the weekly Standard

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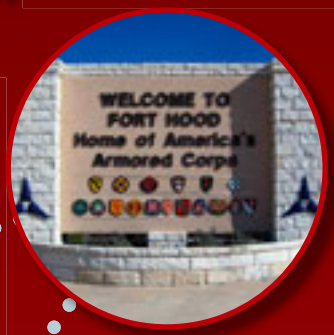
OBAMA'S MAN AT THE NEA
DAVID A. SMITH

CONNECTING THE DOTS

STEPHEN F. HAYES & TOM JOSCELYN on a counterterrorism failure

THE MENTOR

NIDAL MALIK HASAN



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Anonymice Trash Palin

Officials of John McCain's losing presidential campaign are trashing Sarah Palin again. And no wonder. The media let them say anything they wish about Palin while remaining anonymous, and thus not accountable. In effect, they get a free shot at her. The *Washington Post*, for example, identified them as "multiple former McCain officials," a group that includes at least "one former senior official." No names are attached.

This is an old—and entirely unprofessional—trick of the media. Palin is loathed by the elites of the national press corps. But rather than attack Palin on their own, reporters find folks willing to tear into her so long as they aren't named. If they were to be identified, they'd hold their tongue. Heaven forbid! In the case of Palin, the media wouldn't want that to happen.

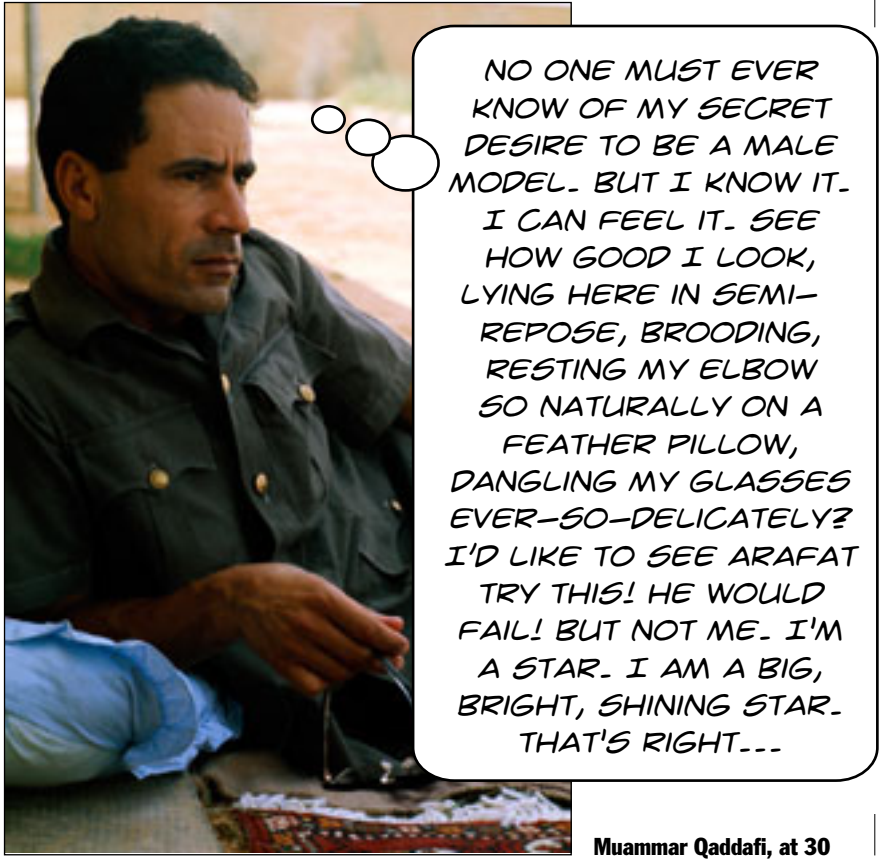
The *Post* quoted from an Associated Press account of Palin's new book, *Going Rogue*. Then it got unnamed ex-staffers from the McCain campaign to dispute her specific claims. Palin writes that aides were delighted with her performance when interviewed by Katie Couric and urged her to tape more segments with Couric. But "one former senior McCain campaign official" disputes that. Who is this person? Is it someone who was there? Is the "official" more credible than Palin? We have no way of knowing.

One "former senior official" spoke to the *Post*, supposedly more in sorrow than anger. "John McCain offered her the opportunity of a lifetime, and during the campaign it seems that, for all of her mistakes, she is searching for people to blame," the official says. "We don't need to go through this again."

We sure don't. The last time unidentified aides and officials were attacking Palin in the media was in the waning days of the losing campaign and afterwards. Blame themselves for McCain's poor showing? No way. It was all Palin's fault. The wave of criticism by aides who'd worked for McCain and Palin was a political low point for them and the media.

But now, a year later, you'd think these "officials" would step forward boldly and speak in their own name. Why do they hide? Simple reason: their zingers failed and Palin has become a formidable political figure with a nationwide following, a sought-after speaker, a bestselling author, and a potential candidate for president in 2012. In contrast, her critics—insiders know who they are—are toxic. All they've got is their anonymity. ♦

What They Were Thinking



GENEVIÈVE CHAUVEL / SYGMA / CORBIS

Muammar Qaddafi, at 30

Who Promoted Major Hasan?

One of the troubling aspects of the Fort Hood massacre is the fact that military colleagues of Major Nidal Malik Hasan at Fort Hood and at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington seem to have been deeply and persistently worried about his behavior. Some of his fellow Army physicians thought he was psychotic, others were convinced that he was dangerous—and all were reluctant to raise their concerns with superiors about an officer in the Medical Corps who openly admired al Qaeda, trafficked in terrorist websites, and talked about his violent Islamist beliefs with patients and fellow doctors.

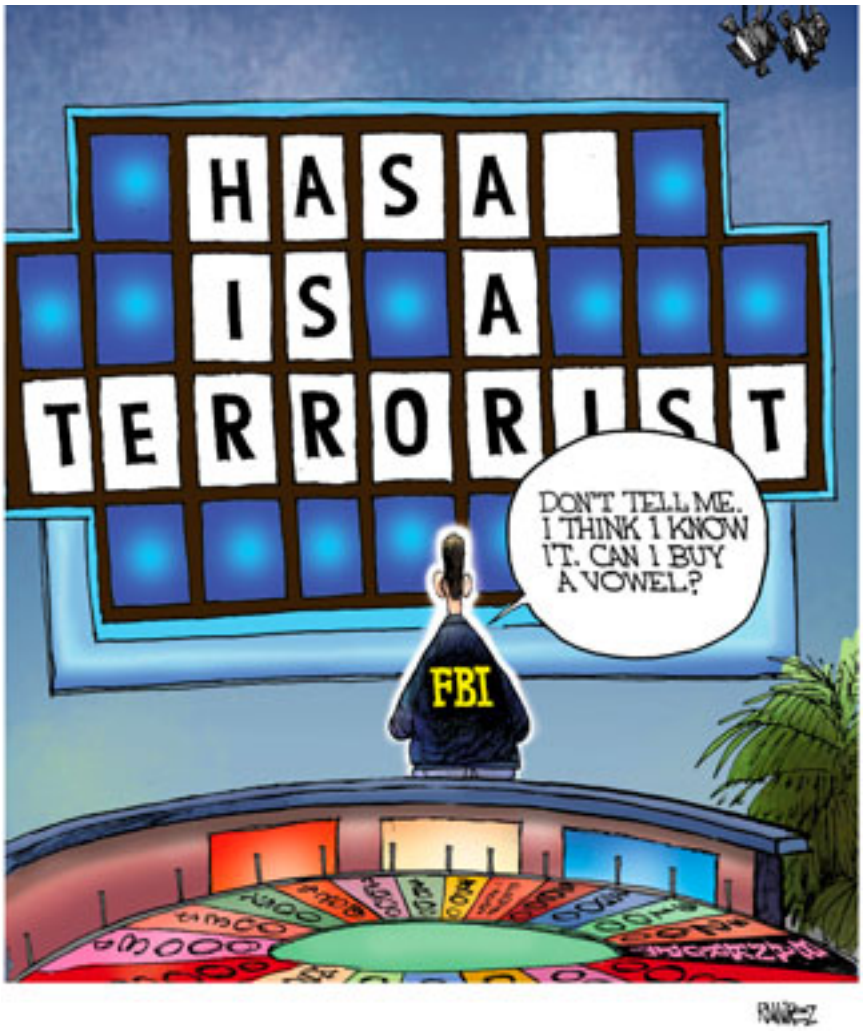
It seems fairly evident, at this

juncture, that Hasan's Army colleagues were paralyzed by political correctness: In a branch of the armed services where the uniformed chief worries publicly about "diversity" in the wake of the shooting of 43 innocents at Fort Hood, it is not difficult to understand why Hasan's fellow officers chose not to complain about his outrageous conduct. Which, of course, leads to one obvious question—Who promoted Major Nidal Malik Hasan, and why? —and one serious warning: The Army's fecklessness in the face of a jihadist officer is not only shocking in itself, but an ideal breeding ground for some contemporary equivalent of Senator Joseph McCarthy.

The Scrapbook recalls that, nearly 60 years ago, a left-wing dentist named Irving Peress was drafted into the Army and, under the provisions of the draft law at the time, automatically promoted to major. Peress was not a Communist, but when it was revealed that he had declined to answer questions about his political beliefs on a loyalty form—he was a member of the leftist American Labor party—his superiors were ordered to discharge him within three months.

At that moment Senator McCarthy swung into action: He summoned Major Peress to Washington to appear before his investigating subcommittee, and when Peress cited his Fifth Amendment right to refuse to testify, McCarthy demanded that he be court-martialed. Instead, Peress's commanding officer at Camp Kilmer, New Jersey, Brigadier General Ralph Zwicker, a World War II combat hero, gave him an immediate honorable separation from the Army—and McCarthy exploded. McCarthy told Zwicker in a later hearing that he was "not fit to wear the uniform," and the subsequent "Who Promoted Peress?" crusade led to a prolonged public clash between McCarthy and the Army and the Eisenhower administration.

It would, indeed, be useful to know who promoted Hasan. Not because we need to persecute middle-rank officers who were following regulations to the best of their ability, but because a system and culture that retains and promotes somebody like Hasan, and discourages colleagues from identifying a potential terrorist in their midst, leads to horrific episodes like the Fort Hood massacre—and opens the door to demagogues who could easily make a bad situation in the Army even worse. ♦



Harold Meyerson on the Filibuster

Liberal columnist Harold Meyerson has a nuanced view of the filibuster: He was for it before he was against it. As noted by Jeremy Lott at the *American Spectator*:

> Writing in the *American Prospect* after the Republicans cleaned up in the 2002 off-year elections, Meyerson predicted that the nation would "suffer" under united Republican rule. He worried about "all the right-wing judicial appointments that will be ratified, for the Supreme Court on down, now that the Republicans control the Senate" and about the "lack of scrutiny" that the Bush administration could expect "now that the Democrats control no committees."
>
> "Only the filibuster," he warned, "now stands between the nation and the unchecked rule of the most right-wing xenophobic and belligerent administration in the nation's history."

Last week in the *Washington Post*, Meyerson sang a different tune:

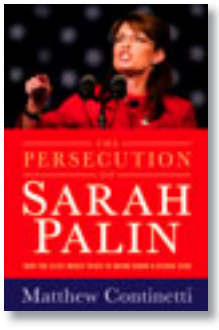
> Now health care goes to the Senate. The world's greatest deliberative body. The other side of Capitol Hill. Dithering Heights.
>
> A catastrophic change has overtaken the Senate in recent years. Initially conceived as the body that would cool the passions of the House

and consider legislation with a more Olympian perspective, the Senate has become a body that shuns debate, avoids legislative give-and-take, proceeds glacially and produces next to nothing. The problem, in part, is that Republicans have routinized the filibuster.

In other words, you might say, only the filibuster now stands between the nation and the unchecked rule of the most left-wing administration in the nation's history. ♦

More on the Persecution of Palin

Weekly Standard readers will be glad to know that the date has arrived—the publication date of our colleague Matthew Continetti's *The Persecution of Sarah Palin: How the Elite Media Tried to Bring Down a Rising Star*, from Sentinel/Penguin. It's available in bookstores and online—the always thrifty Scrapbook notes a particular bargain if you order it on Amazon.com in combination with Palin's own *Going Rogue*.



Continetti lays out, with the clear and elegant prose Weekly Standard readers have come to expect, what happened in the campaign, and the implications of what happened for Palin and for our political culture—and he suggests what might be next for Palin and her party.

The book is what our literary editor, Philip Terzian, would call a real book—256 carefully crafted pages—but it's also what our executive editor, Fred Barnes, would call a readable book—a manageable length, and one moves through it at a brisk pace. The best of both worlds!

Enjoy it over Thanksgiving, and give it for Christmas. ♦

A Dysfunctional GOP?

A front page article in the November 10 *Washington Post* blithely asserted that the Republican party is in "dysfunction." The evidence? The "Grand Old Purging" of New York state assemblywoman Dede Scozzafava in the race for the state's 23rd congressional district.

To review: Scozzafava, a liberal Republican, was put on the ballot in a backroom deal by a handful of county chairmen without a primary, and dropped out of the race when Doug Hoffman, running on the Conservative party line, proved far more popular. Some purge. And while Hoffman narrowly lost after Scozzafava endorsed his Democratic opponent, Republicans won huge victories that same night in the gubernatorial races in Virginia and New Jersey. Some dysfunction.

The *Post* was hardly alone in its assertion: A supposed civil war in the Republican party has been a theme of mainstream coverage of the recent elections. Evidence on the ground is thin. As the *Washington Examiner*'s Byron York noted the following day:

> After years of trailing far behind Democrats, Republicans have now surpassed Democrats as the public's choice in the 2010 congressional elections. In response to the latest so-called "generic ballot" question from the Gallup organization—"If elections for Congress were being held today, which party's candidate would you vote for in your congressional district?"—the new results are 48 percent for Republicans versus 44 percent for Democrats among registered voters, and 46 percent for Republicans versus 44 percent for Democrats among adults nationwide.
>
> It's an extraordinary turnaround for the GOP. Last July, Democrats held a six-point lead. Last December, Democrats held a 15-point lead. At one point in 2007, Democrats held a 23-point lead, and for all of that year, 2007, Democrats held a double-digit lead.

The Scrapbook's advice to the GOP: If this be dysfunction, then make the most of it. ♦

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The Accidental Wine Tourist

The poet Delmore Schwartz famously joked that existentialism means "no one else can take a bath for you." Let me propose a corollary: No one else can drink a glass of wine for you.

I've enjoyed many a glass in my day, but I can't say I have enjoyed reading about wine. The tasting notes baffle me: I read about *mouth-watering acidity* and *hints of tobacco*, the *aroma of orange blossoms* and *richness of ripe cherries*, but I'm rarely able to replicate these experiences with my own taste buds or nose. What I usually detect—if I slow down long enough to analyze it—is a strong suggestion of fermented grape juice in my mouth and, if I stick my nose in the glass, a cauterizing whiff of alcohol. Rule one for aspiring wine-critics is apparently: Develop an awesomely rococo descriptive vocabulary, so that you never, ever have to describe wine as tasting like grapes.

I guess this marks me as a wine philistine. Or perhaps I was just born with a defective tongue, with the taster's equivalent of color-blindness and tone-deafness. But I'm not undiscriminating. I can tell sweet from dry, red from white. I'm crazy about some wines (expensive ones, alas) and abominate others. Still, the precision of Robert Parker's 100-point rating system astonishes me. My rating system at the end of the day is binary: like or don't-like.

What I really like makes me an eccentric nowadays: sherry. It's the Rodney Dangerfield of wines: It gets no respect. Nonetheless, I have been known to push my favorite potion on dinner guests, one of whom was kind enough to recommend me to the good folks of the Sherry Council of America (Washington has a lobby for everything), which is how I found myself spending a lovely mid-September week touring the sherry-producing region of Spain, a small triangle in the southwest corner of Andalusia, itself the southernmost region of Spain.

The triangle—famous among other arts for its flamenco and dancing horses—is anchored by the city of Jerez de la Frontera. (Two smaller towns—Sanlúcar de Barrameda and El Puerto de Santa Maria—complete the three sides.) The *frontera* in question is the one that once divided Christians from Moors—the DMZ of the 13th century. The English word sherry is derived from Jerez, bearing about the same degree of resemblance to the local pronunciation (hair-eth) as Leghorn does to Livorno, or Wipers to Ypres.

MATT COLLINS

I was the odd man out in a group of food and wine writers. Our hosts from the Sherry Council are interested in promoting consumption of this badly misunderstood wine. (It's fortified, but not *that* alcoholic; it should be drunk with meals, not just as an aperitif; Harvey's bottles some fantastic sherries, but Bristol Cream, the dominant seller, isn't one of them.) But the council also has a regulatory agenda, comparable to that of the Champagne makers—they want to eliminate the use of "sherry" as a generic term on labels. In other words, no more "California sherry" in your supermarket aisles. The term would be reserved for *vino de Jerez*—wine from the historic sherry-producing region of Spain.

Well, I'm on board with that—I'm a great believer in truth-in-labeling—but the sad truth is that unpopularity is the real problem for the wine-makers of Jerez. They should be so lucky as to have unscrupulous competitors clamoring to horn in on their trade. Instead they have to contend with an unfortunate reputation for being the favorite, cloyingly sweet tipple of great-aunts and university professors reliving the glory days of their junior year abroad in Cambridge, and the drink of choice of very few other people.

There are, as it happens, some great sweet sherries. People I respect swear by the dark, sugary Pedro Ximenez as a topping for ice cream. But the neglected classics are the *finos* and *manzanillas*—dry white wines made from the Palomino grape that thrives in the chalky soil of the Andalusian hilltops, aged in oak barrels under a protective layer of yeasts unique to the Jerez triangle. The barrels are stacked in vast cathedral-like *bodegas*, built to capture the sea-breezes that fine-tune the temperature and humidity to the liking of the yeast. The new wines go into the top row of barrels; the wine for bottling is removed from the bottom row; each row is replenished from the one above. The result is a blend of many vintages, with a great consistency in the final product from year to year. If the viticultural is the political, conservatives especially should be sherry fans: Each bottle contains decades of tradition enlivened with small amounts of novelty.

A recommendation for beginners: a glass of chilled *fino* with some Spanish olives, almonds, and perhaps some fried fish. I won't try to tell you what it tastes like. But I think you'll like it.

Richard Starr

the weekly Standard

Anti-Obama, Pro-America

President Obama chose not to travel to Germany for the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. Instead, he graced the occasion with a video address. He didn't have time in his two-and-a-half minutes to mention Ronald Reagan or Margaret Thatcher or Pope John Paul II. But somehow he did find time to mention . . . Barack Obama:

> Few would have foreseen on that day that a united Germany would be led by a woman from Brandenburg or that their American ally would be led by a man of African descent. But human destiny is what human beings make of it.

Obama tried (unconvincingly) to disguise his remarkable self-absorption, by adding Angela Merkel to himself as a culmination of the world-historical events of the last 20 years. But what do the victories of Barack Obama and Angela Merkel have to do with the character of human destiny anyway? If the recent German and American elections had gone the other way, and a united Germany were now led by a man from North-Rhine Westphalia, and their American ally by a man of Scots-Irish descent, wouldn't human destiny still be what human beings make of it?

Obama's claim does, however, invite the question: Just what is Barack Obama as president making of our American destiny?

What is the loyal opposition to do? Oppose Obama's destructive proposals. Expose the foolishness of his ineffective policies. But: Don't celebrate bad news and don't root for the bad guys.

The answer, increasingly obvious, is . . . a hash. It's worse than most of us expected. His dithering on Afghanistan is deplorable, his appeasing of Iran disgraceful, his trying to heap new burdens on a struggling economy destructive. Add to this his sending Khalid Sheikh Mohammed for a circus-like court trial. The next three years are going to be long and difficult ones for our economy, our military, and our country.

What is the loyal opposition to do?

Oppose Obama's destructive proposals (health care, cap and trade) and try to defeat them. Expose the foolishness of Obama's ineffective policies (the stimulus, cash for clunkers) and show the American people their failure. And try to influence Obama's policy choices by persuasion (Afghanistan), embarrassment (political correctness in the fight against jihadists), or legislation (Guantánamo), so as to minimize the damage done to the country on his watch.

In all of this, Republicans and conservatives can succeed, especially if they keep two rules in mind: Don't celebrate bad news. Don't root for the bad guys.

Republicans need to point out that Obama's economic policies aren't working. But they need to resist appearing to relish bad news for the country on Obama's watch. When rising unemployment numbers come out, there is occasionally an unseemly sense of celebration in the emails that come from various GOP offices. More in sorrow than in joy, more in confirmation than in vindication—that should be the Republican mood as the news of Obama's failures, failures which damage the well-being of Americans and of America, rolls in. And as the failures become ever more evident, conservatives can urge that he correct them, that he see the error of his ways and move on to the right path.

In areas where policies are still being debated—in foreign policy in particular—conservatives need to keep urging Obama to do the right thing. We are disgusted with Obama's irresoluteness on Afghanistan. But we continue to urge that he side with the experienced military leaders he's been fortunate to inherit against the second-guessing of political hacks (and of failed ex-generals turned political hacks). We conservatives want American soldiers to win wars, American interests to prevail, and American principles to flourish. We want the bad guys to lose. We're happy to work with President Obama to defeat them—and we only wish he shared our clarity and urgency about accomplishing that task.

One year after his election victory, the wheels are coming off the Obama presidency. The first attempt in three decades unambiguously to govern America from the left is failing quickly and decisively. Our task is to minimize the damage to the country, and then to be ready to set things right—to use the next three years to lay the groundwork, intellectual and political, for a new era of a governing conservatism that can restore American prosperity, revitalize American strength, and restore the foundations for American greatness.

—William Kristol

U.S. Marines from the 2nd Marine Expeditionary Brigade shoot at enemy targets during a firefight on July 3 in Main Poshteh, Afghanistan.

JOE RAEDLE / GETTY IMAGES

Afghanistan Myths

What Congress and the media think that isn't so.

BY TOM COTTON

Early this month, I traveled to Washington with Vets for Freedom to advocate for General Stanley McChrystal's request for 40,000 to 60,000 more troops in Afghanistan. I returned from Afghanistan last summer and, along with other veterans of that theater, wanted to share my experience with policymakers.

Tom Cotton was an Army infantry officer from 2005-09. He returned from Afghanistan in July.

During our meetings in Congress and at the White House, I was surprised by how widespread several misperceptions were. Though most officials seemed sincere, these myths are distorting the debate about General McChrystal's request. Here are some of the most common:

■ *A counterterrorism campaign is an effective alternative to counterinsurgency.* Some analysts believe precision counterterrorism strikes can defeat al Qaeda without a simultaneous counterinsurgency. This logic is faulty for several reasons.

First, General McChrystal is a counterterrorism expert, yet he has proposed a full-spectrum counterinsurgency. A decorated Green Beret, he has commanded the Army's Ranger Regiment, Delta Force, and Navy SEALs. His recommendation is entitled to great weight.

Second, a counterterrorism-only approach will lack actionable intelligence. Senior al Qaeda operatives are extremely hard to track at a distance: They move constantly, live among fierce loyalists, and avoid phones, radios, and computers. The best intelligence tends to come as tips from cooperative locals who have come to trust troops on the ground. Locals can't provide such tips if there are no troops to give them to.

Third, our counterterrorism tools have fatal limitations. Predator drones and special-operations forces have limited ranges and need in-country

bases, which generate large protective forces, vulnerable supply lines, and sensitive political questions. Aerial or naval attacks require even better intelligence and risk more self-defeating civilian casualties. To be sure, all these tools are potent, but primarily in conjunction with forward-deployed counterinsurgent forces.

■ *The Afghan people don't want us there.* Although we frequently hear that the fiercely tribal and proud Afghans instinctively rebel against foreign forces, I did not encounter this sentiment during my deployment. Afghans rarely objected to our presence, but they did complain that we haven't provided basic security. When I asked if they would accept more American troops in exchange for improved security, the overwhelming answer was yes.

Our experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq demonstrate that the key issue to the population isn't troop numbers, but troop effectiveness. Afghanistan faces a growing insurgency after eight years of limited deployments. Similarly, violence grew in Iraq for years, until the surge contained it. In this light, we now have the worst possible situation in Afghanistan: enough troops to raise Afghans' expectations, but not enough to protect them.

■ *America cannot win a war in Afghanistan, the "graveyard of empires."* How can America succeed where Alexander the Great, the British, and the Soviet Union struggled? This refrain belongs, as they say now in the military, in the graveyard of analogies.

The Soviets, in particular, teach us how not to win in Afghanistan. A heavily mechanized force, the Red Army was ill-suited for Afghanistan's treacherous terrain, and it was dependent on long, vulnerable supply lines. It also discouraged innovative junior leadership, which is critical against an insurgency. To compensate, the Soviets employed vicious, massively destructive tactics that inflamed the Afghan people and still scar the country with depopulated valleys and adult amputees maimed as children by toy-shaped mines.

Our present way of war couldn't be more different. We deploy light and wheeled infantry to Afghanistan, making our tactics more flexible, our supply lines shorter, and our soldiers more engaged with the locals. We also radically decentralize decision-making authority to our junior soldiers and leaders, who increasingly can draw on years of combat experience.

In short, America has a counterinsurgency strategy, whereas the Soviet Union had a genocide strategy. Afghans I spoke with always recognized the difference, reviled the Russians, and respected our troops.

■ *America needs a new political partner before committing more troops.* This myth stands counterinsurgency doctrine on its head. A government battling an insurgency is by definition weak, else the insurgency would never have gained strength. We must accept this inescapable fact and focus on helping improve President Hamid Karzai's government, not use it as an excuse to abandon his government.

This dynamic played out in Iraq. When added troops and improved security there, we also pursued corrupt officials, whether to prosecute them or to pressure them with the threat of prosecution to improve their performance. In Afghanistan, which today depends more heavily on the coalition for security and funding than did Iraq, we have even more leverage to root out corruption and promote competent, honest government.

Specific reforms can also help. For example, the president appoints provincial and district governors, which makes many unresponsive to their constituents. Political reform to allow for local elections will tie the government more closely to the people and tribal leadership. This kind of ground-up reform succeeded in Iraq and can succeed in Afghanistan.

■ *We should not put troops in harm's way without thorough debate.* True, but we already have 68,000 troops very much in harm's way, and they urgently need reinforcements. The continuing delay demoralizes those soldiers and puts them at greater risk. Also, our allies among the Afghan people and government and in the Pakistani government are wondering if America is truly committed to victory. According to General McChrystal, the security situation is deteriorating and may be irreversible unless we can seize the initiative in the next year—and he made that assessment in August. To put it bluntly, we are not winning in Afghanistan, and without more troops we will lose.

Practically, too, the military needs to begin preparing for this deployment now. Afghanistan's extreme terrain and weather, along with its rudimentary infrastructure, mean the deployment will take many months. Likewise, the military's Spartan bases need significant expansion to accommodate new troops.

■ *The military will break if we send more troops to Afghanistan.* This fear, heard often about Iraq in 2004-06, is no truer now than it was then. At the 2007 peak, the United States had 200,000 troops deployed to Iraq (170,000) and Afghanistan (30,000). Currently, there are 110,000 troops in Iraq and 68,000 in Afghanistan, well below that peak. And 60,000 troops are expected to leave Iraq by next August as more troops flow into Afghanistan. Thus, overall deployed troop levels in 2010 will remain the same or fall.

The Army has also grown to accommodate repeated deployments. It expanded over the last two years from 512,000 to 547,000 soldiers and now plans to add another 22,000 troops by 2012. Further, it just exceeded its annual recruitment and retention goals, hardly the stuff of a broken Army.

To be sure, our military needs to grow in both size and funding to reflect wartime priorities and alleviate the stress of repeated deployments. But the quickest way to break the military is to lose a war.

In a country where firsthand knowledge of Afghanistan and its people is scarce, it is understandable that these myths have gained currency. But they are just that—myths—and should not be allowed to paralyze our war effort when victory is eminently achievable. ♦

Willful Misunderstanding

When JFK was assassinated, liberals couldn't stand the truth. Can they now?

BY JAMES PIERESON

Not the event itself, but the official reaction to the shootings at Fort Hood last week, invites troublesome parallels with the assassination 46 years ago this month of John F. Kennedy.

In the Fort Hood case, officials rushed forward to dampen any speculation that this might have been a terrorist attack, even though the gunman is a Muslim and there are credible reports that he shouted praises to Allah during his rampage. He "snapped" under pressure, as some were quick to explain, or he was a misfit who did not adapt well to Army life. Worse still, prominent officials immediately began to express concern, not that the shooting might signal a broader pattern of attacks against the United States or a shocking breakdown of the military's ability to recognize danger in its midst, but rather that it might cast a shadow over the Army's diversity initiatives or lead to a backlash against Muslims.

By the end of the week, however, these evasions were coming into conflict with some disquieting facts. For more than a year before the shooting, for example, the gunman had carried on a correspondence with an al Qaeda operative who, one infers, encouraged him to undertake the deadly mission. It was also learned that he had often expressed the view that Muslim soldiers should not be sent to fight against other Muslims. The Army knew this, through information collected and transmitted by the FBI, but did nothing about it for fear of taking steps that might be seen as prejudicial against a member of a minority group. Because of this failure to act, 13 soldiers are dead, many more are wounded, and families are shattered.

John Fitzgerald Kennedy
1917-1963

Why America Weeps

Kennedy Victim of Violent Streak
He Sought to Curb in the Nation

By JAMES RESTON

WASHINGTON, Nov. 23—America wept tonight, not alone for its dead young President, but for itself. The grief was general, for somehow the worst in the nation had prevailed over the best. The indictment extended beyond the assassin, for something in the nation itself, some strain of madness and violence, had destroyed the highest symbol of law and order.

City Goes Dark

By ROBERT C. DOTY

Shock and sorrow for the murdered President darkened and silenced uniformed Manhattan last night.

Speaker John McCormack, now 71 and, by the peculiarities of our politics, next in line of succession after the Vice President, expressed this sense of national dismay and self-criticism:

"My God! My God! What are we coming to?"

The tendency to evade unsettling truths when they threaten cherished ideals is not uncommon in political life. It was expressed in a most vivid form in the aftermath of the Kennedy assassination.

President Kennedy was shot on November 22, 1963, by a devoted Communist for motives linked to the Cold War. For many reasons, the liberal leadership of the nation found this explanation difficult to accept. As a consequence, they said things that only added to the confusion surrounding the event. President Kennedy, they said, was a martyr to civil rights; he was a victim of a climate of hate and bigotry then expressed in opposition to civil rights across the South; he died because America is obsessed by violence and permits too easy access to guns. Kennedy's assassination was actually an event in the Cold War, but the liberal leadership of the country said it was an event in the struggle for civil rights.

There is no doubt at this late date that Lee Harvey Oswald shot President Kennedy and that he almost certainly acted alone. Nor should there be much doubt that his motives were linked to his Communist ideology, and in particular to his wish to protect the Castro regime in Cuba from the Kennedy administration's efforts to topple it. The evidence condemning Oswald is every bit as strong as that which condemned John Wilkes Booth in the assassination of Lincoln. Shortly after his arrest, the press began listing Oswald's extensive Communist associations and activities, including his defection to the Soviet Union in 1959, continuing membership in left-wing organizations after his return in 1962, establishment of a pro-Castro front group in New Orleans in 1963, and trip to

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Mexico City in September 1963 to visit the Cuban and Soviet embassies as part of an effort to travel to Cuba. It soon became known that the previous April, Oswald had taken a shot at General Edwin Walker, a spokesman for right-wing causes in Dallas.

Notwithstanding these known facts, liberal leaders sought to cast a different interpretation over the assassination. Earl Warren, chief justice of the United States, said on the evening of the assassination, "A great and good president has suffered martyrdom as a result of the hatred and bitterness that has been injected into the life of our nation by bigots." This was a theme that Warren repeated two days later in a eulogy for President Kennedy given at the Capitol at the invitation of Mrs. Kennedy, who had made clear in personal remarks that she wanted her husband remembered as a martyr for civil rights, not a victim of the Cold War. Warren further implied that the climate of opinion in Dallas had contributed to the assassination, another popular theme (outside of Texas). On the same occasion, Senator Mike Mansfield, majority leader of the Senate, compared Kennedy to Jesus Christ and hoped that his death would bring to an end "the bigotry, the hatred, prejudice, and the arrogance which converged in that moment of horror to strike him down."

The idea that Kennedy was a victim of the far right surfaced the day after the assassination in an influential article by James Reston on the front page of the *New York Times*. Reston was then chief of the *Times* Washington bureau, and his piece ran under the headline: "Why America Weeps: Kennedy Victim of Violent Streak He Sought to Curb in the Nation." Reston wrote,

> America wept tonight, not alone for its dead young president, but for itself. The grief was general, for somehow the worst in the nation had prevailed over the best. The indictment extended beyond the assassin, for something in the nation itself, some strain of madness and violence, had destroyed the highest symbol of law and order.

He continued to develop this theme: "The irony of the President's death," he wrote, "is that his short administration was devoted almost entirely to various attempts to curb this very streak of violence in the American character." He went on to observe that, "from the beginning to the end of his administration, he was trying to damp down the violence of extremists on the Right." The fact that the assassin was a violent extremist from the left did not deter Reston.

The idea that Kennedy was a victim of the far right surfaced the day after the assassination in an article by James Reston on the front page of the 'New York Times.' The headline: 'Why America Weeps: Kennedy Victim of Violent Streak He Sought to Curb in the Nation.'

He blamed the right wing notwithstanding the fact that a detailed article listing Oswald's Communist associations ran adjacent to his article.

The developing consensus about the assassination implied strong parallels between the deaths of Lincoln and Kennedy. Both, after all, had been cut down in their prime in the midst of the struggle for equal rights. President Kennedy's funeral was scripted in important ways in imitation of Lincoln's, so much so that Russell Baker could write, also in the *Times*, that "the analogy to Lincoln's death must have been poignantly apparent to most of those who passed [Kennedy's] flag draped coffin." Under the circumstances, it would have been difficult for a dissenting voice to challenge the wishful consensus.

President Lyndon Johnson, for his part, was concerned that Oswald's Communist loyalties could lead to another round of anti-Communist recriminations that would complicate his diplomatic efforts with the Soviet Union. He was thus not displeased with the developing consensus that Kennedy had been a victim of the far right or of a climate of violence. A week after the assassination, in a Thanksgiving message to the nation, Johnson urged Congress to pass a civil rights bill as a memorial to his slain predecessor.

The cultural and political understanding of the Kennedy assassination was soon detached from the details of the event itself. Instead of accepting the facts and following them to a logical conclusion, the liberal leadership of the country came together to formulate their preferred explanation. Surprisingly, they made that explanation stick, producing no end of questions and conspiracy theories about who was really responsible. And because the false but prevalent explanation was one that blamed American culture itself, it unjustifiably shook the faith of many Americans in their institutions and way of life.

Five years later, in 1968, President Kennedy's brother, Senator Robert F. Kennedy, was assassinated in Los Angeles on the evening of his victory in the California presidential primary. His assassin, Sirhan Sirhan, decided to kill Kennedy after reading that he had made a campaign pledge to support Israel. Sirhan was determined to carry out the murder before the anniversary of the Six Day War in the Middle East, which had occurred almost exactly a year earlier. Yet this event, too, was portrayed as if it reflected some distemper in American society about bigotry and violence.

The repercussions especially of the long-running misunderstanding of President Kennedy's assassination should serve as an object lesson for anyone who would distort the facts surrounding the events at Fort Hood. Whatever those facts turn out to be, we will be far better off facing them than pretending that they are other than what they are. ♦

Gee Thanks, Nancy

Pelosi delivers Reid a health care bill that can't pass the Senate. BY FRED BARNES

Democratic health care reform—Obamacare, that is—in either its House or Senate form is unpopular both in general and in most of its particulars. Not only that, it's become ever more unpopular as Obama has drawn more public attention to it. Yet the operating assumption of the president and congressional Democrats is that enacting Obamacare will increase their popularity and improve their prospects for reelection.

Does this make sense? Will passing a widely disliked piece of legislation endear voters to those who passed it? Not on your life.

And Obama and Democrats have also embraced the flip side of their dubious calculation. They believe the worst thing that can happen is failing to pass Obamacare or something close to it, or at least something. Just look what happened to Bill Clinton and Democrats when they failed to enact Hillarycare in some form or other. They lost the 1994 election in a Republican landslide.

In case anyone had forgotten, Clinton appeared at a lunch of Senate Democrats last week to remind them. "It's not important to be perfect here," Clinton said. "It's important to act, to move, to start the ball rolling. The worst thing to do is nothing."

Really? Polls now show the public prefers doing nothing to passing Obamacare.

The explanation for the seemingly illogical thinking of Obama and Democrats lies in the basic conceit of liberals: We know better. Sure, folks may like their current health care, but we'll give them a better, fairer, more reliable system that's good for them and the country. They'll grow to like it. And Obama and Democrats will get the credit and the boost in popularity that comes with it.

Maybe they're right—no, perish the thought. Health care reform is only the leading edge of the most unwanted, voter-unfriendly agenda a president has ever proposed and fought for. The stimulus, cap and trade, vast spending programs, re-regulation, record deficits, more power concentrated in Washington, Guantánamo—these aren't going to make Obama and Democrats more popular either.

But Obama and Democrats do have one very important thing going for them. They have large, impatient liberal majorities in both houses of Congress. So long as they can keep most Democrats on board, Democrats can pass anything, no matter how unpopular. And this is probably the only Congress (2009-10) in which they'll be able to do this.

Despite a 60-40 majority, they're in trouble on health care in the Senate. It was all but certain that Nancy Pelosi would be able to push Obamacare through the House, and she did—even while 39 Democrats bolted, some no doubt with her permission. Next to Obama and perhaps White House chief of staff Rahm Emanuel, she's the most powerful person in Washington. She's tough and, like Obama, highly ideological.

Senate majority leader Harry Reid is no Pelosi. He's a klutz. His problem is that the more he does to make Obamacare passable in the Senate, the less passable it becomes in the House.

Take the matter of a government-run insurance program, the so-called public option loved by liberals because it's a giant step toward a single payer system. The House bill includes one and so will the bill that Reid introduces. But at the moment, there are 41 senators ready to filibuster a bill with a public option in it—40 Republicans and independent Democrat Joe Lieberman.

That leaves Reid with the need to strip the public option from the bill. It won't be easy. More than 50 Democrats like the public option. There's a good chance 41 of them will be willing to fili-

JASON SEILER

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buster any attempt to take it out. Reid is in a bind.

Then there's the Stupak amendment that put stringent rules against federal funding of abortions in the House health care bill. Putting Stupak in the Senate bill is highly unlikely. At least 41 senators, most Democrats plus a few Republicans, are sure to filibuster it successfully.

There's still more trouble for Reid. A handful of moderate Democrats—Evan Bayh of Indiana, Ben Nelson of Nebraska, Blanche Lincoln of Arkansas, Mary Landrieu of Louisiana—fear Obamacare is too sweeping and expensive. Reid must win them over. He can't offer too much, or he'll alienate more liberal senators. But he has other inducements, like promising Bayh that he'll head a commission to curb entitlements. Reid will have to be deft and clever, traits for which he's never been noted.

Minority leader Mitch McConnell won't be any help. He and Republicans have adopted a strategy of no improvements. They won't support any changes in Obamacare that might make it more palatable to moderate Democrats or queasy Republicans. This makes sense. McConnell wants to kill the bill and start over, this time with bipartisan reform in mind.

Fashioning a Democratic bill that attracts 60 votes is possible. But Reid will have to do this twice, first to gain passage in the Senate, then to get the Senate to approve the measure that emerges from a Senate-House conference—the Reid-Pelosi compromise, should the process get that far.

On both votes, Obama is bound to be personally involved, using whatever clout he can muster to win the 59th or 60th votes. His argument is one we've already heard: The failure to enact a bill would be disastrous for his presidency and for Democrats.

But what if an undecided Democratic senator, in a private chat with the president, asks about the public's distaste for liberal health care reform? "Mr. President, how will it help you and Democrats to pass an unpopular bill?" Obama may have a persuasive answer, but I can't imagine what it might be. ♦

Harvard's Warriors

Honoring the Medal of Honor recipients.

BY JULES CRITTENDEN

Cambridge, Mass.

It was like a fleeting glimpse of an alternative world: the greatness of the past and what might be in the future, brought together for a moment at Harvard University last week.

It was the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month at Harvard's Memorial Church, built to commemorate students lost in the First World War. Decorated with eagles, crosses, and the sculpted form of a woman weeping over a fallen crusader, walls inscribed with the names of Harvard's war dead, the church was filled with martial music, the solemn tramp of a color guard, the echoing notes of "Taps," and the slow tolling of a bell in honor of 16 dead American heroes—Harvard's own Medal of Honor recipients, recognized as a group for the first time.

The Reverend Peter Gomes, Harvard's chaplain, addressed the gathering of generals, admirals, active-duty servicemen, cadets, and grizzled combat veterans, welcoming them to the sanctum of Harvard's illustrious military tradition. He reminded them that the university's association with service and sacrifice is older than the nation, dating back more than 350 years.

"You need to know. We have kept this day long before you appeared today," Gomes told the assembly, which included one living Medal of Honor recipient, Navy Captain Thomas Hudner, who crash-landed his fighter behind enemy lines in Korea to pull his downed wingman out of burning wreckage; others who carried the weight of having ordered men forward to their deaths; and many who had accepted those orders and lived on with the memory of what that had entailed, among them survivors of some of the bloodiest days in American military history.

"You do need to know that we are very much aware of the sacrifice of our youth for our country. This church stands in the middle of the Yard as a perpetual reminder of the sacrifice they gave," said Gomes. "We are very mindful of the past … out of which we have risen here."

"So I hope you will feel welcomed into this place," he said. "It may not be where you ordinarily are but at the risk of some candor, it is where you ought to be."

Army Chief of Staff General George Casey rose to note his own father's name opposite on the plaque of Harvard alumni killed in Vietnam, and to remark, "Our freedom has been bought by the sacrifices of men and women like those we honor today. How lucky we are in this country to have men and women who not only believe in the values and ideals we stand for, but are willing to fight for them."

Then Harvard president Drew Gilpin Faust, a military historian whose father was wounded in combat and decorated for bravery in World War II, stood to pronounce Harvard's own heroes "the finest exemplars of all Harvard students and graduates who have served their country since its earliest days."

From the Civil War to Vietnam, she noted, "These men rallied troops when it meant almost certain death. They fought on when wounded. They volunteered for dangerous missions. They assaulted enemy positions. … We at Harvard are proud to recognize those

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heroes and proud to claim them as our own."

Then she added, "Let us work to ensure that the wisdom we imbue is not just wisdom of the mind but wisdom of the heart, the courage that these men represent."

They were beautiful sentiments, spoken in the presence of greatness. But they seemed oddly in tension with some of the speakers' deeds.

Gomes's greeting notwithstanding, the U.S. military is officially unwelcome in Harvard Yard, except in occasional shows of pomp and circumstance that belie the university's workaday policies and practices. Despite Faust's praise, the military is not a field in which Harvard encourages its brightest minds to contribute and test themselves.

The unveiling of the plaque bearing the names of Harvard's Medal of Honor recipients.

US ARMY / D. MYLES CULLEN

In fact, Harvard's Reserve Officer Training Corps program was kicked off campus in the late 1960s, amid the bitterly divisive Vietnam-era antiwar protests. Today, while most of America has embraced the volunteer military that has fought a long, hard war against a proven and persistent threat, Harvard continues to hold ROTC at arm's length. The current excuse for Harvard's willingness to divorce itself from the protector of its freedoms is ostensibly the "Don't ask, don't tell" policy that was enacted by a Democratic Congress under President Clinton and remains in effect under a new Democratic Congress and administration.

There is no on-campus program to imbue the wisdom of mind or heart exemplified by Harvard's military heroes. Any students inspired to join ROTC by the examples of leadership now etched in stone at Memorial Church must rise early to take shuttle buses and subway trains to MIT and Boston University. An alumni association raises the hefty $150,000 in cross-registration fees that Harvard won't pay, although Harvard is glad to accept full tuition from the military for those same cadets who trek to the other schools three times a week from Harvard Yard.

Harvard officials declined to comment for this article. The Harvard Veterans Alumni Organization which researched the Medal of Honor history, raised the funds, and made all arrangements for the event is officially apolitical, but its members make no secret of their desire to see several steps taken by Harvard.

One is a dedicated effort to research and document Harvard's own contribution to the nation's defense, both in soldiers and in training and defense research. This might include endowing a chair. Another goal, expressed through Advocates for Harvard ROTC, is the full restoration and funding of ROTC at Harvard.

Yet another is a formal effort—much like Ivy League outreach to minorities and athletes—to recruit not only ROTC candidates but also returning veterans, whom the university is already seeking to attract with a "Yellow Ribbon" scholarship program. Some Harvard alumni would like to see veteran status and military values become sought-after qualities for the enrichment of everyone's college experience.

Tom Reardon, chairman of the Harvard Veterans Alumni Organization, expressed some sympathy for Faust, noting that as president of the university, she is a political creature and may be limited by powerful faculty factions, holding on in varying degrees to 1960s antiwar ideals or acting on gay rights concerns. But he and others say policy objections to a military governed by elected civilian leaders have sharply limited Harvard's ability to contribute to the leadership of one of the nation's vital fields in a dangerous world.

"It's bad for the university not to have this exposure," said 1976 Harvard alum Michael Segal, a neurologist who is actively pushing for ROTC, adding, "It's bad for the military as well, not to have access to the best universities."

Any of Harvard's heroes, and any of the combat veterans in the audience, know far better than most people that what must sometimes be done in life can be counterintuitive and terrifying in the execution, and heart-wrenching and embittering in the aftermath. This is many orders of magnitude above the level of intensity one experiences in academia or politics. But men and women have given themselves to it these four centuries past because it contributed to the greater good, and they knew that without it neither our nation nor Harvard University could be what they are today.

So last week's reverent welcoming of military values in Harvard Yard may have seemed like a rare moment of clarity. But it may also have been history in the making. For the nation's oldest university, founded in 1636, it may possibly have been a sign of maturation in progress, an opportunity taken to grasp the fullest measure of what it means to be a leader.

As retired Navy Captain Paul Mawn, a 1963 Harvard graduate, observed of war, "There is no greater crucible of leadership." ♦

Hot Air in Copenhagen

Will the climate gabfest be ineffectual or harmful?

BY IRWIN M. STELZER

Protesters in Barcelona, at a planning meeting for the Copenhagen conference

TONI ALBIR / CORBIS

It sounds harmless enough, the news that the 15th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change will meet in Copenhagen early next month. Another U.N. talking shop, surely, designed mainly to provide a nice expenses-paid junket for the U.N. bureaucrats, representatives of nongovernmental organizations, and world leaders who find these things an attractive diversion from coping with economic problems at home. A total of 20,000 delegates, give or take a few, will be there from 192 nations—so many that Copenhagen can't cope, and many will have to commute for a dozen days from as far away as Sweden, leaving their carbon footprints embedded in the atmosphere.

The goal is to devise a method of reducing greenhouse gas emissions to prevent global warming. At least, that's the stated goal, and the real one of those convinced that warming is an existential threat to the world as we know it—"human survival itself is at risk," according to scientist/activist James Lovelock. So profound is such a belief that the British courts this month accorded believers in climate change all of the rights the law extends to practitioners of any religion. Ruling in a case in which a man claims he was dismissed as "head of sustainability" for a real estate firm because of his ecological beliefs, the court held, "A belief in man-made climate change and the alleged moral imperatives is capable, if genuinely held, of being a philosophical belief for the purpose of the 2003 Religion and Beliefs Regulations."

But the drive for a replacement for the Kyoto Protocol, which expires in 2012, comes not only from the passion of true believers. Others behind the Copenhagen get-together see climate change as a crisis that they cannot let go to waste, a chance to achieve their long-standing goal of transferring trillions in wealth from the rich to the poorer nations. This drive started long before global climate change became the hot issue it now is, and will continue long after the earth starts to cool.

Here is the state of play. The delegates are to consider a 181-page draft that calls for developed countries to pay an "adaptation debt" to developing countries to the tune of somewhere between $70 billion and $150 billion per year, funded perhaps by a 2 percent tax on international financial transactions in the developed countries. Prime Minister Gordon Brown, seemingly unaware that Britain is, er, broke, has generously offered to throw $1.5 billion into the pot, topping Barack Obama's offer of $1.2 billion. The European Union has endorsed the $150 billion figure—but refuses to say how much the 27-nation EU grouping is willing to put up, or how its contribution would be divided among its members. Eastern European members of the EU have rejected a call for an EU contribution of $10 billion. Germany's Angela Merkel guesses that the EU should contribute 30 percent of needed funds, or close to $50 billion, leaving about $100 billion for other developed nations to cough up. In short, even within this one grouping, there is little agreement on how to pay the bill for meeting emission reduction targets.

There is agreement, however, that the stumbling block to a final treaty—"treaty" is a word not used, perhaps to avoid the need for Senate approval of any deal that President Obama might sign—is the United States. Barack Obama might be popular in Europe as the non-Bush, but on this issue America remains Europe's favorite piñata, as the *Guardian*'s summary of world reaction to the American position makes clear. "We expect American leadership.

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President Obama has created great expectations around the world. Now we expect [the United States] to contribute," says Andreas Carlgren, Sweden's environment minister, speaking on behalf of the EU presidency. The reluctance of Congress to pass expensive environmental legislation is no excuse adds Connie Hedegaard, the Danish environment minister, "I remind the U.S. that it is not the only country in the world that has to have discussions with its domestic parliament. The expectation out there worldwide and among populations and the young [is for] the U.S. to deliver."

In short, Hedegaard would have Todd Stern, U.S. special envoy for climate change, renege on his promise not to sign any deal that would be "dead on arrival" in Congress. John Bruton, EU ambassador to the United States, enraged Stern by telling the press, "Sometimes the greatest deliberative body in the world [the Senate] acts as though it is the only deliberative body in the world." Proving that his stay in Washington has taught him nothing about how the U.S. system works, Bruton adds, "The world cannot wait on the Senate's timetable." Wanna bet?

The meeting's chairman, Yvo de Boer of the Netherlands, piles on, "We need to see clear targets from the U.S. at Copenhagen." The U.S. position of "pledge and review"—pledge to reduce emissions and then review the effectiveness of measures taken—has little appeal to those who prefer targets, which the left-leaning politicians who dominate discussions of global climate change have historically found as attractive as they are ineffective.

China, the world's largest emitter of carbon dioxide, a principal greenhouse gas, has made an unquantified promise to cut its "carbon intensity." That means it will reduce its emissions per unit of increased GDP—and since its GDP is growing, its emissions will continue to increase. (When George W. Bush made a similar proposal, it was greeted with disdain.) Obama hopes to use his visit to Beijing this week to get the Chinese to sign on to several specific actions in lieu of specific commitments: more renewable energy, for example.

India, another developing country, is even more reluctant to accept constraints on its growth and rising output of greenhouse gases and is offering only to substitute "actions" of the sort Obama has in mind for any commitments to reduce emissions. No objections heard from most of the delegates headed for Copenhagen, who agree that developing countries should be allowed to go down the "actions" path. But America's offer actually to reduce emissions by 17 percent below 2005 levels just isn't good enough. "Far short of what science demands," says Greenpeace, which characterizes the cap and trade legislation now before Congress as "a perpetuation of business as usual." (Senators know better, which is why the president is having such a hard time persuading his Democratic allies that the recession is just the time to raise taxes on energy production and use.)

China and India say they will do no more to risk their economic growth, at least until offered a satisfactory dollop of cash and access to Western technology. In the case of wind power, China is already using U.S. technology and—get this—stimulus cash designed to create jobs for American workers, to build machines for developers of a 600-megawatt wind farm in West Texas, to the consternation of the neo-protectionist senator from New York, Chuck Schumer. As the developing world sees it, the industrialized world created the warming problem with its high standard of living and is poorly placed to ask emerging economies, many of which can supply electricity only to a minority of their populations, to stop the growth that is bringing rising living standards to their relatively impoverished masses.

Which brings the delegates right back to the United States. They contend that only American leadership-by-example—acceptance of tight curbs on its own emissions and willingness to fund the wealth and technology transfers demanded by poorer countries to cooperate—can produce a meaningful treaty, or at least a large step towards such a treaty. Which is why the 20,000 delegates are so pleased with Obama's decision to stroll across the Skagerrak Strait to Copenhagen to lay hands on the delegates and push the talks to a successful conclusion immediately after accepting his Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo on December 10. John Kerry, among others, believes the presidential presence will be an adequate substitute for legislation as a demonstration of American commitment to fighting climate change. Surely, the man who promised that his election would be seen as "the moment when the rise of the oceans began to slow and our planet began to heal" can bring agreement out of discord.

No summary of the positions being taken would be complete without mention of the African nations—which have boycotted preliminary meetings because they deem the emission-reduction targets inadequate—and the bunch with the most chutzpah (although that is a word they would reject for many reasons): OPEC. The oil cartel contends that since the goal of the Copenhagen summit is to reduce use of carbon fuels, including oil, its members should be reimbursed for any reduction in their revenues resulting from cutbacks in oil consumption. Transfer wealth from consumers who have the temerity to use less oil to the producers who have bled these consumers dry for decades—not a program likely to garner significant support. But, hey, it's worth a try, even if the use of oil is projected to rise, not fall, as the world economy recovers, and the prospect of $100 oil again rears its pricey head.

The size of the Copenhagen gathering reflects the consensus among world leaders that global warming is a threat. Their faith in the efficacy of complex climate-change models has not been reduced by the failure of the complex financial-risk models in which they put their faith until the almost-collapse of the world financial system. They may be right to worry about rising sea levels, especially the 80 percent of Australians who find life along their nation's beaches preferable to residence in its bleak outback, and the small island-states such as the Maldives, Kiribati,

and the Bahamas. After all, it is not bad policy to assume that prudential, cost-sensible steps should be taken on the assumption that the globe is warming, that human activity is the cause, and that prudence dictates taking steps to reduce CO_2 emissions. Low-probability risks with high-magnitude consequences should not be ignored.

But is the U.N. effort the right step? It is if you believe with meeting chairman Yvo de Boer, now presiding over a staff of 200 and an annual budget of $30 million, that only a supranational agency can manage the galaxy of measures needed to produce a major cut in emissions. As the London *Times* put it, "Copenhagen is perhaps viewed best as . . . an agreement that, if successful, could define the global industrial and commercial landscape of the 21st century."

The U.N. is eager to provide that definition, acquire the power to tax to fund its vision, and to take such steps as are necessary to enforce the agreed emission-reduction limits. This goes far beyond anything envisioned in the Kyoto Protocol, so unpopular that President Bill Clinton and his vice president, Al Gore, did not dare send it to the Senate for ratification after that body unanimously adopted a resolution stating that the United States would not sign on unless developing countries agreed to binding targets, or if the agreement would "result in serious harm to the economy of the United States."

Which the Copenhagen deal just might. Oil industry officials have called the U.N. goal of a huge reduction in emissions "completely illusory." Before trotting out the "they would say that wouldn't they?" line, remember that the EU, an enthusiast for emission reductions, has failed to meet its targets, that the emissions trading scheme it set up has failed, that the only effective emissions reducer has been the current recession, which has closed factories around the world, and that heavily subsidized renewable sources have failed to provide more than trivial portions of most nations' energy.

Too bad the Copenhagen delegates won't consider an alternative to centralized U.N. control: private sector investment, backed by carbon taxes or an effective trading scheme that puts a price on carbon and thereby levels the playing field between carbon-free technologies and carbon-intensive ones. Some $3 trillion would be needed by 2020 to even approach the Copenhagen targets, says Deutsche Asset Management in a report prepared with Columbia University's Climate Center.

The bureaucrats, regulators, and NGOs in Copenhagen might usefully spend the time before they gather next year to convert any political deal they strike in Copenhagen into a draft treaty figuring out what incentives are necessary to get investors to put up that much cash to fund the research and development of technologies that can reduce emissions without stifling growth or inviting massive government control of the daily habits of ordinary citizens and industries. ♦

Barack in Beijing

How the Chinese regime hopes to make use of him. BY GORDON G. CHANG

As President Barack Obama takes his first trip to China, Beijing officials are in a triumphal mood, anticipating a "Chinese century" and looking forward to making the oblivious American leader the most important prop in their campaign to legitimize their central role in the world.

China's rulers, however, shouldn't need to seek affirmation. Their country is the planet's most populous state and sits in the center of the most dynamic region of the world. They are, at this moment, building sprawling cities with newfound wealth, making their gigantic military into a formidable fighting force, and buying resources from Africa to Australia. In short, China looks like the world's next hegemon.

But Chinese officials are not so sure of themselves. The nine men sitting on the Politburo Standing Committee oversee a one-party state riddled with corruption, held back by a discredited ideology, and undermined by decades of modernization. The country's export-dominated economic model is particularly ill-suited for the worldwide slump, and the Communist party's rigid political system is unable to respond to rapidly changing circumstances.

The failure to adjust will prove to be a problem because the Chinese people, over an especially prosperous decade, have become increasingly defiant, staging about 100,000 protests a year, some of them large and many violent. The leadership, not surprisingly, has become worried about what the *laobaixing*—the ordinary folk—will do if the country's economy enters a period of stagnation next year, as analysts increasingly fear.

Gordon G. Chang is the author of The Coming Collapse of China.

Chinese leaders know that the stability of the modern Chinese state depends on prosperity and that prosperity largely rests on continued access to American technology and especially markets. Last year, all but $27.5 billion of China's $295.5 billion trade surplus related to sales to the United States. Fortunately for the party, Washington has continued to accept large trade deficits with China, and this unbalanced relationship gives Obama extraordinary leverage in his dealings with Beijing—but only if he uses it.

So far, he has mostly chosen not to do so. To his credit, Obama imposed Section 421 surge tariffs on Chinese tires in September, the Commerce Department levied anti-subsidy duties on steel products in late October, and his administration filed a World Trade Organization case against China in June, but he has failed to take concerted action in a period of Beijing's increasingly mercantilist behavior.

Obama's predecessor also failed to use America's enormous economic leverage on the Chinese, but George W. Bush did apply geopolitical pressure. First, changing course from the Clinton administration, he shored up relations with Tokyo. Obama, by contrast, has weakened ties with America's core ally in Asia.

Second, in what could turn out to be his most lasting legacy, Bush reached out to India and established strong working ties in vital areas, especially nuclear energy. His successor, unfortunately, has undermined these relationships. A partnership between the world's most populous democracy and its most powerful one—even if it remained informal—would be a setback of immense proportions for Beijing. To prevent such a threatening tie-up—and to avoid the formation of an "arc of freedom and prosperity" from India to Japan, as Tokyo once proposed—the Chinese would do almost anything, even accede to Washington's initiatives.

Obama's failure to consolidate relations with Japan and India, the countries China fears most, is a critical mistake. As a result, he has little to bargain with. Beijing's foreign policy is, above all, ruthlessly pragmatic. The Chinese generally do not reciprocate friendly gestures; they interpret them as weakness. Obama, who comes from the rough and tumble of Chicago's politics, should instantly recognize the way Chinese policymakers think. Inexplicably, he doesn't.

As a result of misunderstanding the Chinese, America is losing friends in Asia fast. Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama, who ended the decades-long reign of the Liberal Democratic party in September, has signaled he wants to reorient Japan's foreign policy toward China. And some policymakers in New Delhi, noticing Obama's unusually soft approach, are pushing their country away from America as they feel India too now needs to placate the Chinese. Washington, in a real sense, is undermining its own role in Asia.

Obama is not the only American president to get China wrong. Bill Clinton gave the Chinese an extraordinarily favorable World Trade Organization deal, and George W. Bush sought to enlist them in grand geopolitical projects at a time when they were not ready to help. At least Obama's predecessor told China that it had to play a constructive role in the international system, pushing Beijing to be a "responsible stakeholder." That language was dropped in late September for a less demanding formulation. "We are ready to accept a growing role for China on the international stage," said Deputy Secretary of State James Steinberg. The price for American acceptance would be "strategic reassurance"—in other words, "a shared commitment to building an international system based on mutual trust."

At one time, it might have been possible to think that Beijing would actually share strategic visions with the United States. Jiang Zemin, China's leader from 1993 to 2003, desired recognition for his country's growing status, but he saw himself working cooperatively with the United States and its partners in a Congress of Vienna-like atmosphere.

Hu Jintao, the current supremo, has shifted policy in a new direction. Like Jiang, he believes Beijing should assert itself. Unlike his predecessor, Hu thinks China should actively work to restructure the international system more to its liking. This change in outlook has had consequences as China, to give just a few examples, has recently increased its support for nuclear rogues Iran and North Korea, used aggressive tactics at sea to push the U.S. Navy from Asian waters, stepped up its efforts to remove America from Central Asia, and formed a loose coalition of developing nations to undermine the dollar. Unlike Jiang, Hu is ideologically anti-American.

Yet we cannot place all the blame on Hu. Washington's generous policies have encouraged China to move in wrong directions. Even before the end of the Cold War, we sought to ease the Chinese into the international system. In so doing, we made their economic "miracle" possible by opening our market to their goods and accepted the severe limitations they place on access to theirs. This economic policy has been accompanied by a generous policy of "engagement." Yet by engaging China we have inadvertently created perverse incentives. In the past, when the Chinese acted aggressively, we indulgently rewarded them. So they continued unfriendly conduct. We rewarded them still more. In these circumstances, why would they ever improve?

Since Deng Xiaoping abandoned most of Mao's economic ideology, the primary basis of the regime's legitimacy has been the continuous delivery of prosperity. Should the economy stall in this global downturn—a distinct possibility when Beijing's economic stimulus measures wear off—the only thing the Communist party can rely on is nationalism. Nationalist themes already dominate state media.

So why did Hu Jintao invite Barack Obama to his capital at a time like this? There is little likelihood that the Chinese ruler has any intention of coming to terms with him. The two men have met and talked many times, and they know each other's positions well. The purpose of this week's summit is to show the *laobaixing* that the leader of the world's democracies feels he must come to Beijing to ask for help on the great issues of the day. Obama's visit, unfortunately, makes America appear needy, and this convinces China's officials that they can call the tune.

Now, we are seeing the worst possible combination in Beijing—a deeply insecure regime that has become arrogant over its recent economic success. The world—not just America—is bound to suffer as a result. ♦

Connecting the Dots

The shooting at Fort Hood was no 'mystery.' It was an act of terrorism waiting to happen.

By Stephen F. Hayes & Thomas Joscelyn

At about 1:30 P.M. on November 5, Army Specialist Logan Burnette, a thick-chested, baby-faced soldier scheduled to deploy to Iraq in a few short weeks, was sitting in the back row of a small auditorium-like room at the Fort Hood Army base near Killeen, Texas. Burnette was joking with several other soldiers as they waited—and waited and waited—to see a doctor for a final pre-mobilization medical review.

"Out of nowhere," Burnette later recalled, "a man stood up in uniform, screamed 'Allahu Akbar,' and proceeded to open fire on myself and the rest of my fellow soldiers sitting there." One of the shots hit Burnette on his left pinky finger. Another on his left elbow. Another in the hip. The rampage continued for several minutes.

Army Major Nidal Malik Hasan, 39, went on a shooting rampage at Fort Hood that claimed 13 lives and wounded more than 40. Three hours later, while the base was still in lockdown, an FBI spokesman dismissed suggestions that the attack was terrorism and said that a link between Hasan and terrorist organizations "is not being discussed."

Yet, a little more than a week after the shooting we know that Hasan justified suicide bombings in an Internet posting. He lectured colleagues using the rhetoric of jihad. He warned darkly about "adverse events" if Muslims were not allowed to leave military service. He repeatedly sought counsel from a radical imam with known ties to al Qaeda. He tried to convert some of his patients to Islam—many of them soldiers troubled by their near-fatal experiences with jihadists. He printed business cards that made no mention of his military service but instead identified him as an "SoA," a soldier of Allah.

And U.S. authorities knew about some of this well before the attack at Fort Hood. At Walter Reed—where Hasan spent the six years before his posting to Fort Hood in July—his superiors wondered whether he might be "psychotic" and worried that he consistently sided with jihadists over his fellow soldiers. The FBI had intercepted emails Hasan had sent to Anwar al Awlaki, an al Qaeda supporter with strong ties to three 9/11 hijackers.

But the FBI did not know all that the Army knew. And the Army did not know all that the FBI knew. The participants in an FBI-led Joint Terrorism Task Force discussed Hasan's case briefly and concluded that it did not warrant an investigation. If they had performed even a cursory, unobtrusive examination of this man, his contacts, and his radical views, they would have quickly turned up a great deal of troubling information.

Since the shooting there have been dozens of theories floated about Hasan's motivations. On the night after the attack, CNN's Larry King interviewed the ubiquitous "Dr. Phil" McGraw, who speculated that Hasan's counseling of traumatized soldiers might have in turn traumatized him and caused him to snap. In his November 10 remarks at Fort Hood, President Barack Obama suggested the cause of the shooting was—and may remain—a mystery. "It may be hard to comprehend the twisted logic that led to this tragedy." The FBI agreed: "The investigation to date has not identified a motive, and a number of possibilities remain under consideration." One of them, according to an article in the *Financial Times*, was "anti-Muslim bias."

Here is another: Nidal Malik Hasan is a jihadist. That so many refuse to even consider this in the face of the overwhelming evidence might help explain why those whose job it was to keep us safe refused to see it back when it really mattered.

On May 31, 2001, Nidal Malik Hasan attended the funeral service for his mother, Hanan Ismail ("Nora" to those who knew her) at the Dar al Hijrah Islamic Center in Falls Church, Virginia. According to an obituary in the *Roanoke Times*, Nora was well-known "for her leadership in running the Capitol Restaurant," where she would "keep sometimes rowdy customers out of trouble and always had a warm meal for someone who otherwise would not have anything to eat that evening." Nora

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was just 49 years old when she died, and her husband passed away three years earlier. They had moved their family to Roanoke in the mid-1980s to pursue business interests and left behind three sons and a large extended family.

The Dar al Hijrah mosque describes itself as "one of the largest and most diverse Islamic Centers in the nation." It hosts hundreds of Muslims for prayers every Friday. At the time of Nora's funeral, a charismatic imam named Anwar al Awlaki was leading the weekly proceedings. Born in America and fluent in English, he was especially effective in dealing with the mosque's English-speaking membership. "Our community needed an imam who could speak English," said Dar al Hijrah's current imam, Johari Abdul-Malik, in a recent interview with PBS. "Not like many masjid, who have an imam who is from the old guard—he speaks broken English, if he speaks English at all—but someone who could convey that message with the full force of faith. [Awlaki] was that person. And he delivered that message dutifully."

According to ABC News, Awlaki preached at Nora's funeral. And Hasan, according to various reports, heard him many other times thereafter. It is not clear whether Hasan and Awlaki forged a close relationship when they worshipped together in Northern Virginia, but Hasan did directly seek Awlaki's counsel again.

Awlaki preached at Dar al Hijrah until April 2002 when he suddenly left the United States for his ancestral home in Yemen. Abdul-Malik, the mosque's current imam, told PBS that Awlaki complained about the "climate" in the United States. Awlaki told him: "You can't really do your work, because it's always anti-terrorism, investigating this. The FBI wants to talk to you."

But the FBI had a good reason for investigating Awlaki: He played a role in the biggest intelligence failure in American history.

The FBI first took notice of Awlaki in June 1999 when his contacts with al Qaeda terrorists, including one who had procured a satellite phone for Osama bin Laden, raised red flags. But after a brief investigation, lasting until March 2000, the FBI determined that the facts did not warrant further inquiry.

Prior to joining Dar al Hijrah, Awlaki was an imam in San Diego. In January 2000, he welcomed two al Qaeda operatives, Khalid al Mihdhar and Nawaf al Hazmi, into his community. They had been identified by U.S. intelligence not just as al Qaeda operatives but as attendees of a key terrorist summit in Kuala Lumpur. (U.S. authorities would later learn that both the USS *Cole* bombing and the September 11 attacks were discussed at the meeting.)

Although the U.S. government knew al Mihdhar and al Hazmi were al Qaeda operatives, the intelligence and law enforcement community lost track of them when they entered the United States.

They were with Awlaki. And, when he moved from California to Northern Virginia in January 2001, they—as well as a third September 11 hijacker named Hani Hanjour—went with him. By the time a serious search for them got underway it was too late. Al Hazmi, al Mihdhar, and Hanjour all took part in September 11 attacks.

The FBI would later determine that al Mihdhar and al Hazmi "were closely affiliated" with Awlaki in San Diego. According to the Congressional Joint Inquiry into the September 11 attacks, Awlaki served as "their spiritual advisor." The Joint Inquiry also identified an unnamed member of the Dar al Hijrah congregation who helped al Hazmi and Hanjour find an apartment. After they had settled into the Falls Church area, this same follower drove them and two other future 9/11 hijackers to Connecticut and then New Jersey. "From the hotel in Connecticut where they stayed for two nights," the Joint Inquiry found, "a total of 75 calls were made to locate apartment[s], flight schools, and car rental agencies for the hijackers." Thus, Awlaki and a member of his congregation provided crucial assistance to the 9/11 hijackers as they planned their day of terror. There are further links between Awlaki and the attacks.

After 9/11, when authorities searched the German residence of Ramzi Binalshibh, the key link between the deployed hijackers in the United States and top al Qaeda members in Afghanistan, counterterrorism officials found the phone number for Dar al Hijrah. And the Joint Inquiry found that after would-be hijacker Zacarias Moussaoui and his roommate were arrested in August 2001, one of Awlaki's "close associates" attempted to post bail for Moussaoui's roommate.

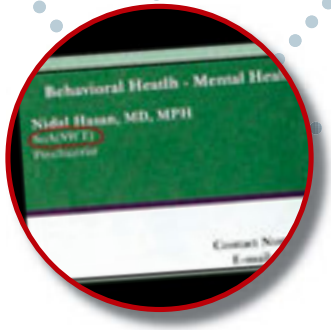
The failure to track known al Qaeda operatives Khalid al Mihdhar and Nawaf al Hazmi after they entered the United States stands out as one of the most noteworthy failures in the run-up to 9/11. Anwar al Awlaki played a role in making that failure possible. He took some of the hijackers under his wing and aided them in blending into American society. Yet, the FBI decided that Awlaki, who is an American citizen, should not be arrested. They let him leave the country in 2002. The Bureau told Congress that while "there's a lot of smoke" surrounding Awlaki, there wasn't enough to hold him. So, Awlaki fled to Yemen—and a better "climate" for his work.

ANWAR AL AWLAKI

NIDAL MALIK HASAN

FORT HOOD

THE DAR AL HIJRAH ISLAMIC CENTER IN FALLS CHURCH



HASAN'S BUSINESS CARD

WALTER REED ARMY MEDICAL CENTER

The U.S. government was concerned enough with Awlaki and his jihadist connections that it continued to monitor his activities once he was back in Yemen. He broadcast his sermons on the Internet, his fluent English making it possible for him to reach audiences that other radical clerics couldn't penetrate. He regularly called for violent jihad against the United States—his native country.

In 2006, the U.S. government asked the Yemenis to detain Awlaki. The jihadist-friendly government in Yemen complied, for a while anyway. But by 2007, Awlaki had been freed and was using his recent confinement as a propaganda tool to expand his reach. Thousands downloaded his lectures and pledged fealty to his radical cause.

Among those he influenced were the six Muslim immigrants who plotted an attack on Fort Dix, a U.S. Army base in New Jersey, in 2007. ABC News reported that court documents show that at least two of the men said they drew inspiration from Awlaki's fiery rhetoric.

Major Nidal Malik Hasan drew on the same source.

In December 2008, the NSA intercepted a series of emails—as many as 20—sent by Hasan to Awlaki. There was no investigation. In a press release on November 9, the FBI explained why:

> Major Hasan came to the attention of the FBI in December 2008 as part of an unrelated investigation being conducted by one of our Joint Terrorism Task Forces (JTTFs). JTTFs are FBI-led, multi-agency teams made up of FBI agents, other federal investigators—including those from the Department of Defense—and state and local law enforcement officers.
>
> Investigators on the JTTF reviewed certain communications between Major Hasan and the subject of that investigation and assessed that the content of those communications was consistent with research being conducted by Major Hasan in his position as a psychiatrist at the Walter Reed Medical Center. Because the content of the communications was explainable by his research and nothing else derogatory was found, the JTTF concluded that Major Hasan was not involved in terrorist activities or terrorist planning. Other communications of which the FBI was aware were similar to the ones reviewed by the JTTF.

The "subject of that investigation" is Anwar al Awlaki. News stories that followed the FBI statement—driven no doubt by FBI officials speaking on background—almost all used the word "benign" to describe the messages Hasan had sent to Awlaki.

That may be correct. Those communications have not been released to the public, and it may very well be the case that Hasan was not taking direct orders from Awlaki. But that misses the point. Even if the content of the communications was benign, their mere existence should have been

troubling: A Muslim officer in the U.S. Army was seeking guidance—spiritual? academic?—from an openly pro-jihad cleric whose past was so troubling he had been investigated by the U.S. intelligence community on three separate occasions and whose words had inspired a plot to attack a U.S. Army installation.

A February 2009 report from a respected counterterrorism think tank called the NEFA Foundation released at approximately the same time the JTTF was reviewing Hasan's communications with Awlaki, described the imam this way. "There is no other comparable pro-al Qaeda American figure who has such tremendous access to audiences or who has such credibility." Awlaki, the report concluded, "may be a key player in al Qaeda's efforts to radicalize and incite American Muslims to commit terrorist acts." It is no wonder, then, that Awlaki praised the Fort Hood attack in a blog posting, calling Hasan a "hero" and a "man of conscience."

If Hasan's communications with Awlaki were disturbing on their own, they were even more worrisome seen in the context of his increasingly bizarre professional behavior over the past several years.

Hasan had long been known as a quiet, somewhat detached man. But as the United States fought two wars in Muslim lands, he became more outspoken and more radical in his religious expression.

During one particularly disturbing June 2007 presentation at Walter Reed, first reported by the *Washington Post*, Hasan showed a slide that raised questions about the ability of Muslims to serve. "It's getting harder and harder for Muslims in the service to morally justify being in a military that seems constantly engaged against fellow Muslims." (Awlaki has repeatedly made similar claims, saying that the war on terror is really a "war on Islam.")

Hasan lectured at Walter Reed about the evolution in Islamic thinking on jihad. At first, Hasan said, the Koran was filled with mainly peaceful verses and "Muslims were not permitted to defend themselves/fight." But as the situation on the ground changed, so did the verses. After the Muslim emigration to Medina, "Self defense was allowed" and then "offensive fighting was allowed." As a result, "Later verses abrogated former ie: peaceful verses no longer apply."

Hasan followed this line of thinking through to its natural conclusion by citing a passage that calls for uncompromising warfare:

> Fight those who do not believe in Allah, nor in the latter day, nor do they prohibit what Allah and His messenger have prohibited, nor follow the religion of truth, out of those who have been given the Book, until they pay the tax in acknowledgement of superiority and they are in a state of subjection.

This is standard jihadist thinking—subjugation of all those who refuse to convert to Islam is a divine commandment. But Hasan took it a step further. In the June 2007 presentation, he echoed the martyr's call to action: "We love death more then [sic] you love life!"

Hasan further warned about the likelihood of "adverse events" if the Defense Department did not heed his warnings. He said that Muslim soldiers "should not serve in any capacity that renders them at risk to hurting/killing believers unjustly." Hasan concluded his presentation by recommending that the Department of Defense allow Muslims to abstain from warfare as "conscientious objectors."

Beyond the substance of his lecture, what made it so striking was that his presentation was to have focused on psychiatry, not jihad.

This new outspokenness caused concern among his colleagues and superiors. According to a story by National Public Radio's Daniel Zwerdling:

> The officials say he antagonized some students and faculty by espousing what they perceived to be extremist Islamic views. His supervisors at Walter Reed had even reprimanded him for telling at least one patient that "Islam can save your soul."

Senior officials in the psychiatric program at Walter Reed held a series of meetings about Hasan to share their concerns. NPR reported two chilling possibilities that concerned Hasan's colleagues:

> One official involved in the conversations had reportedly told colleagues that he worried that if Hasan deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan, he might leak secret military information to Islamic extremists. Another official reportedly wondered aloud to colleagues whether Hasan might be capable of committing fratricide, like the Muslim U.S. Army sergeant who, in 2003, killed two fellow soldiers and injured 14 others by setting off grenades at a base in Kuwait.

Despite these concerns, Nidal Malik Hasan was promoted to the rank of major in May of this year.

It is still unclear precisely how much the Army knew from the FBI about Hasan's troubling contacts and how much the FBI knew from the Army about Hasan's troubled mind. But what is not in question is the fact that too little information was shared and too little attention paid to a man whose words and actions demanded attention.

Barack Obama announced late last week that John Brennan, a top White House counterterrorism official, would review all the intelligence on Hasan. In his radio address on Saturday, Obama promised that the review would include Hasan's "views and contacts."

That's nice. But the seriousness of this atrocity, the acuteness of the intelligence failure, and the administration's demonstrated commitment to political correctness over honest inquiry all demand a comprehensive external investigation. The truth about what happened will give us the best chance of ensuring the prevention of future "adverse events." ♦

The NEA at the Tipping Point

After a decade that saw the endowment successfully expanding Americans' access to art, a new chairman has other priorities.

By David A. Smith

Is there another crucifix in urine lurking just around the corner? Something even worse? The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) is at a tipping point, one that has arrived far earlier in the Obama administration than even close observers of the NEA's fortunes might have suspected. And because of things that are going on right now, a success story in a town with precious few of them—and one that, contrary to public perception, conservatives can and do support—stands at risk of being discredited and damaged.

Over the summer, it was reported that federal funds earmarked for the NEA in the $787 billion economic stimulus package supported the screening of a movie described as "the world's only underground kinky art porno horror film, complete with four men, three women and a gorilla," and a stage production of something called *Perverts Put Out*. Those with long memories might have found themselves thinking, "Here we go again . . ."

These grants, however, rather than directly supporting the questionable individual works, were of the keep-the-lights-on variety, given largely without regard to what sorts of things might be staged when those lights were on. Their purpose, like that of the entire stimulus package, was to address the severe economic trouble besetting the country. The nation's arts organizations were among the countless businesses being threatened; many faced critical financial strains due in large part to a sudden plunge in private donations that followed the Wall Street crash. Salary support was one of the specific projects identified in the NEA's emergency grant guidelines. Symphonies and theater groups have employees who depend on paychecks just as much as auto companies and financial institutions.

Such controversies, however, are a reminder that the National Endowment for the Arts continually faces fundamental choices about how best to preserve the quality and seriousness of the arts and make people aware of their importance. There are today developments more worrisome and threatening to the agency's well being than any headline-grabbing "underground kinky art porno horror film." The time is rapidly approaching in which the NEA must once again consider whom it is intended to serve: the American artist or the American public. This is a central question with which it has wrestled over the entire course of its 44-year existence, and the way it responds now will determine whether it will continue to enjoy its current support in Congress and, indeed, whether it deserves that support at all.

The NEA has a new chairman, Rocco Landesman, appointed in May by the new president. Given the level of support from the arts community for Barack Obama during the 2008 campaign, it was expected that his choice to head the endowment would reflect the interests of artists more than the interests of the public at large. That in and of itself did not necessarily portend trouble. Landesman, like the NEA's first chairman, Roger Stevens, is a successful Broadway producer and a man with proven business sense. This should serve him well when he goes before Congress to defend the NEA's budget and in steering it clear of public controversies. But it's also tiresomely pointed out that Landesman is a man who prides himself

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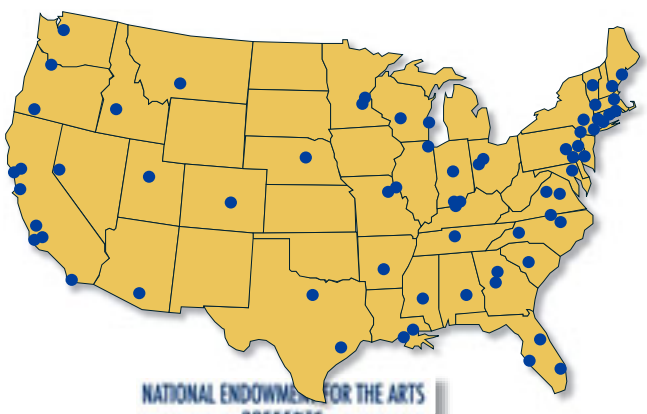
on pulling no punches, and his supporters are looking for him and his "sharp elbows" and "my way or the highway" attitude to shake things up at the NEA, as though stirring the pot were always a productive thing to be doing.

Within hours of being confirmed, Landesman displayed the latter trait, making disparaging comments in an interview with the *New York Times* about small-town theater (in particular, that of Peoria, Illinois) and saying that quality art exists primarily in America's cities. While this may well be true by many measures, it does not necessarily follow that the NEA should be directing its resources primarily to cities (and to the artists who live in them). Landesman further said that creating a program to secure affordable housing for artists—an obviously large city-focused project—should be one of the NEA's priorities. This notion was discussed and largely dismissed back in the mid-1960s at the very first meeting of the National Council on the Arts—the board that advises the endowment's chairman and reviews the grants and initiatives. But now Landesman wants to bring it back. It is further indication that he conceives of the endowment primarily as a way to steer government money to artists rather than a way in which government money can bring more art to the public at large. That the NEA is there, in other words, for the benefit of artists.

Landesman went on to say that geographic distribution of the NEA's money isn't as important as quality. Again, on the surface a hard point with which to quibble. "There is going to be some pushback from me about democratizing arts grants to the point where you really have to answer some questions about artistic merit." He intended this remark to draw a stark distinction between himself and his immediate predecessors—Dana Gioia and Bill Ivey—but it shows he's completely missing what the NEA has really been up to the past 10 years. It hasn't been funding a democratization of artistic creation: It's been funding a democratization of art access—two completely different enterprises.

Shakespeare in American Communities

Participating Theater Companies as of May 2008



SOURCE: NEA

Take, for example, one of the most successful programs in the NEA's history: "Shakespeare in American Communities." With it, the NEA has been funding professional Shakespeare troupes, not earnest amateurs, to hit the road aiming to play for people who've never been able to see a live Shakespearean performance before. Since its beginning in 2003, the program has employed scores of professional companies that have given more than 5,400 performances, including 3,600 at American schools. NEA funding makes available multimedia "teaching kits" designed to broaden and enrich students' understanding of Shakespeare. Upwards of 1.5 million people, in all 50 states, have been the beneficiaries of this program.

This is an expensive undertaking, to say the least, just as it is for an orchestra to go out and give similar concerts. Few individual institutions can fund such energetic outreach programs (even regionally, let alone nationally) from their day-to-day budgets. Funding and encouraging such activity is the National Endowment for the Arts at its best, and the impetus behind such programs is a clear understanding that the NEA's constituency is the American public.

Later in that same *New York Times* interview, Landesman insinuated that those who oppose the NEA's projects and who are skeptical of contemporary art in general may be secretly motivated by a dislike of homosexuals. This absurd argument had its first life during the Robert Mapplethorpe controversy of the late 1980s and does absolutely nothing to resolve the question about the proper spending of federal funds. It's nothing more than an attempt to restart the culture wars that paralyzed the NEA and took Ivey and Gioia a decade to quell.

Nor have Landesman's remarks been the only source of recent controversy. During an August 10 conference call with a large group of artists, the NEA's then-new communications director, Yosi Sergant, encouraged them to use their talents to draw attention to the administration's political agenda: health care, the environment, and education. The nation's artists are "a community that knows how to make a stink," he reportedly said. "Do it." (Whether directly a result of this or not, just a few days

after the call, Americans for the Arts, the nation's largest arts advocacy group, along with several other arts organizations, issued a call for Congress to pass health care reform in full, including the controversial public option.)

Also on the call was Buffy Wicks, the deputy director of the White House Office of Public Engagement. A former campaign worker for Obama, she effusively thanked the artists for all their hard work during the presidential campaign and said that much more was about to be expected of them. Never in the history of the NEA has an administration sought to use it for its own political purposes. Whether artists and administrators understand it or not, using the endowment as a propaganda tool will discredit it faster than funding every form of blasphemy and pornography imaginable—not to mention being a clear violation of the 1939 Hatch Act, which prohibits political activities by federal employees.

Upon being challenged about this call, Sergant denied that he was involved and then said that the invitation to the conference call must have come from outside the NEA. That course quickly became untenable when invitees pulled out their invitations. Sergant was reassigned within the NEA and eventually, more than a month after the conference call, let go. Landesman then issued a statement trying to defuse the mounting criticism. "This call was not a means to promote any legislative agenda," he vowed and bluntly said that any suggestions to that effect "are simply false." Instead, he described it as nothing more than a way to "inform members of the arts community of an opportunity to become involved in volunteerism," though he was willing to admit that some of the language used was "not appropriate." While the call took place the day *before* Landesman was actually sworn in (a fact he pointed out in his statement), the episode illustrates the way that serious problems arise for the NEA when it does not maintain its distance from a sitting administration.

It's no exaggeration to say that the NEA may be on the verge of suddenly demolishing nearly a decade of work that restored an embattled agency to the good graces of Congress and the public. The NEA changed course in the wake of the scandals of the early- and mid-1990s, and the story of how it recovered from its troubles, avoided controversy, and became a productive civic good is too little known.

Posters for The Big Read in San Antonio and Knoxville

When Republicans took control of Congress in 1994, there was anticipation in many quarters that the NEA would be brought to an end once and for all. It had been battered by years of scandal—most notoriously those involving a small number of controversial works by Andres Serrano, Robert Mapplethorpe, and a handful of performance artists that taken together seemed to point to an agency whose idea of what constituted the best in the arts (and, moreover, the best use of tax dollars) was at odds with that of a majority of Americans. Yet the NEA soldiered on and found congressional allies, including many Republicans.

In a dramatic moment in January 1995, Charlton Heston (who had served on the National Council for the Arts in its earliest years) teamed up with Ronald Reagan's NEA head, Frank Hodsoll, to convince Congress that the endowment did other things beside cultivate art that stumbled over the line into pornography and blasphemy. Heston cited the work being done by "little theaters, little orchestras, little museums" in places away from the big cities, organizations that simply wouldn't exist without the NEA's help. He noted that, at its best, the NEA had the potential to preserve and showcase America's (and the West's) artistic and cultural heritage. "I think conservatives generally agree that such a result is a public good," Heston said. "Certainly this one does." Heston was pointing the way forward for the embattled agency, one that would be seized on by two of its chairmen: Bill Ivey (1998-2001) and Dana Gioia (2003-09). It was a matter of necessity.

While the NEA survived, its funding was slashed. From a high in 1992 of just under $176 million its budget bottomed out in 2000 at $97.6 million. More important, Congress mandated a series of reforms, and these proved vital in shaping a clear sense of mission for the NEA. First of all, Congress took away the endowment's ability to make grants to individual artists, leaving only a handful of exceptions. It also largely ended the practice of "sub-granting," in which the endowment provided money to organizations that in turn made direct grants to artists with no NEA oversight. The endowment could also no longer award general operating grants. All grants had to be program grants, with the project clearly spelled out in the initial application—the only exceptions being the recent grants made under the

terms of the emergency stimulus package. Congress was also adamant that the NEA be of service to what it referred to as the "underserved" areas of the country—places away from traditional centers of art and culture.

The reforms bore substantial fruit through a lengthy roster of new and successful programs. Bill Ivey, who came to the endowment after stints as director of the Country Music Foundation in Nashville and president of the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences, was the first chairman to lay out a new program in line with the congressional mandates. Through an initiative called "Challenge America," he started to allocate millions of dollars in annual grants for arts education and access in those "underserved" areas. Then, beginning in 2003 under the leadership of Dana Gioia (a well-known poet and critic who had also served as vice-president of marketing at the General Foods corporation), the NEA created a slate of "National Initiatives" with the goal of bringing professional-quality artistic exhibits and performances to communities that did not regularly have access to them. "Shakespeare in American Communities" was the first, and it was followed by ambitious undertakings like "NEA Jazz Masters on Tour," "Great American Voices" (in which touring opera companies perform classic works at military bases), and "American Masterpieces" (a program that funds touring exhibits and performing arts companies).

Largely because Congress and the Bush administration were pleased to endorse programs of this nature, by 2005 the NEA's budget was back up over $120 million. That year came "The Big Read," a popular program in which the NEA sponsors a local community group—such as a library or museum, sometimes even a whole town—in reading a classic of literature in an effort "to restore reading to the center of American culture." Other public literature initiatives include "Operation Homecoming," in which the NEA funds writing workshops in VA hospitals for returning veterans, and "Poetry Out Loud," which has so far seen a quarter-of-a-million students take part in a classic poetry recitation program. Over the last decade the NEA has made the breadth of its reach as much a hallmark of its efforts as artistic merit.

While the periodic flare-ups about scandalous art, heated as they were, garnered the major publicity in the 1990s and were the trigger of the congressional reforms, they were never the real problem at the NEA. They were only a symptom. The real problem was the National Endowment for the Arts viewing itself first and foremost as a means of channeling government support to artistic innovation and operating as if it were to artists themselves that it was ultimately accountable.

The congressional reforms encouraged the NEA to shift its focus away from artists to the public in general. This was the essential step in transforming its political fortunes. Yet Rocco Landesman has said that if it were up to him, he'd rescind the prohibition on grants to individual artists today. In his eyes, the programs of Ivey and Gioia, rather than representing substantive change, served mainly to reconstruct the endowment's image. The time has now come "to move the ball down the field," he said in late October. "The days of a defensive NEA are over." Should his attitude result in these congressional reforms falling by the wayside, one by one or all at once, the NEA could be on the road to a repeat of its earlier scandals. More seriously, its ability to touch the lives of people other than just artists could be gradually eroded. It could grow less responsive to the civic aspect of the arts, less concerned about how the public at large interacts with the arts. If that comes to be the case, we will all be the losers. When the NEA falls into controversy, the real casualty is the very idea that the arts are truly important in civic life and that the government has a valid interest in supporting them.

Yet there is more than a glimmer of hope. At the end of October, the congressional committee working out the endowment's budget for the coming year specifically praised the effectiveness of "The Big Read" and instructed the NEA to provide a "detailed funding plan for the continuation of this popular and successful program" within 60 days. The committee's report indicated that it was well aware of the recent controversy regarding the potential political use of the endowment and knew, moreover, that "The Big Read" was in Landesman's crosshairs. The report also reiterated the importance of the congressional reforms about making and distributing grants. While some may see this as Congress trying to micromanage the endowment, the committee saw it as necessary "in order to restate for the Endowment and the general public the guidelines within which the agency is expected to conduct its work and distribute taxpayer dollars in support of the arts." It's a clear message to the endowment's new leadership. Sad perhaps to say, but such close attentiveness on the part of Congress must be kept up going forward.

G.K. Chesterton wrote, "How much larger your life would be if your self could become smaller in it." Thus is the work of great art: It draws us outside of ourselves. It makes us less self-centered. What a nice thing this is for a democracy, and how contrary it is to contemporary popular culture, which relentlessly insists that the individual is the center of all things. The greatest potential of the National Endowment for the Arts is that it can testify to the communal power of great art and help people who want to have it as a central element in their lives. But paradoxically the endowment also has the power to make the public doubt whether the arts are of real interest to the government at all. Congress will have a large say in the way this power is used. ♦

The Battle of Spotsylvania, 1864

Memories of War

And the battle for posterity

BY EDWIN M. YODER JR.

The Civil War centennial observance, a half-century ago, gave us two monumental works of narrative history: Shelby Foote's great trilogy and Bruce Catton's memorable, multivolume chronicle *Mr. Lincoln's Army.* And of course, many other worthy books. With the sesquicentennial observance two years away, one wonders whether any successors of the Foote/Catton dimension will emerge. The twelve essays gathered here may provide a slight preview. If so, what we are likely to see in the coming years are not the large narratives of the past but specimens of microhistory, often tinctured by fashionable preoccupations with race and feminism.

Wars Within a War
Controversy and Conflict over the American Civil War
by Joan Waugh and Gary W. Gallagher
North Carolina, 328 pp., $30

Preliminarily, however, it should be noted that what is represented as "controversy and conflict," to say nothing of "wars within wars," suffers from a certain titular exaggeration. There are certainly trace elements, and more, of conflict; but, after all, history itself *is* revision, a "re-seeing" of the past, and we differ on what we see. The dynamism of the past is almost always a reflection of the shifting fashions and perspectives of observers.

How much, to begin with, do we actually argue about the Civil War? On Main Street, little enough. As usual, most of the argumentation is generated in the quiet of the academy. In his informative essay, William Blair examines the Second Confiscation Act of July 1862, when Congress struggled to devise a framework for the seizure of secessionist property. This was before the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation made a special case of slave property, later designated "contraband" to emphasize its legal continuity with war materials. As the argument played out, the crux became the Constitution's

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BUYENLARGE / GETTY IMAGES

treason section. Moderates who wished to impede confiscation made conviction of treason a precondition. Lincoln signed the resulting act reluctantly, and the results were paltry.

James McPherson writes on the familiar subject of "McClellan and Lincoln," familiar to even casual students of Civil War history. The title ("My Enemies Are Crushed") is apt, since McClellan usually had political opponents rather than Confederate forces in mind when he complained of "enemies." As for his notoriously insolent treatment of Lincoln, there was the famous evening when the general, returning from a party, was told that the president was waiting to see him—but went upstairs to bed anyway. McPherson's scrutiny of McClellan's military torpor tends to confirm that his "slows," as Lincoln came to call them, reflected his antipathy to aggressive prosecution of the war. And that this caution was rooted in racial views.

"Help me dodge the nigger," McClellan pleaded privately to an influential political friend. He was, he said, "fighting to preserve the integrity of the Union" and "we cannot afford to raise up the Negro." This is one manifestation of a dividing line in Unionist opinion that was to persist through the war and after. No wonder, then, that in contemplation of McClellan's static strategy, Major General Henry Halleck remarked that "it requires the lever of Archimedes to move this inert mass."

It is well known that the Union side finally found respite from incompetent generalship with the rise, after Vicksburg, of Ulysses S. Grant. Accordingly, an implicit companion piece is Joan Waugh's essay on the vicissitudes of Grant's tomb in New York City. That soaring mausoleum, echoing ancient architectural models and dominating the skyline of its time, was one for which the nation's "greatest city" lobbied aggressively, only to experience near crippling difficulties raising its million-dollar cost. (Grant's former aide, Horace Porter, almost singlehandedly salvaged the project.) When completed twelve years after Grant's death in 1885, the tomb rose in the still-pastoral Riverside Park and, up to 1916, was the city's premier tourist attraction, drawing up to 600,000 visitors a year and overshadowing even the Statue of Liberty.

But then decline and decay set in, and by the 1960s it had become a near-ruin, a graffiti-scarred hangout for

Grant's tomb

doping and petty crime. So much so, in fact, that the Grant family threatened to remove the general's remains. Waugh offers no striking speculations about this turn of fortunes; but surely the nation's gathering involvement in a world war, and the precipitate plunge of Grant's presidential reputation, help explain it.

Of special interest, given the horrendous human cost of the war, is Drew Gilpin Faust's discussion of the grim subject of reburial, "Battle over the Bodies." At the war's end, scores of thousands of the dead, Union and Confederate alike, awaited decent interment. The dead were often unidentified and layed at random, anonymously, in shallow temporary graves. The infamous Wilderness battlefield, where wild brushfires had tortured the wounded and dying on the day of battle, was littered with bones. Farmers, here and there, complained that their foraging hogs were unfit for use.

Under the National Cemeteries Act (1867) Congress made funds available for identification and reburial, at an average cost of $9.75, including coffin, according to one piquant statistic. Within four years, more than 300,000 of the Union fallen had been identified and reburied, often in new national cemeteries. But like so much of the aftermath of war, this heroic effort was asymmetrical, inasmuch as no comparable official provision was made for the Confederate dead. To the extent that they were cared for, it was by voluntary charities, usually by dedicated associations of Southern women.

Most of these essays, which otherwise explore such subjects as Civil War caricature, the early reputation of Robert E. Lee, and the postwar reputation, in Georgia, of William T. Sherman, and Walt Whitman's cryptic assertion that the "real war" would never be disclosed, are remarkably subdued, even anodyne.

In fact, the most passionate legacy of Civil War revisionism may well be behind us. It had less to do with the war than with what followed it, as the nation sought terms of reunion. By 1866 it was clear that the victorious Unionists (especially their congressional spokesmen that historians usually call "radicals") would not countenance Andrew Johnson's earnest but inept attempt to implement what he understood to be Lincoln's clement Reconstruction policy, "let 'em up easy." The spectacle of former Confederate officials and officers filing back into Washington, and political influence, on mild terms of executive pardon, proved indigestible.

One Dares Call It Treason

In a recent book review in the *Washington Post*—speaking of "controversy and conflict"—Professor Michael Kazin of Georgetown University spoke of Robert E. Lee as "the treasonous general." The words are offensive; but the paramount objection is that they are unhistorical, as was the reviewer's gloss on the confiscation of Arlington as a cemetery.

It is true that, at the end of the Civil War, there was a clamor among vengeful politicians (not soldiers) to try Lee, Jefferson Davis, and other high Confederate officeholders for "treason." The weak and pliable Andrew Johnson—who, for a moment, echoed the inflammatory and baseless charge that Davis and others were involved in Lincoln's assassination—might well have gone along with treason indictments and trials but for Ulysses S. Grant, who famously said that he had set the terms of surrender with Robert E. Lee and would remove his uniform and never wear it again if Lee were tried. Wiser heads prevailed, moreover, because it was uncertain that acts of secession constituted "treason."

Arlington House

Certainly there was no precedent for that view under American law. Lincoln evidently did not think so. He declined to recognize secession and treated it as a rebellion, requiring and authorizing executive suppression and lenient terms of pardon (as had George Washington in the so-called whiskey rebellion). Distinguishing the action of the seceded states and their leaders from that of the rebellious British colonies in 1776 would have been a formidable challenge—as would any use of the Constitution's treason clause against the Confederate leaders.

A description of Lee as a "treasonous general" is consequently an unhistorical personal slur, as void of analytical content as the casual and destructive use of that adjective by McCarthyites in the 1950s. Certainly it is a formulation to be avoided by serious historians.

As for the confiscation of Arlington, it was an act of understandably bitter personal enmity by Quartermaster General Montgomery Meigs, whose son had been killed. But it was both barbaric and unlawful. In the first place, Arlington was not a Lee property—"soil," as Kazin oddly puts it, as (for instance) were Stratford on the Northern Neck, Lee's mother's house in Alexandria, and assorted rural properties—but an estate belonging to the Custis-Washington family, like Mount Vernon. (Imagine the outcry had Meigs attempted to bury the Union dead there!) Mrs. Lee, daughter of George Washington Parke Custis and great granddaughter of Martha Custis Washington, regarded Arlington as a site, shrine, and symbol of the American Revolutionary tradition, to be honored as such, along with the artifacts and relics looted by Union troopers. (See Elizabeth Pryor's recent *Reading the Man* for a humane and reasoned treatment of the Arlington confiscation issue and Mrs. Lee's strenuous attempts to save the estate from Meigs's spoliation.)

As Kazin also should know, the confiscation of Arlington was ultimately declared unlawful by the U.S. Supreme Court. The property was returned to Lee's heirs, who then sold it to the United States. There is no more conclusive proof of illegality under American law.

—EMY

The ensuing reaction, sharpened by Johnson's obstreperous campaigning in the autumn elections of that year, generated a sharp swing toward severe Reconstruction policy. And that policy, in turn, in its ever-evolving phases, was to fuel violent controversy for an age—controversy so sharp that one essayist spoke famously of the "dark and bloody ground" of Reconstruction historiography.

It is, perhaps, another chapter of an old story. Grass, said Winston Churchill, grows easily over the battlefield, but over the scaffold, never. The shadow of the scaffold never fell over the American Civil War. But in the South it became an article of mythic faith that harsh Reconstruction was its moral equivalent. Just as, before secession, the argument over the extension of slavery was largely theoretical, often involving climes and terrains where slavery could never have flourished, so the most bitter argument over the legacy of the Civil War was less about what soldiers did to one another with guns than what politicians did to other regions with legislation and occupation. Reconstruction came to be thought of, certainly in the South and even elsewhere, as deliberately destructive and vindictive.

The classic articulation of that view was Claude Bowers's *The Tragic Era*, a tract of the 1930s by an eminent Democrat which served to obscure the unpleasant truth that the Democratic party had become, to a degree, the implicit guarantor of Jim Crow. It wasn't until what C. Vann Woodward called "the second reconstruction," the civil rights movement and the reanimation of the 14th Amendment, that an overdue revision, a "re-seeing" of Reconstruction, found constructive elements in it. The wonder is that this more balanced myth took almost a century to arrive. Perhaps the historians of the approaching sesquicentennial will elaborate. ♦

B&A

Healthy Obsession

Every modern president has his own cure.

BY TEVI TROY

BETTMANN / CORBIS

Signing Medicare into law, July 30, 1965

The Heart of Power begins with a story of how health policy expert and current Obama health IT czar David Blumenthal recruited the Brown political scientist James Morone to collaborate on a book on "how presidents deal with health care issues." By their own admission, they are writing the book with a political purpose—they express the hope that their book will "guide a new administration . . . toward winning social justice and the people's health"—but they have also produced a helpful history of both the health and health policies of almost all of the last 11 presidents, from FDR to Bush '43. "Almost all," that is, because they skip Gerald Ford, oddly whitewashing his health care policies and his presidency from their discussion.

The Heart of Power
Health and Politics in the Oval Office
by David Blumenthal
and James Morone
California, 494 pp., $26.95

Nevertheless, if you are interested in presidents and health care policy, this is the book for you. Of course, I'm not sure exactly how large that subpopulation is, but I'll leave that problem to the authors and to the University of California Press.

At its heart is an interesting idea, which is that presidents are most like real people in the realm of health care. Presidents don't go hungry or homeless, they don't schedule or drive themselves, but they do get sick and visit the doctor—er, have the doctor visit them. In addition, the Blumenthal/Morone analysis found presidents to be "distinctly unhealthy." Eleven of the 15 presidents who died in the 20th century died prematurely—"eight of them fell more than seven years short of the actuarial tables." We know a lot about the health of presidents, often more than we know about the health of friends or even some relatives: Ike's heart attacks, Kennedy's Addison's disease, Nixon's phlebitis. (Recall Jackie Mason's classic line on Nixon's painful and life-threatening swelling of the veins: "You don't screw 200 million people and get phlebitis. You get syphilis.")

Given their collective poor health, as well as the importance of the health issue to the American public, the authors describe how most of the presidents reviewed here made some kind of run at some kind of significant health care reform. One notable exception was George H.W. Bush, whom the authors claim could not be bothered with domestic trifles like health care while he had a world to fix. It was only in 1992, when worried about reelection, that Bush allowed his staff to come forward with a plan, and even then he had a hard time convincing voters he was serious about the issue.

According to Blumenthal/Morone, Bush would approach health care stakeholder meetings like a schoolboy trying to run out the clock in class to avoid a quiz. He would enter a room late, joke with the participants, talk about sports and world affairs, and only then, with a few minutes remaining, mumble something about his vision for health care reform. Even then, the authors claim (based on staff interviews) that Bush did not really understand, and could not fully articulate, that vision.

This is in stark contrast to George W. Bush, whom the authors credit mightily for his efforts in adding prescription drug coverage under Medicare. According to Blumenthal/Morone, on this issue President Bush was knowledgeable, skillful, and nimble throughout the deal-making process. In their words, "The details of an engaged, interested, and flexible President Bush surprised us." Another surprise for the authors was that, Lyndon Johnson aside, "Republicans have been far more successful at health reform than the Democrats." They do not, however, answer the obvious question their conclusion presents,

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which is why that is so. The furthest they go is to suggest that "Republicans get into [health reform] because of a president's personal bent, whether for systems reform (competition) or election-year insurance; Democrats go along for benefits they have invariably wanted for some time."

There is, of course, another possibility that the authors fail to suggest: Perhaps Republicans have tended to have more salable, or even better, ideas in this area.

One intriguing but apparently unsalable idea died in the Reagan administration, when White House staffers put forward perhaps the most conservative approach to health reform of any of our modern presidents. Beryl Sprinkel, Reagan's chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers, developed (with assistance from the Heritage Foundation) a plan to "voucherize" public health care assistance. When Sprinkel presented the plan to the president at a cabinet meeting, he ran into staunch opposition from Doc Bowen, Reagan's secretary of health and human services. Bowen, knowing how Reagan liked stark images or graphics to make a point, took out a pen and drew a complicated chart showing the various and intersecting lines the plan would require. Although, by Bowen's own admission, he exaggerated the complexity for effect, he soon had the whole room laughing, and the administration quietly shelved the voucher plan. A decade later, conservatives would use a similar tactic to defeat Bill Clinton's proposed health care plan.

Blumenthal and Morone have loads of similar stories, both fascinating and little known. Franklin Roosevelt's adult-onset poliomyelitis was initially misdiagnosed twice by the physician who made a house call to the Roosevelt vacation home at Campobello. The erring doctor then had the nerve to charge the family $8,000 for the double misdiagnosis. Fans of P.J. O'Rourke will be happy to learn that Harry Truman was both the most "hale" president studied in this volume, and yet the biggest drinker of the bunch.

The hero, however, is Lyndon Johnson, who presided over the most eventful administration in history, from a health perspective. The authors show Johnson to have been a masterful behind-the-scenes presence during the creation of Medicare and Medicaid in 1965. Johnson worked secretly with the House Ways and Means Committee chairman, Wilbur Mills, on combining seemingly competing proposals to cover the elderly and the indigent into one giant, and still growing, system. It was a bold and risky move, but it worked—although the plan's passage was not always guaranteed. At one point, Johnson's chief health aide, Wilbur Cohen, warned LBJ about a new development that would increase the cost of the plan by $500 million in the first year.

According to Blumenthal/Morone, on this issue President Bush was knowledgeable, skillful, and nimble throughout the deal-making process. In their words, 'The details of an engaged, interested, and flexible President Bush surprised us.'

Johnson's curious response: "Well, I guess I'll run and get my brother." He then proceeded to tell Cohen the story of a railroad switchman who was asked how to handle a pending and unstoppable train wreck: He said he'd get his sibling "because he hasn't ever seen a train wreck." Johnson was also quite good at convincing recalcitrant legislators to go along with him. Florida senator George Smathers told a reporter that he switched his vote on the Medicare bill from "against" to "for" because "Lyndon told me to."

While many of the stories told here are entertaining, and especially helpful during these health care-minded days for providing useful cocktail chatter, the stories do not necessarily create a narrative that explains the policies that presidents eventually pursued. If Truman was healthier than FDR, why did he seem to try harder to create a universal health program? Could it be that other factors than presidential health determine the approach to health policy? If anything, the number-one factor determining the level of presidential attention to health care appears to be electoral politics. In the current situation, Barack Obama is "all in" on health care reform, and it is not at all clear that his status as an occasional smoker, or as someone who works out twice a day, has led him to place that bet.

Perhaps this relates to the fact that Blumenthal and Morone are interested in something more than a work of history. This becomes clear in their appendix, which is a list of keys for successful presidents in the area of health care. Examples of their suggestions include "Passion," "Speed," "Bring a plan with you," and, amusingly, "Hush the economists," which will likely be necessary in the current administration because of the stratospheric scores the various proposals have been generating from the Congressional Budget Office.

Given Blumenthal's closeness to many top Democratic health strategists—he has been a Democratic health policy adviser for over three decades—it seems probable that he has pushed this book's argument with the Obama White House. So the Obama team has been closely following many of his lessons, particularly the point about a need for "speed." At the same time, Republicans are hoping that they get to demonstrate the last lesson the authors suggest, which is "Learn how to lose." ♦

B&A

Blessing and Burden

What it means for Jews to be the 'chosen' people.

BY HILLEL FRADKIN

IMAGNO / GETTY IMAGES

Jewish immigrants to New York, 1920

Avi Beker, a diplomatic historian and former Israeli diplomat, has written about an important subject and an abiding concern: the biblical designation of the Jews as the "chosen" people and the longstanding Jewish experience of persecution. He is especially concerned with the current revival of anti-Semitism. Of course, the most direct object of current hatred is the state of Israel. But as Beker observes, contemporary anti-Semitism is not only directed at Israel or Zionism; in a well-worn tradition, it charges Jews, as such, with all manner of conspiratorial evil, including a uniquely malevolent character and behavior.

The Chosen
The History of an Idea and the Anatomy of an Obsession
by Avi Beker
Palgrave Macmillan, 256 pp., $38

The contemporary revival of anti-Semitism, which is particularly powerful among Muslims but also within the secular left, has been a great shock, coming as it does so soon after the Nazi attempt to exterminate the Jews. Beker believes that a most powerful root of this unreasonable, unjust, and dangerous hatred is the concept of the Chosen. Jews say they are different, and the world agrees—unfortunately, with malevolent intent.

In part, this is due to the fact that others have claimed an equal, or more precisely superior, distinction. This is true of both Christianity and Islam, each of which acknowledges the original chosenness of Jews but claims that such status was superseded by their new teachings. It was even true of Adolf Hitler, as Beker brings out, who adopted the notion of chosenness to define his mission and explain the necessity of destroying the Jews.

Although other factors have historically contributed to the hatred of Jews—especially the desire for a scapegoat in unhappy circumstances—the dialectic of chosenness and supersession is the most abiding and specific plane of the problem. For this reason Beker sees no other alternative but to address the issue directly, an approach he believes has been neglected even by Jews themselves since, at least, the Middle Ages when it was last taken up by its two greatest thinkers, Moses Maimonides and Judah Halevi.

Beker offers this study in that tradition. But his goal is more ambitious than theirs, since Maimonides and Halevi addressed themselves only to fellow Jews. Beker certainly has a concern for his fellow Jews; but he is also addressing non-Jews, and in so doing hopes to put the issue (and perhaps anti-Semitism) to rest once and for all. It might be said that what justifies Beker's larger ambition is a change in historical circumstances: Jews have, through modern conditions, a greater opportunity to address non-Jews; they also have greater need now that we have seen, in the example of the Holocaust, the danger to which Jews are exposed by modern conditions.

The first order of business is to describe and explicate the notion of the Chosen in its original biblical sense. Beker stresses that the notion of chosenness has nothing to do with any presumed genetic or racial superiority. Neither Judaism nor Zionism is

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racism; the core and basis of chosenness is the covenant God made with the Children of Israel at Mt. Sinai. The task of Jews ever since has been to adhere to God's law and preserve it by teaching it to their children.

But this obligation does not exhaust the duties entailed in chosenness. For contrary to any parochial understanding of the role of Israel or the Jews, it involves a duty to all people. Beker makes special reference to the preaching of the Hebrew prophets—in particular to Isaiah's famous formulation that Israel should be a light unto other nations—but it would be equally important to stress that this obligation is first enunciated and given specific content in the Pentateuch. In Deuteronomy, Moses declares in his farewell instructions to the Israelites that they should

> Observe these statutes and judgments; for these are your wisdom and understanding in the sight of the nations which will hear them and say: What a wise and understanding nation this great people is. . . . What great nation is there that has such just statutes and judgments as in all this teaching.

To be the Chosen people is to embrace a task: to provide universal instruction in justice and wisdom. This justice and wisdom is embodied not in the Jews as such but in the principles with which they have been entrusted—principles intelligible to all men. To be the bearers of justice and wisdom may be a privilege, but it is far more certainly a very heavy responsibility and burden, one which, as the Bible details, the Israelites were not always up to.

In the context of the theme of chosenness and the misunderstandings to which it may give rise, it is important to stress that the Bible is unusual not in the praise it bestows on the Israelites but the censure that is mixed with it. And the Israelites, or more precisely their descendants, the Jews, have been notable in embracing a book which includes such a heavy admixture of censure. In the highest cases this testifies to the embrace of the burden and responsibility more than the privilege, and justifies chosenness itself. It is for this reason that the Bible can hold out the promise that, despite Israelite failures, their and their descendants' relationship with God will never reach a total and final rupture. This consolation was surely necessary to sustain Jewish faith through the long experience of hatred and persecution.

'Moses Breaking the Tablets of the Law,' by Gustave Doré

CHRIS HELLIER / CORBIS

However necessary and useful it is to have a proper and suitably elevated notion of Jewish chosenness, how can that address the problem of contemporary anti-Semitism? It should, of course, absolve the Bible and the Jews of any intrinsically parochial or racist character. Beker seems to hope that his exposition will provide Christians and Muslims with a better and more respectful understanding, and *The Chosen* includes a kind of dialogue with them. What is less clear is whether he has an adequate assessment of the current state of play, and what kinds of dialogue are appropriate.

As far as Christians and Christian anti-Semitism are concerned, Beker observes that there has been a sea change in Christian thinking since World War II and the Holocaust. He seeks to encourage this trend, and his explication of chosenness might help, especially as Christians accept the authority of the Hebrew Bible as Muslims do not. Indeed, a rethinking and reaffirmation of God's covenant with the Jews has been a significant element in postwar Christian theology. But his discussion of the history of anti-Semitism tends to weight its Christian form more heavily than its Muslim form, and with dubious effects. This is a common error: Muslim persecution of Jews was equal if not greater than Christian persecution, as Maimonides and Halevi both testified. What appears to lead Beker in this direction is the fact of the Holocaust—the greatest material disaster Jews have experienced since classical antiquity—and his assimilation of the Holocaust to the history of Christianity. This, too, is a fairly common view, but also a common error.

The question is complicated: The Holocaust *did* occur in Europe, and Europe's Christian tradition often disposed people to be unfavorable to Jews. But it did *not*, as such, dispose Christians to be favorable to Nazism and its view of Jews as fit solely for annihilation. During the worst periods of Christian persecution it was always possible for Jews to spare themselves by conversion to Christianity. No such salvation was possible under the Nazis; indeed quite the contrary, because Nazism was not Christian but anti-

Christian. More precisely, it was modern. Nazism must be laid at the door of modernity—a modernity which promised at its outset that it was the answer to premodern fanaticism—and any proper Jewish assessment of the dangers to which Jews have been exposed must take the mixed record of modernity into account.

Moreover, as Beker notes, a new Christian appreciation of Jews did not have to wait until the Holocaust, and he spends no little effort in describing a change which occurred within certain Protestant churches, especially among Anglo-American churches, which began some 350 years ago with the Puritan revolution in England and which ultimately gave birth to so-called Christian Zionism. As Beker also notes, the faith and loyalty of Jews have earned them respect among certain distinguished European and American authors. To take only one example, Beker cites Mark Twain:

> [The Jew] has made a marvelous fight in this world, in all the ages, and has done it with his hands tied behind him. He could be vain of himself and be excused for it. . . . Other peoples have sprung up and held their torch high for a time, but it burned out and they sit in twilight now or have vanished. The Jew saw them all, beat them all, and is now what he always was, exhibiting no decadence, no infirmities of age, no weakening of his parts, no slowing of his energies, no dulling of his alert and aggressive mind. All things are mortal but the Jew.

Whether this is too generous or not, you would search in vain for analogs to this or other expressions of Christian respect in Muslim attitudes towards Jews—past or present. Beker should be appreciative of the present possibilities of Jewish/Christian comity, and in some fashion he is; but he remains dissatisfied—sometimes unreasonably so. For example, he complains that the Vatican, despite many changes in its views, still stresses that it is "the instrument for the salvation of all humanity." But how can it not and remain what it is? A different and somewhat more practical problem is the Vatican's stance towards Israel. This was, for a long time, unjust, heartless, and scandalous, refusing to recognize Israel's existence. And it is still not great: Beker notes that the Vatican's present recognition is extended on the basis of "the common principles of international law" rather than any specifically Christian teaching. Well—this is not nothing, and is the principal way Israel defends its legitimacy!

All this points to the fact that the most serious form of contemporary anti-Semitism is not that of Christians but of Muslims, and their sometime allies on the secular left. Some of the reasons are captured in a quotation from the late Samuel Huntington, cited by Beker, who observed that the present problem of the Muslim world is that it is "convinced of the superiority of its culture and obsessed with the inferiority of its power." This is a part of the problem. Another equally important part is the unwillingness of many Muslims to examine their own responsibility for that inferiority and what they might, themselves, do to address it. They have sought, like many others in history, to avoid this painful necessity and find an answer in the actions of others, to find a scapegoat.

Nevertheless, the deepest issue raised here is the post-biblical status of chosenness, and the question of supersession to which it gave rise, especially through the historical appearance of Christianity and Islam. This difficulty, as Beker sometimes understands, arose from the original conception of chosenness, which pointed towards a universal mission. This is first enunciated in God's blessing of Abraham, which described it as a blessing not only for him, his family, and his prospective nation but as a blessing for *all* families and *all* nations. This blessing has played a large historical role in the claims of Christianity and Islam. But Moses' farewell instructions to the Israelites point in the same direction.

Nor did post-biblical, or Rabbinic, Judaism ignore this view, as Beker seems to claim. There are many examples of this, especially in the Jewish prayer book; but the most telling is a prayer recited several times a day every day of the year. It is called the Aleinu. It is telling because it contains the most direct statement of Jewish chosenness: "It is upon us to praise God for not having made us like the other nations and the other families of the earth; for having made our portion different than theirs." But this is preceded by a prior obligation: "to praise the Lord of everything," the Creator of everything, and is followed by the expectation that God will repair the world through His kingly rule, through which all will call on His name.

No less authorities than the two Beker cites—Halevi and Maimonides—claimed, in defense of the veracity of the Bible, that the promise made to Abraham should be partially seen, but only partially seen, as fulfilled in the emergence of both Christianity and Islam. They, like Beker, reaffirmed the chosenness of the Jewish people, but the question is on what grounds. Today it is a question posed not only by Christianity and Islam but by modern universalism, and particularly by the contemporary critique of the nation and nation-state. It is this which especially affects the defense of Israel, and has facilitated the reemergence of anti- Semitism on the secular left. Addressing that question would be an urgent necessity, but it is unclear how Beker means to meet it.

A good starting point would be further reflection on the Hebrew Bible's preference for nationhood—not only Jewish nationhood, but nationhood as such. Properly explicated, it derives from the Bible's analysis of the human condition, its characteristic injustices and what remedies are available and reasonable. As Moses said to the Israelites, the wisdom, understanding, and justice to which they were given access at Mt. Sinai is meant to be intelligible to people who had not stood there. Whether this would put an end to anti-Semitism or not, it would be a contribution to a most important contemporary debate, consistent with the notion and responsibility of chosenness. ♦

B&A

Tree Musketeers

Digging and replenishing the Scottish landscape.

BY SARA LODGE

A friend once prophesied that on my tombstone will be written the rueful words: "I really wish I hadn't agreed to do this."

He had a point. Standing at a deserted railway station at dusk in the Scottish Highlands tired, hungry, and late, I wondered what on earth had induced me to volunteer for a week planting trees with 11 complete strangers. We would be sharing a bunkhouse: one room for sleeping, one for socializing. Cooking would be communal and vegetarian. And each day we would be schlepping up hills, perhaps in pouring rain, to engage in hard physical labor. I reflected gloomily that I was probably undertaking something that combined the social delights of Big Brother with the physical pleasures of a gulag.

I feared snores, chores, and bores.

At that moment a van, cheerfully emblazoned "Trees for Life," swung around the bend. Two young figures emerged, ruddy with sun, fresh air, and goodwill, and gave me a friendly hug. As we chatted on the road to Plodda Lodge, 30 miles from Inverness, my mood lightened. Then we came towards the Lodge itself, and I beheld an extraordinary sight. All of the other team members had come out into the garden to greet me. One of them was playing the bagpipes; a lively jig. The others, in pairs, had joined hands to form an arch down which I was invited to pass. It was the loveliest impromptu welcome I'd ever received. I breathed a sigh of relief.

There were once 6,000 square miles of Caledonian forest, populated by bears, wolves, lynxes, and beavers. By the 18th century most of it was gone: consumed by shipbuilding, charcoal-burning, mass sheep farming, and deer. In 1773 Samuel Johnson, journeying west from Inverness, commented that "the country is totally denuded of its wood." Now, only one percent of the Caledonian forest remains. Trees for Life began in 1989 with the aim of restoring a further 600 square miles of wild woodland. Forests support a rich ecology, and the charity aims to "join up" existing pockets of native trees, creating wildlife corridors and encouraging the regrowth of rare plants. Volunteers pay £120 a week for their bed and board (£50 for the unwaged) and undertake activities including improving deer fencing, seed gathering, surveying trees, and, of course, planting new ones.

It is also extremely peaceful being up on a hill with a spade and a bag of saplings. . . . You take breaks when you wish, and I enjoyed lying full-length on the heather, developing my freckles.

On our first day of work, we drove up to Glen Cougie, where our trees were waiting: slender Scots pine saplings, no taller than the screen of your laptop but already two years old. They were bundled in clutches of 30; we stuffed three bundles each into our fluorescent yellow postbags, grabbed our spades like members of a small but determined army, and set off up the hill to our planting site. It was, on my part, an ungainly climb: The hillside consisted of springy ridges of heather, alternating with quagmires. I bounced and squelched accordingly, spade flailing; the trees in my bag probably felt seasick.

When I reached the level where we were going to begin planting, however, my bag and my jaw dropped simultaneously. Looking beyond the valley beneath us I could see the snowy peaks of Càrn Eige and Tom à Chòinich scissoring into a perfectly clear blue sky. The air was absolutely still: No cars, no houses, no people but us for miles around. The scattered old pines below us on the valley floor, some of them 300 years old, looked as dignified and graceful as the forgotten kings of an exiled race. We heard and saw a cuckoo on a dead tree nearby: Here on the hills there had long been no trees living, only slippery deadwood from commercially logged plantations. Until now. As I took my first tiny pine out of its wrapping, I had a sudden vision of the trees we were planting swarming to join the patriarchs in the valley below, to relieve them of their long and lonely guard.

There is no task more hopeful than planting a tree. A meditative mind is, however, luckily not requisite for the job. As we wandered across the designated hill, finding our own pace and our own places, bursts of song, Indian whoops, and laughter, the Celtic lilt of a penny whistle reminded us that fellow planters were close. We shared lunch beside a brook that tumbled merrily in the sunshine. It was so idyllic that, had Julie Andrews suddenly crested the ridge in a pinafore singing, "the hills are alive with the sound

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of music," I would have been horrified—but not altogether surprised.

In fact, while companionable, it is also extremely peaceful being up on a hill with a spade and a bag of saplings. Perhaps it is that you start to think like a tree—and take the long view. There are no quotas for accomplishment on these volunteer weeks. You take breaks when you wish, and I enjoyed lying full-length on the heather, developing my freckles. Occasionally, I'd surprise a frog or a lizard. Once, we encountered two slow worms, fighting in a ditch. Each had the other by the throat and they rolled and twisted dramatically, their bodies shining like freshly oiled metal.

Other times, we'd marvel at spaghnum moss, which comes in all the colors of a tequila sunrise, or peculiar lichens, whose branches resemble miniature tattered boots. Volunteers in various Trees for Life locations, including the island of Skye, have spotted golden eagles, otters, badgers, mating adders, and capercaillies, an enormous game bird of which only a thousand remain in the wild.

On day two, we built a polytunnel, a greenhouse made of plastic. Plodda Lodge, our base camp, was also a tree nursery. We learned how to propagate aspen and saw rows of wild cherries, willows, junipers, hazels, and alders, ready to be repotted. I was contemplating a gentle task, so when the organizers asked for volunteers for polytunnel building, I was amazed to see my own hand in the air. Actually, I was amazed that I could still lift my hand that far after the previous day's spadework. It was hard graft, digging out rocks, then backfilling the trenches to stretch the plastic taut over the polytunnel's metal frame. But it was an archetypal team-building exercise: By the end of the day, we were supporting each other like the components of the structure we were raising.

Afterwards, we partied. There was hilarity in the kitchen. I made a carrot and orange soup, which I ended up wearing after I overfilled the blender. Calum, one of the group organizers, provided comedic assistance. Ineffectually chopping broccoli, he memorably announced, of the knife: "Ah've worked with sharper teaspoons." We drank mead (honey liqueur) from the local shop (six miles away) and ate chocolate with the kind of relish you can only feel when you've spent eight hours digging outdoors.

The author, with shovel, in the Highlands

SARA LODGE

By the middle of the week, I knew a little of everybody's story. There were roughly equal numbers of men and women; people in their twenties, their thirties, and their fifties. Amongst us was a ballet dancer from Utah, a professional cellist from London, a schoolteacher, an administrator for a carers' association, an organic gardener, and a student. We all got along. I asked the organizers if the tree-planting weeks sometimes produced conflict. They said it was rare. Some groups were not as cohesive as ours, but most were enjoyable and rewarding.

On the last of five improbably sunny days, we were in Glen Affric, putting rock phosphate on young pines. The grove had been planted in memory of the sister of one of the organizers who had died young. Elias Alexander, the 20-year-old American who had played the bagpipes for my arrival, stood on a hillock, with the mountains above and the loch below, and piped, beautifully, the lament for Bonnie Dundee, a leader of the Jacobite rebellion.

Bagpipes are meant to be played in this setting: The wind catches the wild and melancholy notes and echoes them across miles of rock and heath and water. Around us was a panorama of cinematic splendor. But the music also called up loss: the Highland Clearances, when hundreds of people were forcibly moved off this land; the loss of forests everywhere; and for each listener, perhaps more personal losses which, given air, found graceful release. We returned to our labors with a renewed vigor, a sense of restoration that redounded from us to the land, from the land to us.

I am, by nature, a skeptic. I had a horrible feeling when I set out that I might be calling this essay "Elm and High Water." But I thoroughly enjoyed myself. I got fitter; I started to breathe more deeply and, to my astonishment given the chorus of snores, sleep more deeply, too. I began reading a book, *The Secret Life of Trees*, which reveals that trees communicate with one another about predators (through pollen) and that they remember events (a tree that has been shaken will grow thicker than one that hasn't).

Certainly I hope that when I revisit the trees I planted, they won't hold their shaky mountain ascent against me. Meanwhile, I recommend joining the intrepid band of tree musketeers. All for one, and one for all. ♦

B&A

Soft Landing

Why 'too big to fail' leads to costly mistakes.

BY EMILY ESFAHANI SMITH

At a congressional hearing last fall, Frank Raiter, a former Standard and Poor's executive, described the financial system as if it were a train on tracks: "The engine was powered by the low interest rates that prevailed after the turn of the century," he declared. "The conductors were the lending institutions, and investment bankers who made the [subprime] loans and packaged them into securities, and the rating agencies were the oilers who kept the wheels of the train greased."

And the passengers? "Investors. And it was standing room only."

With low interest rates, money was cheap, so everybody, from homeowners-in-waiting to bankers, borrowed massively, often beyond their means. Confident that the value of housing would only go up, the train rode off the edge of an exploding credit bubble that didn't just pop, but burst, in 2008. The train hit a wall when the financial meltdown reached a fever pitch in September: Lehman Brothers crumbled, the feds bailed out AIG the next day, and the Dow Jones Industrial Average received its worst beat-down since 1931. Then came TARP, the auto bailouts, and the economic stimulus. After all that, Bear Stearns's bailout this past March seemed like nothing more than a bad day on the road to serfdom.

But what was the cause of all of this? Who was running this train off the rails? Nicole Gelinas tells the story of the financial meltdown, but traces its genesis to 1984, when the federal government radically changed the rules of the finance game. That year the country's eighth largest commercial bank, Continental Illinois, was on the brink of collapse; lenders rushed to pull their funds out of Continental, which sparked a global run on other banks. Gelinas explains that, in order to avoid a major financial crisis, the Reagan administration nationalized Continental Illinois, and subsequently told "Congress that none of the nation's top eleven banks would be allowed to fail."

After the Fall
Saving Capitalism from Wall Street and Washington
by Nicole Gelinas
Encounter, 250 pp., $23.95

That was the debut of "too big to fail"—and that policy is the villain of *After the Fall*. Big banks were no longer disciplined by the normal rules of the market: With government-insured risk for the next two decades, banks borrowed more and more against each dollar they had on hand—Bear Stearns was leveraged $35 to every dollar it actually held—which amounted to speculation to turn a profit. During that time total debt "doubled as a percentage of" Gross Domestic Product, yet debtors didn't feel the full brunt of their risk. By nationalizing Continental Illinois in 1984, Washington socialized risk for the next quarter-century.

Gelinas, a fellow at the Manhattan Institute, argues that if the government does not scrap its too-big-to-fail policy, and devise clear and consistent regulations on the market, the "next time the markets try to correct our unsustainable financial system, as they brutally have tried in this crisis, Washington may not be able to pull us back from the brink of depression."

Unraveling the intricacies of the current mess and how we got here, Gelinas lays out her case with skill, citing parallels between the speculation-mad 1920s and the easy-money 2000s to support her argument. After 1929 gave way to the Great Depression, regulators imposed sound and consistent rules to dampen the effect of volatile, risky speculation on the overall economy. But three-quarters of a century later, regulators either forgot or outright ignored those principles for fear of squelching profits and prosperity in the financial markets.

Of course, as we now know, such lax policies and enforcement ended with hundreds of billions of dollars being pumped into a financial system that could have, and should have, self-corrected had too-big-to-fail not ingrained itself into the landscape. What we need, Gelinas argues, is not more bailouts but more regulation of the financial system. If banks know that they actually face the possibility of bankruptcy they will presumably correct their own reckless behavior as a hedge against such stark reality. And even if they do take excessive risks to turn a profit, but fail, there will be a clear, ordered, and consistent way for banks to liquidate their remaining holdings without causing real damage to the global economy. (On the "what" and "how" of this last point *After the Fall* could use a little more flesh on the bones.)

Most important, Gelinas does not believe that such close regulation would threaten capitalism; instead, it would invigorate the market. Looking back on the recent crisis, she observes:

> Capitalism didn't fail; companies did—after having adopted the idea, en masse, that any loan, bond, or other bank asset, could be sliced up and turned into an instantly liquid, priceable, and tradeable security, with all its risk quantified and distributed scientifically to parties willing and able to bear it.

If those companies had been left to die, their bad ideas would have been buried with them. As it is, the ideas still live and are being recycled as banks continue to take opaque risks, reap the short-term benefits, and expect the feds to catch them when they fall. ♦

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B&A

Machine Dreams

There are limits to the magic of technology on film.

BY JOHN PODHORETZ

We are being told these days that the wave of the future in moviemaking is the seamless merger of live action and animation. We've been seeing it in bits and pieces for a decade—the character of Gollum in the *Lord of the Rings* films was the actor Andy Serkis turned into an animated figure. The key element of it is a process known as "performance capture," in which actors like Serkis are essentially converted into special effects. They are filmed on a bare soundstage with hundreds of computerized electrodes all over their body, after which their forms are digitized so they can be moved about in a computer-generated universe built around them in three dimensions.

The medium's most visionary and successful directors have committed themselves to the perfection of the entire process. James Cameron, the director of *Titanic*, has just spent somewhere in the realm of $500 million on his science-fiction epic *Avatar*, which aims to be for performance capture what *Star Wars* was for science fiction. Steven Spielberg and Peter Jackson (the maker of the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy) are collaborating on a trio of movies based on the Tintin character. But the director who has made performance capture his life's work is Robert Zemeckis, who made *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* and *Forrest Gump*. He is now on his third all-captured film in five years, following *The Polar Express* and *Beowulf*. It's a rendition of *A Christmas Carol*, with Jim Carrey playing Scrooge and all three ghosts.

To hear Zemeckis tell it, this new system of moviemaking is a director's dream; it removes all the rough edges from the medium, all its uncertainties and imperfections. Every element of a movie can be considered in isolation and perfected independently. When the actor is being filmed, the only thing that matters is his performance, since no one has to worry about lighting or sound or the weather or anything else. The atmosphere can be layered in later through the visual design. Editing becomes almost entirely unnecessary; everything can move fluidly from one moment to the next without cutting and slicing.

"The ability to move the camera anywhere, to take any angle on a scene without worrying about the physical thing getting in the way—how wonderful is that?" Zemeckis told Dave Kehr of the *New York Times*. "I like to say that the beautiful thing about what I'm doing here in this form is that it frees me from the tyranny of technique, and yet I get the wonderful bonus of maintaining the magic of the performance. I get the best of both worlds."

He may, but we don't. The director's joy at his liberation from the difficulties of moviemaking is palpable, but the movies he has made using this technique are profoundly joyless, and the joylessness is a direct result of the technique with which he has fallen in love.

The new *Christmas Carol* is a case in point. There is every reason it should be wonderful. It is faithful to the source, which is wise, since the Dickens novella is so transporting that it can be read over and over again, and versions of it seen over and over again, without the story losing a millionth part of its ineffable charm and power. And in voice at least, Jim Carrey is a splendid Scrooge, austere and bitter before becoming merry and childlike in his salvation.

But the Zemeckis *Christmas Carol* isn't wonderful. It's just weird. The reanimation of human tissue is what Dr. Frankenstein did, and look what happened to him. After three passes at performance capture, Zemeckis hasn't defeated the central problem of the form. If a director places one of these performance-capture creatures in a realistic setting, as Peter Jackson did with Andy Serkis's Gollum, he can work wonders.

But the effect of an animated human body overlaid by computer illustration is ineffably discomfiting. It's like seeing your little kid with ugly face paint on her beautiful visage: You want to go up to the screen with Windex and wipe the goop off Scrooge's face so you can see Jim Carrey behind it. As for the animated world around Carrey, it's far less magical than director Carol Reed's stunning re-creation of Dickens's London in *Oliver!* 41 years ago, in which actual actors danced through an amazingly detailed marketplace.

Doubtless performance capture will improve, and doubtless the merger of imaginary worlds and human figures doing impossible stuff will dazzle in a way it hasn't yet. (It's hard to believe James Cameron, who is a wizard, won't have figured some of that out with *Avatar*.) But the extreme artificiality of the form creates distance between the viewer and the work. The secret about the movies is the way they trick you into believing you are seeing something realistic when you are actually watching something entirely artificial. The key is the recognizable human face and the interaction of the human body with recognizable real-world objects. Remove those from the picture and you are in the entirely stylized realm of kabuki theater.

I am not Zemeckis or Spielberg or Cameron or Jackson, all of whom have earned in the billions of dollars and each of whom has won Academy Awards. I'm just a man in a movie theater watching their work, and for the life of me, I can't imagine what has possessed them to go off on this peculiar tangent. Maybe it's just that they can't take it anymore when they have a shot set up and it starts to rain. Who can blame them for their impatience, and for achieving God-like control over all aspects of their productions? Alas, now they are as gods, but their work is as blech. ♦

John Podhoretz, editor of Commentary, *is* The Weekly Standard*'s movie critic.*

"Imagine five years ago somebody comparing health care reform to 9/11. Imagine just a few years ago had somebody walked around with images of Hitler. . . ."

—White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs, November 6, 2009

NOT A PARODY

Here are actual photos of signs people walked around with at protests just a few years ago. Imagine that!

the weekly Standard

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