 percent of the capital is now under control, up from just 8 percent a year ago.

As we walked down Airplane Road, Dora's main drag, we saw shops and schools open, people in the streets, and trash being picked up. Even the concrete walls, potentially an eyesore, have been prettified with well-executed murals and trees planted alongside them. Housing prices are on the rise. We concluded our stroll with a gargantuan meal—what troops call a "goat grab" because you're supposed to grab hunks of lamb or goat with your hands—at the home of a Sunni physician who has been working with American forces to improve the neighborhood.

Many factors account for the dramatic turnaround. First was the willingness of President Bush to commit more American forces to what was widely deemed a lost cause. Just as important was General David Petraeus's decision to switch the U.S. mission from handing off authority willy-nilly to the Iraqis in favor of trying to secure the safety of the Iraqi population—a basic tenet of counterinsurgency strategy that had never been implemented on a large-scale in Iraq. This meant moving many U.S. soldiers off giant forward operating bases into smaller joint security stations and combat outposts where they could work closely with Iraqi security forces to gain the confidence of the population. Iraqis in turn responded by ratting out the terrorists hiding in plain sight.

Two merchants in Bayji on January 16: When asked how he was doing, the man on the right said, "'How am I doing?' There is no fuel, no electricity, no hope. I'd rather be dead."

But while this growing success would not have been possible absent the American role, it also could not have occurred were it not for the willingness of tens of thousands of Iraqis to come forward and take up arms against

Even more important than the Iraqi Security Forces has been the role played by Concerned Local Citizens (CLCs)—mainly Sunnis who have banded together to chase insurgents out of their neighborhoods. This process, known as the Awakening (*sahwa* in Arabic), started in 2006 and has spread across all Sunni areas and even into parts of the largely Shiite south.

CLC members man a checkpoint in Bayji on January 16.

extremists, both Sunni and Shia. The Iraqi Security Forces, particularly the army, have grown in size and effectiveness over the past year. In much of southern Iraq, they are the ones maintaining order: imperfectly to be sure, but with only minimal help from coalition forces.

But even more important than the Iraqi Security Forces has been the role played by what American commanders call Concerned Local Citizens (CLCs)—mainly though not exclusively Sunnis who have banded together to chase insurgents out of their neighborhoods. This process, known as the Awakening (*sahwa* in Arabic), started in Anbar Province in September 2006 and has since spread across all the Sunni areas of Iraq and even into parts of the largely Shiite south. There are more than 80,000 CLCs—with 70,000 of them on the American payroll earning an average of $300 a month: a good wage in Iraq. They enhance not only security but also economic activity.

This movement has been criticized by some Shiite leaders, including Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, who fear that it has the makings of an anti-government militia. To assuage such concerns, American commanders are taking care to maintain limits on the CLCs: Every member has his biometric information—fingerprints, voice prints, retinal scans—collected, and all the groups are carefully monitored by Iraqi and coalition forces. They are forbidden from taking part in offensive operations. Their work consists of manning checkpoints and fingering insurgents.

Many of the CLC members are former insurgents themselves who made a conscious decision to switch sides, and coalition forces have received few reports of any going back to fighting the government. The success of the CLCs may be judged from the fact that they have themselves become a top target for AQI, which has managed to kill several of the CLCs' high-profile leaders. The CLC chieftains we spoke to know they are in a fight to the death, and they are grimly determined to defeat the Islamist extremists who have alienated most of their erstwhile supporters.

American commanders who work closely with them rave about the effectiveness of the CLCs. Their main concern is the opposite of the one so often heard in Washington: Instead of worrying about what the CLCs will do if they remain in business, they worry about what they will do if they go out of business. The latter danger arises because senior American and Iraqi leaders are understandably determined to prevent the emergence of another militia. They are pushing to disband the CLCs, with 20 percent moving into the Iraqi Security Forces and the rest into civilian jobs. This is a plan fraught with problems. In the first place, the Maliki government has been dragging its feet on incorporating these mainly Sunni volunteers into the Iraqi Security Forces. And there are few civilian jobs available at a time when unemployment is running at 50 percent in some areas. The U.S. high command is pushing for the creation of a jobs program modeled on the Civilian Conservation Corps in the Great Depression, but so far funding has been anemic from both the Iraqi and American governments. In any case, most of the CLCs we spoke to expressed scant interest in digging ditches or cleaning streets—they prefer the prestige that comes from carrying a gun.

American commanders in the field fear that they will be forced to stop paying the CLCs without being able to provide them another livelihood—something that senior officers in Baghdad privately assured us would never hap-

pen. Nevertheless, a number of officers scattered across the country independently used the phrase "perfect storm" to describe what might happen this summer with a reduction in the CLC ranks.

This worst-case scenario centers around the planned reduction of U.S. forces from 170,000 (20 brigade combat teams) to the pre-surge level of 140,000 (15 brigade combat teams). In Baghdad this could mean a cut from 32 battalions to 20. Can the security situation continue to improve with one-fourth of the coalition force withdrawn? We will soon find out, since the drawdown will be finished by mid-July.

Another element of the feared "perfect storm" is the planned release of thousands of inmates from the U.S.-run detention facilities at Camps Bucca and Cropper—the successors to the notorious Abu Ghraib. The number of detainees in American custody rose from 14,000 at the beginning of 2007 to 25,000 at the end of the year—a trend that closely corresponded with the fall in violence. Senior commanders think that the prisoner population, which is 80 percent Sunni, can be safely trimmed because much of the Sunni population has switched sides against AQI. Although no numerical quota has been set, the goal is to reduce the overall prison population to roughly 12,000 to 15,000 by the end of 2008. Since American forces detain an average of 28 insurgents a day, this will require releasing perhaps 18,000 of the current detainees.

Sensitive to charges that previous prisoner releases worsened the situation, the American high command has been careful to put checks in place and to pledge that the releases will be suspended if the recidivism rate is too high. For the first time, American forces are continuing counterinsurgency inside the prison walls, using educational and vocational programs to wean inmates away from violence. Every potential releasee will be vetted by the American operational forces, who will have veto power. And in most cases sheikhs or family members will be made to sign pledges holding them responsible for the good conduct of ex-detainees.

Senior American commanders argue that under those circumstances the prisoner release can be managed without endangering hard-won security gains: that, indeed, releasing prisoners can win even more goodwill among an Iraqi populace that has seen too many of its sons and brothers locked up on flimsy evidence. But out in the field many combat officers express serious misgivings. They note that Iraq has no parole system, and they do not have the manpower to monitor those who are released. There are, moreover, no jobs available for them. "The detainee release is not good. It's just one more rock in the rucksack of commanders who already have a heavy load to carry," one brigade commander complained. "It's the first time we've given the enemy a free ride in the middle of a war."

American commanders also worry about the performance, or the lack thereof, of the Iraqi government. The theory behind the surge is that a reduction in violence would make possible political reconciliation. There is some evidence of this occurring, especially at the local level. But at the national level the record is spotty. To its credit, the Iraqi parliament has passed an accountability and justice law (still awaiting approval by the presidency council) that will, if implemented (a big if), allow thousands of ex-Baathists to seek government employment once again. And even without passing a hydrocarbon law the government is sharing oil revenues with the provinces.

But the government has done a terrible job of delivering basic services: water, electricity, garbage collection, sewers, education, and all the rest. The situation is especially bad in Sunni areas. We were told that Sunni areas of Baghdad get only one to two hours of electricity from the national grid every day, compared to eight to nine hours for Shiite areas. "The government is paralyzed and incompetent," an aide to one of Prime Minister Maliki's rivals (and coalition partners) told us, echoing a widely heard viewpoint.

General Mustafa, a former Iraqi army brigadier general, is one of the CLC leaders in Arab Jabour.

To the extent that the government of Iraq functions at

We need to make a long-term commitment to prevent Iraq from sliding back into the kind of civil war that began to erupt in 2006. As Abu Abed, a leader of the CLCs in the Ameriya neighborhood of Baghdad, put it, 'If coalition forces left it would be a disaster. All of us would get killed.'

U.S. soldiers walk through a marketplace in Kirkuk on January 15.

the local level, at least in the regions we visited, it is due largely to American battalions, who are arranging everything from the supply of fresh water to the installation of street lights. American commanders are even trying to improve coordination between provincial governors and the central government in Baghdad. They undertake "helicopter governance" by flying officials, who would otherwise never talk, to meet with one another.

After almost two years in power, Maliki is getting poor reviews. Iraqi and American officials alike complain about his reliance on a small coterie of hardline Shiite aides with close ties to Iran. He is building up the prime minister's office into its own power center while shunning the ministries that are supposed to be in charge of governance (and that are mainly in the hands of other parties). For instance, he has created a parallel defense ministry known as the Office of the Commander in Chief that answers to him personally, and he has put Shiite sectarians in charge of the Implementation and Follow-up Committee for National Reconciliation, which vets new recruits to the security forces.

Maliki's aides thoroughly exasperated their American interlocutors when they sat down late last year to negotiate the terms of the United Nations Security Council Resolution that will extend the mandate of coalition forces in Iraq through the end of 2008. The Iraqis tried to put limitations on coalition forces that would have crippled their ability to operate effectively. Maliki eventually came to an agreement with the American representatives, but the U.S. side has vowed not to repeat this exasperating process when the two nations sit down to negotiate the looming Status of Forces Agreement which will set the terms of a future American role in Iraq. The Americans are demanding that Maliki involve the foreign ministry and more of his coalition allies in these crucial talks.

That echoes a demand made by the Kurdish parties, which have been key Maliki supporters. They have told the prime minister that he has to involve a broader variety of advisers and to consult more closely with President Jalal Talabani (a Kurd), Vice President Adil Abd al-Mahdi (a Shiite), and Vice President Tariq al-Hashimi (a Sunni) as part of the "three plus one" process. Maliki has promised to be more inclusive in the future. If he isn't, he could face a "no confidence" motion in parliament.

American diplomatic and military officials have an increasingly low opinion of Maliki. They argue, as do many Iraqis, that he has not been able to overcome the paranoid, conspiratorial habits he developed as an exile plotting against Saddam Hussein. "I don't think we can stay with Maliki and make any progress," a mid-level American officer who has worked closely with the Iraqi government told us. But, there is no consensus alternative. The most likely successor would be Adil Abd al-Mahdi. He is considered a better politician and a more charming fellow, but he represents the Islamic Supreme Council of

Iraq, a party with close links to Iran and with its own sectarian militia, the Badr Organization.

There is also the danger that if Maliki were toppled the Iraqi parliament would be paralyzed for months, as happened in the first half of 2006 when the previous prime minister, Ibrahim al-Jaafari, was ousted. That period saw a staggering increase in violence—an experience that no one wants to repeat. For now both the Americans and the other Iraqi political parties are resigned to working with Maliki.

The problems with Iraq's government run much deeper than the prime minister. Many were created by the Coalition Provisional Authority and the United Nations when they crafted Iraq's constitution and electoral system in 2003-04. As things currently stand, Iraqis vote for parties, not individuals, and the parties have largely been based on ethno-sectarian identity, not on differing policy preferences. That leaves a handful of unaccountable party bosses in Iraq free to divide the spoils of government between them. No process has yet been created for provincial elections, so there is no effective mechanism for voicing the concerns of ordinary Iraqis in the halls of government.

What is desperately needed is an electoral system that allows voters to select individual candidates to represent individual districts. Also needed is a law spelling out provincial powers and another law setting the date for provincial elections. The problem is that these proposed changes have been stymied in Baghdad, where the reigning elite has little incentive to change the system that empowers them.

If the electoral system were changed, it might produce a more moderate and inclusive government. The Awakening movement, in particular, chafes at its lack of representation. Its ethos is nationalist and secular; it has little sympathy for the Islamist politicians who are so prominent in the current government. If the Awakening organizes politically, it could well be a force for positive change. But that may require covert help from the United States, given how well-financed the incumbent parties are. The United States played this sort of role during the Cold War when the CIA heavily subsidized Italy's Christian Democrats and other anti-communist parties. But in Iraq the Bush administration and Congress have fallen prey to self-defeating idealism: They refuse to offer subsidies to the more moderate politicians while Iran and other nations offer copious subsidies to the radicals.

In order to secure the military victories that U.S. and Iraqi forces have won at great cost in the past year, the CIA and State Department should engage more effectively in political warfare to shape the Iraqi political process in ways conducive to American and Iraqi interests. (This most assuredly doesn't mean boosting Langley's favorite Iraqi politician, Ayad Allawi.) Otherwise, there is a real danger that the situation may regress.

The shortcomings of Iraq's politicians, who are struggling to overcome decades of dictatorship, should not be taken as an indictment of Iraqi society as a whole—any more than the frequent failings of America's political class are an indictment of our country as a whole. Although I saw and heard much in Iraq that left me concerned about its future, I also saw many reasons for optimism.

One cause for cheer is how adept American forces have become at counterinsurgency operations and how deeply they have come to understand Iraqi society. Their level of effectiveness is light years ahead of where it was when

Colonel Abbas on the Besyama range complex. Behind him is one of the new Iraqi army BMP armored vehicles.

I first visited Iraq in August 2003. The senior American commanders—General David Petraeus and Lieutenant General Ray Odierno (who is about to be reassigned)—are outstanding. Petraeus, in particular, should be remembered as the Matthew Ridgway of this war, rescuing a failing war effort just as Ridgway rescued the United States in the Korean War. But similar skill and even greater

bravery is displayed every day by tens of thousands of lower-ranking officers and enlisted personnel who have embraced their largely "non-kinetic" counterinsurgency mission. Sergeant Adam Farmer, an 82nd Airborne soldier stationed in the Adhamiya neighborhood of Baghdad for the past year, spoke for many grunts when he said of his soldiers, "Deep down they believe in the mission of extracting the s—heads from this area."

An even more profound cause for hope is that the Americans are finding so many effective partners—Iraqis who are willing to risk their necks to fight with the coalition against extremists, both Shiite and Sunni. Some of these men are members of the CLCs. Others are part of the Iraqi army, which in many areas is undertaking the same kind of civil-affairs work as the U.S. Army and the Marine Corps.

A sign on the elevator at MNFI (Multi-National Forces Iraq) headquarters near Baghdad airport encouages troop solidarity.

The one who stuck out the most during my recent trip was Colonel Abbas Fadhil, commander of the Besmaya Range Complex, an Iraqi army training center east of Baghdad. A burly man with a bald, bullet-shaped head, Colonel Abbas, who is (like many Iraqis) of mixed Shiite and Sunni ancestry, was an officer in Saddam's army. But he had little love for a dictator who had jailed his father, an army general, for three years. In 2003, Abbas refused to fight the American invasion, telling his men to lay down their arms and go home. "If the Americans had not been successful, I would have been killed with my family," he notes.

When the Iraqi army was being re-created in mid-2003, he was one of the first volunteers. He even went on television to urge other Iraqis to sign up. This caused the Jaysh al-Mahdi to attack his home, killing his daughter. But Abbas remains undaunted in his determination to work with his "American brothers" to make his country a better place.

"All soldiers say Mr. President George Bush is the hero man in the world," Abbas told us in fractured English. "He's fighting on behalf of all the world, not just Iraq. Mr. President Bush is fighting on behalf of humanity. . . . America was the only country in the world that decided to help the people of Iraq. Under Saddam we had a very black future. We had no refrigerators, no electricity. We lived like the cow. . . . Now we have a future."

Lest this make Abbas sound like an unworldly idealist, unmindful of the horrors that have befallen his country since 2003, it is important to note that he has been not only brave but also skillful in working against the enemies of his country. Not long ago, a Shiite extremist group tried to infiltrate a soldier into his base to kill him. U.S. officials learned of the plot and sent a frantic warning to one of Abbas's American advisers. Abbas was not the least surprised by the warning. He kindly asked the American adviser whether he would be interested in taking custody of the would-be assassin whom he already had locked up. Abbas maintains his own intelligence network to warn him of such dangers.

As we ended our tour of his well-run range complex, I asked Abbas about his political views. "We don't follow any party," he said. "We follow the Iraqi flag. We don't like Badr or Mahdi. They are for Iran. We are for Iraq."

By helping leaders like Abbas, the United States has a real chance to secure a historic victory in Iraq—one that would deal a heavy blow to Sunni and Shiite extremists alike. But only if we don't pull out too many forces too soon, whether motivated by the illusion that we have already won or the delusion that we can never win. The reality is that we are winning but that the war is far from over. We need to make a long-term commitment to prevent Iraq from sliding back into the kind of civil war that began to erupt in 2006. As Abbas put it, "It's very important for your forces to stay here and kick the bad people out." His views were echoed by Abu Abed, a leader of the CLCs in the Ameriya neighborhood of Baghdad. "If coalition forces left it would be a disaster. All of us would get killed," he told us.

If we fail to heed their advice, it will result not only in a calamitous defeat for the United States but also a disgraceful betrayal of many brave Iraqis like Abbas and Abu Abed who have placed their faith in us. ♦

Shelley monument, Christchurch Priory, Bournemouth

GETTY IMAGES

The Devil and Percy Shelley

A meditation on the Mephistophelean poet. BY CHARLES PETERSEN

It's hard to think of Romanticism without laughing. This impish remark may seem a mere anachronism, a fashionable contempt for the past; and yet no one knew the comedy of the Romantics better than Goethe, the movement's great wayward father. After achieving worldwide fame with *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, he spent the next 60 years trying to live down the youthful indiscretion. Weimar Classicism was one result. The other is his bifurcated *Faust*, whose structure, everyone knows, comes in two parts, but which few realize splits just as well into two characters: Faust and Mephisto, the revolutionary spirit of the age with its constant comedic antidote.

Being Shelley
The Poet's Search for Himself
by Ann Wroe
Pantheon, 464 pp., $30

Ann Wroe's daring new biography of Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822), perhaps the most inadvertently comic of the Romantics, reminded me just how Faustian a figure the poet cut. As a student at Oxford he tried to raise the devil; when that failed, he settled for raising his own unkempt locks, attaching his body to an early electrical generator and asking his friend, Thomas Hogg, to wind the machine until he could set off gunpowder with nothing but a touch. Some years later, after Shelley and Hogg were both expelled for *The Necessity of Atheism*—close to the first published instance of avowed godlessness in the history of England—the young poet, again like Goethe's Faust, took up a scheme to reclaim land from the sea. He even equaled Faust's (female) death count by causing the suicides of two young women: Harriet Westbrook, his estranged wife, and

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Fanny Godwin, unrequited lover and half-sister to Mary.

The role of the biographer changes with the age; for the chronicler of Shelley, with his Faustian career, the only proper approach may be Mephistophelean, a kind of comic counterweight to the poet's Romantic excess. That's certainly how Shelley's friends—those who experienced his wild moods directly, without the nostalgic glow of a bygone age—first approached the task.

Thomas Love Peacock, turning to satirize his friend in the classic roman à clef *Nightmare Abbey*, added a fine sense of comic timing to Shelley's natural flair for the dramatic. The poet, renamed Scythrop or Gloomy Face, orders "a pint of port and a pistol," set promptly for 7:25, but then manages to postpone impending doom by directing the butler to reset his watch. Similarly, Shelley's old friend Hogg, the poet's first real biographer, tells a story so comic that it would seem an obvious fiction if the author hadn't witnessed it firsthand. Halfway through a discussion of metempsychosis, Shelley apparently snatched a child from a local Oxford woman, dangled it over Magdalen bridge, and proceeded to inquire, "Can your baby tell us about pre-existence, Madam?"

Scandalized by Hogg's lack of poetic piety, the Shelley family forced him to cut his biography short, and the next 120 years saw a series of Shelley apologists do nothing but damage to the poet's reputation. Matthew Arnold's review of Edward Dowden's 1886 biography provides a representative sample: "Professor Dowden holds a brief for Shelley; he pleads for Shelley as an advocate pleads for his client, and this strain of pleading . . . is unserviceable to Shelley, nay, injurious to him, because it inevitably begets, in many readers . . . impatience and revolt."

It wasn't until Richard Holmes's *Shelley: The Pursuit*, originally published in 1974 and recently rereleased, that the poet's life finally received the deeply skeptical, Mephistophelean treatment it deserves. Holmes, while retaining great respect for Shelley's poetry, showed how the gentle jokes of Shelley's friends masked "extremely characteristic pieces of calculating duplicity." Instead of a brief in Shelley's defense, Holmes filed an indictment: "Shelley's Demons were never to prove intractable or rigid: on the contrary they adapted themselves to his interests and assimilated his intellectual developments with an almost sinister ease." Yet by indicting Shelley, rather than pleading for him, Holmes enlists sympathy for the struggling, self-deceiving artist, and his *Shelley* ends with a sense of admiration slowly displacing that initial condemnation, much like the end of *Faust*.

Shelley's old friend Hogg tells of the poet, halfway through a discussion of metempsychosis, snatching a child from a local Oxford woman, dangling it over Magdalen bridge, and inquiring, 'Can your baby tell us about pre-existence, Madam?'

Being Shelley, Wroe's faithful, flawed new biography, throws out both chronology and judgment in a bold and finally doomed attempt to achieve fresh perspective on the poet. Her introduction aptly sums up the project:

> This book is an experiment. It is an attempt to write the life of a poet from the inside out: that is, from the perspective of the creative spirit struggling to discover its true nature. . . . Rather than writing the life of a man into which poetry erupts occasionally, my hope is to reconstruct the world of a poet into which earthly life keeps intruding. . . . It takes seriously Shelley's statement that a poet "participates in the eternal, the infinite and the one; as far as relates to his conceptions, time and place and number are not."

Wroe's idealizing impulse is, in many ways, admirable. Holmes, despite his marvelous mimicry of Shelley's headlong lifestyle—"I go on until I am stopped, and I never am stopped"—often gives the sense, with his devotion to daily detritus, the encrustations of chronology, that Shelley barely managed to squeeze in the occasional poem between haggling with loan sharks, running from creditors, and chasing after women.

Wroe's biography doesn't deny these blemishes, neither does it plead or condemn, instead floating over Shelley's sins in a kind of trance. When Wroe recounts the poet's failed attempt to save Fanny from suicide, her writing reads almost as incantation:

> From what did he wish to save her? If earthly life was prison, then death was release, the dissolving of the bonds of the body. In Shelley's "younger" poems, as he called them, Death was already "a calm habitation" and a friend. The virtuous man, dying in the regenerated world of *Queen Mab*, was full of calm wonder and hope. . . . At times, being human, he could not repulse a shudder of horror. He lingered over the gluey putrefaction of the flesh, the clinging, choking air of his own decay, his eaten eyes. And yet it was ridiculous to think this way. . . . Besides, Death's worm-ridden winding-sheets were also mysteriously seductive.

This line of thinking may seem profoundly tasteless—questioning the attempt to save a young woman from suicide—and yet it is decidedly Shelleyan. The poet himself was no less callous when Harriet Westbrook, the estranged mother to his two children, hurled herself into the Serpentine: "Everything tends to prove . . . that beyond the mere shock of so hideous a catastrophe having fallen on a human being once so nearly connected to me, there would, in any case, have been little to regret." Wroe doesn't neglect to mention the agonized poems Shelley wrote in response: "They die—the dead return not—Misery." But she abdicates all interpretation, and these expressions of Shelley's despair read more as mood swings than attempts at critical balance.

No doubt such moody, incantatory writing befits a book intent on *Being Shelley*, but Wroe's choice of subtitle—*The Poet's Search for Himself*—suggests an effort at self-criticism that her work hardly attempts. This is ironically

appropriate since Shelley, despite his declared motto "Know thyself," rarely understood his own motives.

As Mary wrote long after the poet's death: "It will be sufficient to say that, in all he did, he at the time of doing it believed himself justified to his own conscience." Shelley often achieved some self-reflection after the fact, and his best poems derive their strength from these personal doubts. But Wroe's ridiculous structure—trading chronology for a misguided tour through the elements of Earth, Water, Fire, and Air—only exacerbates the sense that Shelley learned nothing from the tragedies he induced. That, after all, is the inevitable conclusion of a book based on Shelley's claim that, for the poet, "time and place and number are not."

Rousseau, Goethe, and Wordsworth, with their pioneering *bildungs*-biographies, all rejected such a static view of character. Wroe's maddening conflation of events reminds us why this revolution grew necessary: The Romantic Age, with its hope for personal (as well as political) reform, displaced the assumption of permanent traits with a belief in, if not progress, at least development.

Shelley, despite all his bluster, indeed learned from his mistakes, came to admit that Utopia, while *the* necessary concept—the light which *like a star / Beacons from the abode where the eternal are*—must remain a fleeting vision on this earth. Hence, the deep irony in his repeating Faust's famous words: "Remain, thou, thou art so beautiful!" Dramatically, these words meant Faust's death, the end of the bargain he had struck, the moment Mephisto could steal his soul. Figuratively, they signify reflection, seizing a moment that soon recedes, and the personal damnation that inevitably follows looking back on an infernal career. Absent a Mephisto to damn him, Shelley took on the role himself with his *Triumph of Life*, the hellish final poem left fragmentary when he drowned.

Wroe, by refusing to complete Shelley's own indictment, fails her end of the bargain, and the reader, instead of stepping in like Goethe's angels to save him, can't help but damn Shelley in her place. ♦

Lincoln Slept Here

Where the Great Emancipator escaped the malarial heat. **BY ANDREW FERGUSON**

NATIONAL TRUST FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION

The President's Cottage

For history buffs, there's something about banisters. I don't know what it is. But whenever I tour a historic house—Mount Vernon, Lincoln's home in Springfield, Madison's Montpelier—sooner or later there's a flight of stairs to climb and somebody always asks about the banister.

So I wasn't surprised recently when, in a preview tour of President Lincoln's cottage at the Soldiers' Home, in Washington, D.C., we tramped up to the second floor and one of us asked, "So this banister—is it original to the house?"

In a funny coincidence, it was me who asked that, but if it hadn't been me, it would have been somebody else in our little group. And when we learned the answer was yes, the reaction would have been the same: a slight leap of the heart, a lingering hand, a pat of the ancient, fleshy wood, a stolen glance from buff to buff. It's just the way we are.

And for buffs there could be few banisters with more *frisson* potential than the one at the cottage at the Soldiers' Home. The cottage and the leafy park that surrounds it is a legendary piece of real estate. Though its historical significance has been recognized since the Civil War, it has been a government facility hidden from public view and placed beyond the sweaty, outstretched hands of history nuts for more than a century. Now, thanks to the historiographical expertise and fundraising mojo of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the "Lincoln cottage" has been carefully restored to the condition that Lincoln would have known. When it opens to visitors beginning

Andrew Ferguson, a senior editor at The Weekly Standard, *is the author, most recently, of* Land of Lincoln: Adventures in Abe's America.

February 19th, it will instantly take its place as one of the essential sites of presidential history.

To escape the malarial summer heat and the stink rising from the fetid canal that lay a hundred yards beyond his bedroom window, Abraham Lincoln and his family vacated the White House each spring and traveled three miles into the breezy hilltops above the city, where a retirement home for old soldiers had been built with booty from the Mexican War. One large dormitory-style residence (called the Soldiers' Home) and several generous-sized cottages were scattered among the shade trees. James Buchanan, the Great Procrastinator, had used one of the cottages as a summer home, and on Inauguration Day 1861, he commended the place to his successor.

The Lincolns hoped to move there that summer, but several events—the firing on Fort Sumter, the battle of Manassas, the usual—upended their plans. They set up house there the next summer, however, and the two summers following, with Lincoln leaving each morning to work at the White House and returning by nightfall. Altogether, Lincoln spent fully a quarter of his presidency residing in a cottage at the Soldiers' Home.

What precisely transpired there, though, is a question whose answer remains obscure. Diaries from the soldiers who guarded the First Family (as it wasn't called in those republican days) and glancing references in the papers of Lincoln's aides and friends don't tell us much: minor anecdotes, mostly, and such homey details as an account of Lincoln padding around in house slippers.

Some historians surmise that the first draft of the Emancipation Proclamation was written there, and it's certain that Lincoln received a steady stream of callers at night and on the weekends, for entertainment and recreation as well as for councils of war. But only a handful of graphic images of the place from the war years survive, and no reliable descriptions are available of what the house's interior looked liked, how it was decorated, who slept in what bedroom, which parlor Lincoln used for an office, or whether he had an office there at all.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

A trend toward Disneyesque overkill has swamped many modern history museums, in a last, desperate attempt to attract a history-averse public dazed by long hours with the Xbox. At Lincoln's summer cabin, the curators have somehow resisted the trend, daring to leave a lot to their customers' imaginations.

In an ingenious bit of curatorial jujitsu, the preservationists at the National Trust have made a virtue of our ignorance, turning this general lack of hard information to their advantage. No attempt has been made to refurnish the house. Instead, visitors enter rooms stripped almost bare. No velvet ropes restrict their movements, and they're invited to sit on period chairs placed here and there. The austerity has the odd effect of drawing attention to the mantle pieces, hearthstones, wainscoting, molding, and the window frames with their blurry, leaded panes, almost all of which date from Lincoln's day (not to mention the stairtreads, the risers, and—be still my heart—the banisters).

A trend toward Disneyesque overkill has swamped many modern history museums, in a last, desperate attempt to attract a history-averse public dazed by long hours with the Xbox. Here, the curators have somehow resisted the trend, daring to leave a lot to their customers' imaginations. A single guide escorts visitors from room to room in small groups of 15 or fewer. Some of the rooms have unobtrusive TV monitors to flash period images, and the guide can control the simulated gaslight and trigger small speakers that broadcast brief snippets of actors telling stories. Mostly the information comes straight from the tour guides themselves.

"We're trying a different approach to interpretation," said Frank Milligan, the site's director. "Historical houses are closing all around the country, because people are sick of standing behind velvet ropes being lectured to. We don't want to talk about furniture, really, or decoration. We want to talk about Lincoln's ideas."

The emphasis leans, predictably enough, on our contemporary enthusiasms: slavery, emancipation, and Lincoln's view of equality. "What we'll have," Milligan said, "is the experience of a small group of people sitting around talking in these historic rooms." It's an audacious idea—and on the part of the National Trust, an act of faith in the patience and good sense of historical tourists.

Yet there's one complication that the guides are unlikely to dwell on. You'll find it deep in the text of *Lincoln's Sanctuary: Abraham Lincoln and the Soldier's Home*, an original and beautifully written book by Matthew Pinsker (Oxford, 272 pp., $15.95), a historian who's made the cottage his specialty. Along around page 130,

Pinsker reveals that the Lincoln cottage—the house that the National Trust has so lovingly restored at a cost of $15 million—may not really be the, um, Lincoln cottage.

"The oral tradition at the Soldier's Home," Pinsker writes, has "always assumed that the president lived in the same cottage during each of his three seasons in residence." Yet this is just an assumption. There's a fair amount of evidence that the Lincolns actually spent the first two summers at a smaller but more sumptuous cottage next door to the one that is now called the Lincoln cottage.

This smaller cottage, which still stands, was the one used by James Buchanan as a summer home. A Civil War-era print of the site labels the smaller cottage the "President's Villa." The same print labels what we now call the "Lincoln cottage" the "Military Governor's House." And a congressional letter from early 1864 requests money to refurbish our Lincoln cottage. The reason for the request: "The house heretofore occupied by President Lincoln has, since last summer, been taken by some other person."

Pinsker weighs this evidence only to dismiss it. He concludes, rather shakily, that it is still "most likely" that the Lincolns used the Lincoln cottage for all three seasons. On the present record, we can't know for sure. That's history for you: All that can be said definitively is that the Lincolns stayed in what we call the "Lincoln cottage" during 1864, their last summer at the retreat.

Among other things, this means that the Emancipation Proclamation might not have been written there, in the bare rooms where the tourists and buffs will now come to feel their *frissons*, but in the house sitting inconspicuously next door, neglected. On the other hand, it also means that we can still be sure about that banister—sure that Abraham Lincoln, in the momentous summer of 1864, gripped it with his own hand as he climbed wearily to bed.

And for lots of us, that's what really counts. ♦

Iran Goes Nuclear

Last month's National Intelligence Estimate is far from the last word. **BY STEPHEN RADEMAKER**

Conventional wisdom holds that the international community is "united" in its concern about Iran's nuclear program and "adamant" about stopping Iran from developing nuclear weapons. All responsible governments are said to be pulling frenetically in the same direction, disagreeing occasionally, but only over tactics.

Iran and the Bomb
The Abdication of International Responsibility
by Thérèse Delpech
Translated by Ros Schwartz
Columbia, 160 pp., $26.95

Enter Thérèse Delpech, a French official—director of strategic studies at the French Atomic Energy Commission—but certainly not a spokesman for the French government. She takes a club to these international platitudes, revealing a world largely indifferent to Tehran's nuclear program, at times complicit in it, and always with something more important on its mind.

Her subtitle says it all: *The Abdication of International Responsibility*. Delpech delivers a blistering critique of all the key players in the Iranian nuclear controversy: the Iranian regime, of course, as well as its diplomatic enablers in Russia, China, and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). But she goes on to flay those governments that are widely seen as most committed to stopping Iran's nuclear program, including Great Britain, France, and Germany (the so-called EU-3), to say nothing of the United States.

She begins with Iran, reviewing the history and technical details of its nuclear program and demolishing the notion that the program could be designed for peaceful purposes. Launched in secret 20 years ago, pursued in violation of Iran's legally binding safeguards obligations, and with no economic justification for the huge investment required, Iran's program only makes sense as a nuclear weapons program.

Delpech moves on to Russia, asking why Moscow is not more alarmed about the potential development of nuclear weapons by a Muslim fundamentalist state on its periphery. She observes correctly that, in private, Russian officials agree that Tehran is pursuing nuclear weapons. Yet Russia has provided considerable nuclear assistance to Iran over the past 15 years, and persists today in blocking meaningful action against Iran at the U.N. Security Council. Reviewing possible explanations, such as the desire to build a strategic partnership with Tehran and business considerations, she concludes that "in Moscow it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between strategic issues, commercial issues and criminal activities."

China has a similar record of past cooperation with Iran's nuclear program, coupled with the provision of diplomatic protection for it today. As a result of its relentless economic growth, China is now the world's second largest consumer of oil and relies on Iran for 15 percent of its oil imports. Clearly, Beijing's principal interest is in enhancing its access to energy, but Delpech argues that it has strategic interests as well. Like Russia, China is keen to establish a diplomatic foothold in the Middle East. In addition, China is more than happy to refocus America's attention and military might away from East Asia, particularly Taiwan.

Stephen Rademaker was an assistant secretary of state from 2002 to 2006, responsible for international security and nonproliferation.

Delpech is especially critical of the IAEA, excoriating the agency for exceeding its mandate as an international inspectorate. She cites repeated instances in which the IAEA leadership has sought to influence diplomatic initiatives to restrain Iran, most notably its efforts to dissuade the IAEA Board of Governors from referring Iran to the Security Council. She also takes the agency to task for resorting to "all sorts of euphemisms and understatements" to avoid finding Iran in breach of its nuclear nonproliferation obligations, for not fully exercising its inspection authority in Iran, and for removing two particularly effective IAEA inspectors at Iran's request.

"Who is giving orders to the Agency?" she asks. "The Board of Governors or the country under examination?"

Turning to Britain, France, and Germany, the leaders of international efforts to negotiate with Iran, Delpech correctly points out that their early interest in the problem had more to do with Iraq than Iran, and even more to do with demonstrating the superiority of "soft power" over the muscular foreign policy of the early Bush administration.

With so much prestige and ideology invested in their diplomatic project, the EU-3 could not afford to see it fail. For years they equated an IAEA referral of Iran to the Security Council with the failure of their initiative, and therefore on three occasions, between 2003 and 2005, they shielded Iran from such a referral. The result was additional time for Iran to advance its nuclear program. Delpech's verdict is harsh: "Europe will have to shoulder part of the blame for the development of Iran's nuclear programme if the Iranian bomb sees the light of day."

She assigns a greater share of the blame, however, to America. Delpech faults the United States for failing to provide leadership on the Iran issue commensurate with its power and responsibilities in the international system. Contrary to the usual European critique, her complaint is not that America has provided insufficient support to the efforts of the EU-3, or that it has failed to talk directly to Iran. Rather, her complaint is that the America has not been tough enough.

Distracted by Iraq and burdened by all the unhappy developments in U.S.-Iran relations since the fall of the shah, America insists at the rhetorical level that "all options are on the table," but, in fact, is manifestly unwilling to use military force. The use of force would not be the optimal outcome, but "negotiations that are not accompanied by any threat in the event of a failure to meet obligations have no chance of success." With America in a "state of paralysis," Delpech comes to the dire conclusion that "what Iran is about to show is that there is no longer anyone in control of the international scene."

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in Mashhad, 2006

AFP / GETTY IMAGES

Delpech's logic is crystal clear and backed by a firm command of the facts. At times, however, the author's outline-like organizational style impedes rather than facilitates the reader's comprehension. The biggest disappointment is that her narrative ends in August 2006, shortly before the European edition of her book was released. As a result, developments since then are not addressed.

The most important subsequent development is, of course, the National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) released by the U.S. intelligence community this past December. As popularly understood (or, more precisely, misunderstood), the NIE casts grave doubt on Delpech's basic premise that Iran remains a nuclear threat that must be contained. The infelicitous phrasing of the NIE certainly invites such misunderstanding.

The assertion in the first sentence of the NIE—"We judge with high confidence that in fall 2003, Tehran halted its nuclear weapons program"—appears to assure us that Iran is no longer pursuing nuclear weapons. In a little-noticed footnote to this assertion, however, the NIE's authors clarify that "by 'nuclear weapons program' we mean Iran's nuclear weapon design and weaponization work and covert uranium conversion-related and uranium enrichment-related work; we do not mean Iran's declared civil work related to uranium conversion and enrichment."

In other words, the NIE's authors are excluding from their definition of "nuclear weapons program" the underground enrichment facility at Natanz, which began life as a covert nuclear facility, and was only acknowledged by Iran and declared to be for civil purposes after its existence was revealed by an Iranian opposition group in 2002. The authors are also excluding from their definition the uranium conversion facility at Isfahan, the heavy water reactor under construction at Arak, and other sensitive facilities that, along with Natanz, have been the focus of intense international concern since 2002.

Delpech's conclusions about the ominous nature of the Iranian program relate to the now-declared "civil" facilities that became known once Iran was caught illegally concealing them. Her conclusions do not depend on assump-

tions about unknown conversion and enrichment-related work that the NIE now assures us was suspended in 2003. The same can be said, incidentally, about the premises upon which the Bush administration and other governments have been operating since 2002.

Therefore, for purposes not only of Delpech's analysis, but also Bush administration foreign policy, the NIE's conclusion that "in fall 2003, Tehran halted its nuclear weapons program" is a classic straw man. It is a fact that may be true under the NIE's cramped definition of a "nuclear weapons program," but it is not a fact that negates Delpech's analysis, or that of those countries that have been working to constrain Iran's nuclear program.

The NIE is not the only development since 2006 that is left untreated by Delpech's narrative. As the narrative ends, the Security Council has just taken its first meaningful action, adopting a resolution requiring Iran to suspend its nuclear program within 30 days. She expresses confidence that Iran will not comply, and questions whether the Security Council will respond to that noncompliance by imposing sanctions.

In fact, the Security Council has since acted twice to impose sanctions, though Russia and China have wielded their veto power at the Council to ensure that those sanctions have more bark than bite. The latest deadline set by the Council for suspension by Iran of its nuclear program "or else"—May 2007—has long since passed without any indication that Russia and China will allow the Council to deliver on its threat. The NIE is sure to compound the diplomatic challenge of persuading Russia and China that the Council must back up its demands with action.

There have been other important diplomatic developments as well. The new government of Nicolas Sarkozy in France sees international action against Iran as absolutely essential, in radical contrast to its predecessor. On the other hand, despite the election of Angela Merkel, Germany has moved in the opposite direction, becoming ever more reluctant to pay an economic price to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. The tendency of the IAEA leadership to see itself as an independent power center has grown more pronounced. The August 2007 agreement between the IAEA and Iran on resolving outstanding verification questions not only ignores pertinent Security Council resolutions, but arguably is inconsistent with them.

The most interesting and least-noticed changes involve Russia. As Delpech notes, Russia's behavior toward Iran since the demise of the Soviet Union appears to result from a combination of strategic calculation, business opportunism, and criminal activity. For most of that time, a central goal of U.S. policy has been to change Russian behavior by changing the economic incentives influencing that behavior. Specifically, the United States has sought to persuade the Russian nuclear establishment that its involvement with Iran is a liability, and that ultimately Russia stands to make much more money by abandoning the Iranian market.

Distracted by Iraq and burdened by all the unhappy developments in U.S.-Iranian relations since the fall of the shah, America insists at the rhetorical level that 'all options are on the table,' but, in fact, is manifestly unwilling to use military force.

To this end, Congress enacted, and the executive branch enforced, laws imposing economic sanctions on Russian commercial entities that supplied Iran with nuclear and other sensitive technologies. Following Russia's decision in 1995 to complete the Bushehr nuclear reactor in Iran, the Clinton administration shelved plans to negotiate a bilateral agreement with Russia permitting nuclear commerce between the U.S. and Russian nuclear industries. The Bush administration changed this policy last July by initialing a nuclear cooperation agreement with Russia. The House of Representatives has signaled its disagreement with this policy change, however, voting 397-16 in September to approve legislation that would condition U.S. nuclear cooperation with Russia on termination of Russia's cooperation with Iran.

In response to these kinds of pressures, the Russian nuclear agency, Rosatom, apparently decided a few years back to go legit. Rosatom wants to compete in the international market with the likes of Areva, General Electric, and Westinghouse, and it seems to have recognized that it will not be able to do so if it continues to be seen as a supplier to Iran. Accordingly, Rosatom began dragging its feet on completing the Bushehr reactor, while also seeking to renegotiate the price with Tehran. Russian sources suggest that Rosatom also decided to take a pass on tenders issued by Iran in April 2007 for the construction of two additional nuclear reactors.

Rosatom's change of heart regarding Iran was a hopeful sign that, perhaps, Russian foreign policy would one day shift to conform to Rosatom's new calculation of its economic interests. Regrettably, this hope must now be counted among the casualties of the NIE. Less than two weeks after the NIE was released, Russia shipped the first batch of nuclear fuel to Iran for the Bushehr reactor after years of resisting Iranian pressure to do so. Implicit in Russia's decision to ship the fuel was a decision to direct Rosatom to complete the construction of Bushehr. Thus, far from conforming Russian foreign policy to Rosatom's economic interests, the NIE prompted Russia to conform Rosatom's actions to Russian foreign policy.

Iran and the Bomb does not give us the benefit of Delpech's reactions to these developments. She would surely say, however, that Russia's recent actions were a predictable retreat in the face of apparent American equivocation, and the NIE would no doubt be the new Exhibit A on her list of abdications of international responsibility. ♦

Seafood Chatter

The men behind the fish beside the salad bar.

BY STEFAN BECK

Menial work has a way of invading one's consciousness. I passed a summer on the overnight shift at Super Stop & Shop; by July I dreamt only of product mascots. One day it was the Land O'Lakes squaw and the Sun Maid; another, Betty Crocker in nothing but oven mitts and a lacy apron. When the produce guy railed against interracial dating, I had Chef Boyardee and Aunt Jemima *consommé*. Since gay marriage never came up, I was at least spared the fervent moppings of the Brawny Man and Mr. Clean.

Last Night at the Lobster
by Stewart O'Nan
Viking, 160 pp., $19.95

Stewart O'Nan

Stewart O'Nan's eleventh novel, *Last Night at the Lobster*, faithfully captures this and other aspects of the dirty job done dirt cheap. It describes the last shift of a Red Lobster in New Britain, Connecticut, which "corporate" has decided to shut down for not "meeting expectations." I spent a year in Hardware City one winter and can report that O'Nan gets his setting note perfect, from its popular epithet ("hard-hittin' New Britain") to its large Polish community ("New Britski") to such crucial details as the "Citgo next to Daddy's Junky Music" and the Lobster's "adopt-a-highway mile on 9."

Then there are its citizens, downcast but steadfast. Our Sisyphean hero, Manny DeLeon, is the hardworking Puerto Rican manager of the restaurant, rolling his rock lobster up the hill each day only to have it crash down on him again. Even his name is just right, as it recalls that old chestnut, "I've got a friend so lazy he thinks Manual Labor is a Hispanic guy." All the same, the plight of Manny and his doomed coworkers isn't the least bit comical.

That doesn't mean it's boring, though. O'Nan's prose, unlike his protagonist, is anything but workmanlike. Some writers rely on the finery of simile and metaphor, but O'Nan's use of the humble verb outdoes many of his more celebrated peers. At one point, Manny "chops on the lights and waits as the panels hopscotch across the kitchen ceiling." And if that sentence doesn't give you a shock of recognition, you're blessed never to have toiled beneath fluorescent lighting.

Yet language, however artfully it's used, accounts for but a small part of the pleasure to be had here. I mention verbs because it's watching people *do* things that makes *Last Night at the Lobster* such a joy. On the first page, when Manny's Buick Regal "signals for no one's benefit" in a snowbound parking lot, we know we're in the hands of a writer who shows more than he tells—and who shows action more than he tells about introspection. Want to watch someone finesse a Frialator or a stubborn snowblower, or dice cabbage for cole slaw? If you think the answer is no, O'Nan has a surprise for you: His descriptions of ordinary restaurant work border on the hypnotic.

What that parking-lot snapshot shows us is that Manny is a serious, scrupulous fellow, particularly where his job is concerned. It may be his last day—soon he'll assume a more degrading position at Olive Garden—but even so, he reflexively contemplates taking a putty knife to some chewing gum on the underside of a table, and stoically endures the rudeness of a woman with a badly behaved, then gluttonous, then violently ill, child. This is one of the book's funniest and most painful scenes. It takes the stuff of bad sight gags and transforms it into a portentous trial by ordeal:

> Now they've stopped. One of the grandmothers wants to offer the kid something from her purse—a piece of hard candy, just what he needs. . . .
>
> The mother's politely declining—no, thank you, we couldn't possibly—when the kid puts a hand to his mouth as if to cover a burp, bends at the waist and gushes all over her boots. A big butterscotch-colored flood, with chunks. And he's not done. The gagging is audible over Kenny Loggins, making one side of the retirement party turn in their chairs. . . .
>
> "Can *someone* please get him a glass of water?" the mother shouts, stuck in the puddle, since borrowing one of the grandmothers' is out of the question.
>
> Manny has a pitcher right there at the station, and a spare goblet.
>
> "*Thank* you," the mother scolds him.

The saintly patience of people like Manny is too often taken for granted in real life, but *Last Night at the Lobster* isn't propaganda for the Service and Food Workers Union. It's not about appreciating the "little guy," that most hideous of *faux*-populist slurs. I, for one, love to learn the ins and outs of a job, prefer-

Stefan Beck writes on fiction for the New York Sun*, the* New Criterion*, and elsewhere.*

ably one I don't have to do myself, and O'Nan manages to do for chain restaurants what Richard Ford did for real estate in *The Lay of the Land*. Frankly, though, neither book would be more than a set of operating instructions were it not for the emotional struggles going on behind the scenes—that is, behind the glad-handing and the free Sprite refills.

I don't want to dam up the stream of consciousness and then throw a party for the WPA. Stewart O'Nan's achievement is to have constructed a novel of consciousness on an unfamiliar foundation, so that the reader can see feelings filtered through the unnatural restraint and deference that come along with the food service industry. (The obvious comparison is with the butler narrator of Kazuo Ishiguro's impeccable *The Remains of the Day*.) What Manny's thinking about isn't popcorn shrimp and tilapia; it's really a failed romance with Jacquie, a coworker he'll never see again after this shift. And he's still got another woman at home, and a fancy Christmas present to buy for her. But which girl will he end up giving it to?

There's no supporting cast in *Last Night at the Lobster*. Every character is credible—such as a kitchen worker who slashes Manny's leather jacket before vanishing into the night. Manny thinks this vandalism was intended for a coworker's similar coat, only to find that both have received the same treatment. We never know what our coworkers, or anyone else, honestly think of us.

The only disappointing fact about O'Nan is that he can tell the *New York Times*, while being interviewed in an actual Red Lobster, "It's America. This is where folks live. There is nothing ironic or silly about it."

Ugh. *Folks*? These sound suspiciously like the words of a connoisseur, someone who doesn't want anyone else to feel at home in the same way he does, or thinks he does, or wants us to think he does. It seems that work, not drink, is the curse of the working class, while a guilty desire for empathy is the curse of everybody else—writers especially. But as curses go, you could do a lot worse. After all, those popcorn shrimp sure don't bread themselves. ♦

BCA

Mother Knows Best

While America wasn't looking, the adolescents took over. BY JOHN O'SULLIVAN

Few experiences are as ultimately liberating as growing up in two worlds. In 1969, Diana West, then a precocious eight-year-old, was taken by her parents to live for a year in Brittas Bay south of Dublin in Ireland. She went to the local Irish school and, outside the home, lived the life of an Irish schoolgirl. Inside the home, her entertainment was restricted to the BBC radio, some audiotapes of Hollywood musicals brought along by her author-father, books, and family games of gin rummy before the fire.

The Death of the Grown-up
How America's Arrested Development Is Bringing Down Western Civilization
by Diana West
St. Martin's, 272 pp., $23.95

I can guess pretty well what this experience must have been like, both because I spent six weeks every summer from 1948 to 1966 in my aunt's home 20 miles from Brittas Bay and because I joined RTÉ (Irish radio and television) as a trainee reporter in 1971. Ireland, in those days, was deeply Catholic, morally conservative, family-centered, and socially authoritarian. It was also much more gentle and accommodating to outsiders, including internal "outsiders," than the current myth of its uniform puritan repression. The picture in John Ford's *The Quiet Man*, though painted in rosy hues, is not a complete distortion.

In any event, the young Miss West enjoyed her stay there and returned to the United States transformed into a polite, respectful child who automatically stood up when Teacher entered the room. But America, too, had been transformed in her absence. Adolescents now said rude words, did rude things, and showed no respect to Teacher—nor, indeed, to anyone in what had once been called "authority."

Growing up in this transformed home, West noticed that everyone else was growing down. She was a walking culture clash within herself. The mental distance given by her life in Brittas Bay enabled her to experience the revolutions of "the sixties" from inside and outside. And

Diana West

what others found simply "liberating" she felt to be unsettling at first and, eventually, sinister.

In fact, though West was too young to notice such things, the cultural change had gotten well under way in the 1950s before she was born. Teenagers, invented *circa* 1944, were already an important consumer market by then. Large numbers of young people with

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money meant that society and the economy set out to cater to their tastes.

The first convulsive effect was rock 'n' roll. No sooner had Bill Haley and Elvis hit the charts than they began to drive the older tradition of American standards out of them. Resistance was brief and easily overcome. One of the more touching proofs of America's social decline West unearths in her research is a gallant but now unthinkable effort to criticize blatant sexual references in song lyrics from a 1955 front-page editorial in the showbiz notice board, *Variety*:

> Music leer-ics are touching new lows and if the fast-buck songsmiths and music-makers are incapable of social responsibility and self-restraint then regulation—policing, if you will—will have to come from more responsible sources.

Legislation backed by these more responsible sources was introduced in the mid-fifties. It went nowhere. Rock 'n' roll had become an instantly popular mass culture phenomenon. As Rosemary Clooney would later recollect, by the 1960s Frank Sinatra (in his mid-forties) was taking a six-year vacation from the music business, 55-year-old Bing Crosby had signed up with a British recording company because he couldn't find an American one, and Mel Tormé, younger than both, was considering a career as an airline pilot.

By the time the young Diana West returned from Brittas Bay in 1970, rock 'n' roll had, for 15 years, been acting as a battering ram for a mass of other social changes, almost all of which elevated drives over restraints, emotions over intellect, and sex over all. Some such loosening of social mores had been foreshadowed in the postwar middle-class popularity of psychoanalysis. But the drug culture, the Pill, feminism, the antiwar movement, the sexual revolution, and the campus rebellion took this loosening to a more elemental, vulgar, and even threatening, level. Finally, all these revolutions began to change the power relations in society.

West's first cultural shock, naturally enough for a teenager, was the transfer of authority from adult to adolescent, teacher to pupil, and parent to child. She arrived in an America whose sages and media were celebrating the greatest generation of young people in world history, even as these paragons trashed the colleges, burned books, imprisoned skeptical faculty members, and generally made the tantrum a mass cultural phenomenon rivaling rock 'n' roll itself. How could such things happen?

For perhaps the first time in history, adolescence was a time of joyous irresponsibility for most people. Parents and teachers must have envied this; maybe they subconsciously wanted to imitate it; certainly they appeased it. Under the new rules of postwar parenthood, that meant being your kids' best friend. At first that required not exercising heavy-handed authority, then not exercising authority at all, and finally becoming an adolescent just like them—uncertain, irresponsible, subordinate to peer pressure, pandering, anxious above all not to be like the stern unbending parents of the past—whom, oddly enough, you loved nonetheless.

The new rules of postwar parenthood meant being your kids' best friend. At first that required not exercising heavy-handed authority, then not exercising authority at all, and finally becoming an adolescent just like them.

West produces comically extreme examples of the corruption this *faux* adolescence requires. For instance, the managing director of a Wall Street brokerage firm arranged a party for his son's football team at which a nude "interactive" stripper—surely there used to be a single noun for that—squirted whipped cream on her breasts for the team to lick off. Not to worry, however. According to one boy, the "parents were right there, having a good time with us." That led to their arrest because, by being there and not halting the fun, they opened themselves to a charge of child endangerment. It is quite possible that the parents were indignant about their arrest. After all, they had performed the new version of a chaperone's duty: They were present to ensure responsible behavior if things got out of hand. Maybe they had condoms on hand, just in case things became really interactive.

Are they to blame that the definition of "responsibility" has changed since the 1950s? Official America itself—in the form of school sex education classes, social welfare agencies, the courts, Planned Parenthood—now hands out condoms to underage children on the argument that, since things will inevitably get out of hand, they need to be helped to practice "safe sex." Maybe the problem here was neither the parents nor the stripper nor (of course) the fine young football team but an out-of-touch detective who, with antediluvian certainty, thought that "there's certainly a limit on what parents should allow."

Hey, buddy, who's to say?

And that, as Diana West further documents, is the problem. The paralyzing uncertainty inherent in voluntary permanent adolescence spreads. It spreads geographically and socially, of course; Brittas Bay is a different town today and Ireland is becoming a post-Catholic society in the mold of Quebec or Spain. It also spreads across categories of thought and activity.

Parents who find it hard to justify the simple exercise of authority over their children are likely to be teachers who fail to assert the authority of scholarship, or Americans who doubt their country is admirable (let alone exceptional), or Westerners uneasy about Western Civ, or Christians earnestly respectful of every religion except Christianity. In each case they are stopped by the question: "Hey, buddy, who's to say?"

Earlier generations would have given such answers as "because I say so," Cardinal Newman, Theodore Roosevelt, Nicholas Murray Butler, or God. Some may be tongue-tied because they don't know those, or other, answers. What

is more significant is that those who do know the answers are equally tongue-tied. The only authority they can bring themselves to accept is the authority of relativism. Doubt is the new faith, Pontius Pilate the patron saint of the age.

All of this is powerfully argued and supported by numerous examples. The author carries the reader along with her through sections on the moral life—popular music, parenthood, the decline in demanding forms of identity, censorship and public decency, the sixties revolutions, the continuing culture wars—of America and the West. She should probably concede that there were *some* good reasons for the cultural changes she rightly dislikes: Not all families were as happy as hers (and mine); misery, brutality, and petty tyranny stalked many homes. Some social loosening was justified, even if it went too far.

Yale students in support of Black Panthers, 1971

LEE LOCKWOOD / TIME LIFE PICTURES / GETTY IMAGES

West might also derive comfort from the recent improvement in some social statistics, especially the reductions in divorce, abortion, and family breakdown. After the convulsions of the sixties, society is settling down to a new moral balance, less traditional than the fifties, more stable than the seventies, captured by a cartoon showing an Afro-haired hippie passing a crew-cut "suit" in the street, both thinking the same thought: "I'm glad I don't look like that any more."

Hollywood reflects this balance. Beginning with the superb *Groundhog Day*, it has been producing a series of Capra-esque films—*Waitress*, *Bella*, and *The Ultimate Gift* are recent examples—in which characters, presented with hard moral decisions, make the right, painful choices and become better people. *Bella* is interesting because that choice is not to have an abortion; *Waitress* even more so because the central character decides not only to have her baby *and* end an extramarital affair, but also to dismiss her brutal and unfeeling husband from the home. It is undoubtedly a moral ending, but not from the standpoint of Brittas Bay or the Hays Code.

These points qualify rather than nullify Diana West's central argument about America's internal failings. She is on more treacherous ground, however, when she deals with the difficulties of the West's relations with the Muslim world. She rightly sees that placatory rhetoric about "universal values" from Western politicians merely exposes their adolescent anxiety to avoid any strong stance in dealing with the Other. As a political tactic to avoid conflict with the Islamic world, it misses the point. Not only jihadists reject the idea of universal values. And almost all Muslims, including moderates, do so.

Nor are they entirely wrong. The Saudi embassy in London was undiplomatic but correct when it wrote on its website: "Some human rights are controversial, and yet others are anathema to a large portion of humanity." Abortion is a controversial "right" even within Western societies shaped by the Judeo-Christian tradition; it is anathema to societies shaped by Koranic traditions. And because rights arise from particular cultures and religions, many other Western rights are rejected by Muslims who see them—more clearly and accurately than Western secular elites—as essentially Judeo-Christian imports. Some kind of conflict is, thus, inevitable. What kind?

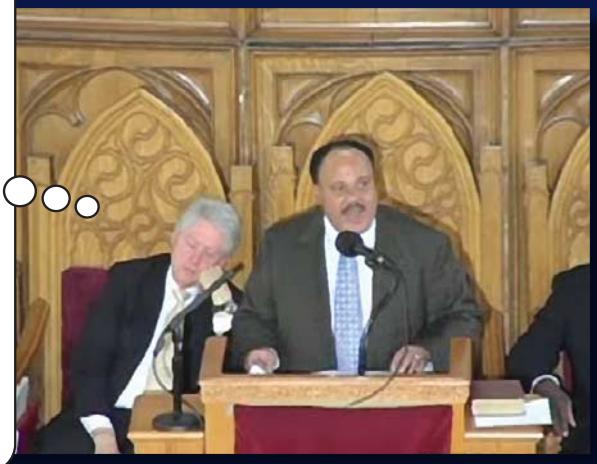
West seems tempted to go along with those secular rationalists—some post-Muslim, such as Ayaan Hirsi Ali—who would wage an ideological war on Islam worldwide, including Muslim countries, on human rights grounds. Such a war is unwinnable. If waged, it would swell the ranks of the jihadists, radicalize moderates, and maximize conflict everywhere. Cultural geography suggests that, while we may shout encouragement from the sidelines, we must leave the main work of promoting human rights within the Muslim world to Muslims.

Our own world is a different matter. If we cannot bring freedom of religion to Saudi Arabia, we are under no obligation to surrender it in Western countries by the creeping dhimmitude that West uncovers in matters such as the Danish cartoon controversy. People who come to live among us must accept our rules and ways. Even if our values are not "universal"—and they are not universally accepted—they are still *our* values. We can justify them on numerous grounds, not excluding "Because we say so."

But we have to be adults to say that. ♦

"During an appearance at the Convent Avenue Baptist Church in Harlem . . . former president [Bill Clinton] was caught nodding off. Clinton was there during a service to honor Dr. Martin Luther King Jr."
—New York Post, *January 22*

I HAVE A DREAM, YOU HAVE A DREAM, WE ALL SCREAM "ICE CREAM!" LISTEN, I GOTTA DREAM, ALL RIGHT: IT'S THAT LITTLE NUMBER IN THE SECOND ROW WITH THE YELLOW TOP AND THE BIG HAIR. YEAH, SHE'S LOOKIN' AT ME. YEAH, SHE'S TRYIN' TO LISTEN TO THIS BIRD, BUT IT AIN'T EASY, IS IT, HONEY? MAYBE SHE'LL BE AT THE RECEPTION. . . . ***SIT UP! SIT UP!*** DAMN, WHERE WAS I LAST NIGHT? SOME DINER, OR MAYBE IT WAS A MOTEL OR SOMETHING, IN SOUTH CAROLINA. MAYBE IT WAS FLORIDA. ANYWAY, THEY WOULDN'T LET ME FINISH MY DAMN FRENCH FRIES. ***GOTTA KEEP MY EYES OPEN!***. . . I WONDER WHAT THAT GISELE BUNDCHEN SEES IN THAT QUARTERBACK GUY? WHAT IS SHE? GERMAN? SWISS? EUROPEAN, ANYWAY. I OUGHTA TELL HER I WON THE CHARLEMAGNE PRIZE, THAT'LL GET HER ATTENTION. . . . ***DAMN! FOR A SECOND THERE I THOUGHT I WAS FALLING!***. . .



I TELL YOU, HE CAN WORK THAT JAWBONE LIKE A DAMN WOODPECKER. HE SOUNDS LIKE HILLARY LIGHTIN' INTO BARACK HUSSEIN OBAMA ON HEALTH CARE: YOU JUST PRESS THE OL' BUTTON AND OUT IT COMES— WHEW! MY HEAD IS KILLING ME. ***GOTTA BITE MY LIP! OWW!***. . .

I THINK WHEN I TALK AT THAT RALLY TOMORROW I'M GONNA SAY BARACK HUSSEIN OBAMA OUGHTA RELEASE THE TRANSCRIPTS FROM THAT MADRASSA HE WENT TO IN LIBYA, OR WHATEVER. I WONDER WHERE ELEANOR MONDALE IS RIGHT NOW? YEAH, DR. KING HAD A DREAM THAT ONE DAY LITTLE BOYS AND GIRLS, BLACK AND WHITE. . . . ***SIT UP! SIT UP!*** OH MAN, IS HE EVER GONNA SHUT UP AND LET ME TALK? Y'KNOW, I'LL BET JESSICA SIMPSON'S A DEMOCRAT. . . .