

1986's "Something Wild," but 16 years later, it's old news. Worse, focusing on what's no longer French about Paris makes the City of Light look like a host of other multiethnic big cities, such as London or Toronto. "Charade" was set in the "Paris!" of dreams. In "The Truth About Charlie," though, Paris looks more like "Sydney on the Seine." ■

Rated PG-13 for some violence and sexual content/nudity.
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BOOKS

[*The War Against the Terror Masters*, Michael Ledeen, St. Martin's Press, 262 pages]

The War Against the World

By Justin Raimondo

IT IS A CASE of the chicken hawks counting their eggs before they hatch: *The New York Times* reports that the administration is "coalescing" around "a detailed plan, modeled on the postwar occupation of Japan, to install an American-led military government in Iraq." This news may come as a shock to those Republicans who still quail at the thought of "nation-building"—especially when one considers that the U.S. military occupation of Japan continues to this day. But to readers of Michael Ledeen's *War Against the Terror Masters*, this bright idea has a familiar ring to it.

Holding up the example of postwar Germany and Japan as models for a post-Saddam Iraq, Ledeen avers, "paradoxically, we advanced the cause of freedom by violently undemocratic means." But there is more involved here than mere hubris: arguing that deterrence will not work against suicide bombers, he writes, "We will therefore need to demonstrate that radical

Islamism is a road to humiliation and defeat, not a pathway to glory." The Middle East, as currently constituted, must be utterly destroyed in a regional war, which, he predicts, will closely follow an invasion of Iraq—and this is a good thing, he believes, because it will give us a chance to "ensure the fulfillment of the democratic revolution." As Ledeen puts it:

Creative destruction is our middle name, both within our society and abroad. We tear down the old order every day, from business to science, literature, art, architecture and cinema to politics and the law. Our enemies have always hated this whirlwind of energy and creativity, which menaces their traditions (whatever they may be) and shames them for their inability to keep pace.... We must destroy them to advance our historic mission.

Ledeen—or Lenin? One might easily be forgiven for asking.

The author hopes a destructive dynamism will transform the Middle East—not only Iraq, but also Syria, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and beyond. The governments of all these countries must be overthrown, according to Ledeen, either by a U.S.-supported internal rebellion or by outright military invasion. The neo-conservative Cultural Revolution in the Middle East threatens to be even bloodier than the Chinese Marxist original. Like Mao and the Gang of Four, the radical Ledeen wants to sweep the historical slate clean—to erase the religious and cultural basis of a civilization far older than our own—and create new traditions on the ashes of the old. But first, the conflagration:

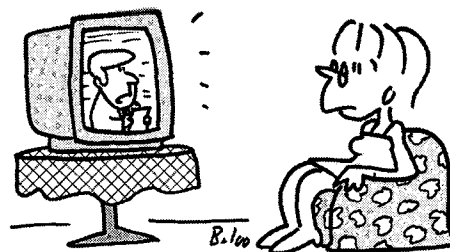
"Our unexpectedly quick and impressive victory in Afghanistan is a prelude to a much broader war, which will in all likelihood transform the Middle East for at least a generation, and reshape the politics of many other countries around the world."

Never mind that tens, if not hundreds, of thousands of people will die in such a

regional cataclysm. As the Soviet commissars used to say in defense of their feats of social engineering, "You can't make an omelet without breaking a few eggs." Hailing a new world war as a great step forward for mankind might still seem, to some, a signal act of madness, but in our nightmarish post-9/11 world such bombast is not only taken seriously, it is semi-official U.S. government policy. The value of Ledeen's book is as a guide to the ideology and action program of the War Party's radical wing, which seems to have captured control of the White House.

Ledeen's argument is not very convincing: his text is riddled with wholesale evasions, contradictory assertions, and overblown rhetoric. No distinction is made between al-Qaeda, Iraq, Iran, the Saudis, and the Egyptians: they are all Arabs, or at least not Israelis, and they are all in on the Islamist conspiracy, cogs in the Terrorist Machine. While the analogy to international Communism in the Cold War era is not exact—Islamism is multi-polar, not monolithic—Ledeen does not burden us with too many facts. This is a book practically bereft of footnotes, one in which the assertions of the author are to be taken at face value.

The author is hard put to refute the persuasive theory of Chalmers Johnson, who sees phenomena like al-Qaeda as "blowback"—the unintended consequences of foreign intervention. We, after all, built up the Afghan resistance (dubbed "freedom fighters" during the Cold War) that later coalesced



"The Federal Government today authorized a ten-year study of all its five-year studies..."

into bin Laden's terrorist network. Ledeen can only manage the rather dubious assertion that it "was not an excess of zeal but a lack of engagement and follow-through" that led to the empowerment of Ladenism. Presumably if we had only invaded and occupied Afghanistan *earlier*, we could have "dismantled the Mujahideen networks" we funded, organized, and armed with Stinger missiles.

In a book that otherwise reads like a paean to the rightness of Israel's cause, it is strange to see an open admission of that nation's terrorist roots. In a discussion of how terrorism tends to be counterproductive, he points to three exceptions: the African National Congress, the PLO, and "Zionist terrorism against the British in Palestine (which contributed to the creation of the state of Israel)." So then why are they the good guys?

The makeshift construction of this book makes the whole edifice creak audibly when Ledeen dives into one of his favorite subjects, the "liberation" of Iran. He holds up Bill Clinton and Madeleine Albright as patsies for Khomeini—who supposedly believed that the Ayatollah overthrew Shah Reza Pahlavi because the Iranian government was "excessively repressive and intolerant." While it would not do to come right out and deny the savagery of the Shah's legendary SAVAK secret police, Ledeen informs us that, under the monarch's beneficent rule, "Iran had become too modern, too tolerant—especially of women and of other religious faiths—and too self-indulgent. The shah had Westernized Iran"—except, perhaps, in his prisons, where the ancient methods of torture were routinely employed on dissidents of all sorts.

Ledeen conflates Ladenite medievalists with the secular socialists of Iraq's Baathist regime and throws Sunnis, Shi'ites, Wahabists, and Alawites together under the general rubric of "the terror masters." The effect is rather like a used car salesman talking at a very rapid clip, slurring his words into one long litany of dubious claims. As "evi-

dence" for the al-Qaeda-Iraq connection we are given the assertion of one David Wurmser that Saddam has "lately encouraged the rise, in Iraq's northern safe haven, of Salafism, a puritanical sect tied to Wahabism" and that "one of these Salafi movements turns out to be a front for bin Laden." Such a tenuous connection seems like an awfully thin thread on which to hang the invasion, devastation, and military occupation of a country.

According to a number of reports, bin Laden offered to help defend the Saudi kingdom against a possible incursion from Saddam in 1991, provided the Saudi government rejected the stationing of U.S. troops on the holy soil of his home country. A recent issue of *Al Majallah*, a Saudi magazine, features an interview with Abd-al-Rahman al-Rashid, in which the al-Qaeda spokesman says that Saddam Hussein "is at the top of Al-Qa'ida's assassination list." Saddam, he announces, "is exactly like Bush in barbarism, cruelty, and unbelief." I guess Mr. Al-Rashid has not seen the Ledeen book, or else he would know that bin Laden and Saddam are *really* allies.

We are also treated to a dutiful reiteration of the alleged meeting in Prague between Mohamed Atta and an Iraqi agent, a myth dispelled by Michael Isikoff and Robert Novak, among oth-

ers, who point to the FBI's denials—and the impossibility of being in two places at once. According to the FBI, records show Atta was in Virginia Beach checking out naval facilities as possible targets at the time this legendary powwow was supposed to have occurred.

But Ledeen is not entirely wrong when he makes the important point that "one of today's most misleading conventional generalizations about the Islamic world is the suggestion that members of different sects or traditions cannot work together in a common enterprise." The whole point of U.S. policy in the region seems to be driving them together out of a common cause: survival. In which case, Ledeen's dictum becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. But the author's point about the pragmatic necessities that dictate trans-sectarian cooperation can be taken even further, as the Israeli connection to the early history and success of Hamas dramatically confirms.

The rise of Hamas is a textbook case of "blowback" aimed directly at its earliest sponsor and protector—Israel. For the Israelis "aided Hamas directly," says Tony Cordesman, Middle East analyst at the Center for Strategic Studies. Hamas was originally registered as a legal organization in Israel in 1978 under the name *Al-Mujamma al Islami* by Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, their fire-brand spiritual leader. "According to U.S. administration officials funds for the movement came from the oil-producing states and directly and indirectly from Israel," reported UPI terrorism correspondent Richard Sale in June. "The PLO was secular and leftist and promoted Palestinian nationalism. Hamas wanted to set up a transnational state under the rule of Islam, much like Khomeini's Iran."

Israel's strategy of divide and conquer boomeranged badly when one of the severed tentacles of the terrorist monster began to take on a life of its own. The religious-based proto-Ladenite movement, nurtured by Israeli covert support, began to recruit heavily in the wake of the Iranian revolution. Today,



"I thought you needed a challenge, so I declared war on the Austro-Hungarian Empire for you."

far more radical and violent rivals challenge a weakened Arafat, and Hamas is the PLO's leading competitor.

Israel's amen corner in the U.S., of which Ledeen is a leading light, often inveighs against the alleged sin of "moral equivalence" when it comes to the Israelis and the Palestinians. Israel, we are told, is our best ally in the war on terrorism, but who are the "terror masters" in this instance? Sheikh Yassin or those who initially funded and supported his movement of teenaged suicide bombers?

Near the end of his screed, Ledeen cites the late Luigi Barzini on the rise of Caesarism in ancient Rome: "How can men, who are dedicated to liberty and the defense of their own independence, efficiently dominate subject peoples, without damning their own soul?" "We believe," Ledeen writes, "that our ideas are more powerful than those of the terror masters, and that, once liberated, the peoples of the Middle East will embrace our ideas and join with us."

Surely, then, ideas of such awesome power do not need to be exported at gunpoint. Why, in that case, do we have to go to war with practically everyone in the Middle East before they all become convinced Jeffersonian democrats?

It is extremely odd that this book ends with a self-refutation, but there is no other way to describe it. The author cavalierly informs us that his program of world conquest is very risky and tells us a story about how Machiavelli was a great card player who "ruefully admitted that the best one can hope for is to have good luck about half the time. But that should be enough for us."

No, it is not enough. What if we take an empire, lose our old republic, and follow our British, Byzantine, and Roman ancestors into the graveyard of imperial ambitions? What will Ledeen and his fellow would-be *conquistadores* say then—"tough luck"? ■

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[*Wealth and Democracy*, Kevin Phillips, Broadway Books, 474 pages]

As The Gap Widens

By Dwight D. Murphey

WEALTH AND DEMOCRACY can be seen as a follow-up to Kevin Phillips' 1990 book, *The Politics of Rich and Poor*. It is not, however, a mere update, because it extends its vision to cover a number of other facets, including the disparities of wealth in American economic history from the 1790s to the present.

The book has considerable substance and extensive factual detail about several themes that are interesting in themselves. Leading among these is his phase theory about major economic powers. "The similar trajectories of the previous leading economic powers present a powerful argument for stages of development that the U.S. is itself following," Phillips claims. The phases can be seen in the rise and fall of sixteenth century Spain, seventeenth century Holland, and nineteenth century Britain. In the United States and the others, Phillips sees a progression from initial vitality and commercial expansion to erosion and weakness, accompanied by complacency during a period of economic, ideological, and military triumphalism. He especially describes this latter phase in which each society has lived off its accumulated strengths, has transferred capital and technology to others, has moved strongly into finance rather than continuing with actual production, has seen the rise of powerful competing economies, and has experienced an ascendancy of the conspicuously rich while at the same time unemployment has risen, and the workforce is sullen.

The concern, of course, is that the United States is in its terminal phase as a leading economic power. Readers are advised, however, to keep in mind the

speculative nature of such historical analogies. The idea that "Financialization" leads to vulnerability and decline may well be true, but Phillips himself notes that it was actually an exhausting war that brought Spain, Holland, and Britain off their respective pinnacles. This mixes and confuses the causal message. The present-day United States, involved in a "war against terror" and extended throughout the world in a melioristic interventionism, may well become involved in exhausting warfare, completing the analogy. But that remains to be seen. The United States' economic progression is something that anyone attentive to American well being will want to follow closely, however, and Phillips's book gives much to ponder.

Another theme is the polarization of wealth and income, which Phillips traces in its ebb and flow from 1790 to the present. His comparison is especially of the "top 1 percent" to a variety of segments of the remainder of the population. Most pertinent to us today is that Phillips sees an extraordinary expansion of wealth by the top few in the 1980s and 1990s while there has been "a relative stagnation of the middle class and a decline in the net worth of the bottom 60 percent of Americans." The quality of life of the average American, he says, has declined dramatically, with wives working to help maintain family income, longer working hours, decreasing job benefits, longer commutes, and a shift to temporary and part-time employment.

This is a theme the American Left has stressed in a number of books during recent decades. The hue and cry about the polarization became muted during the boom psychology of the late 1990s (re-enforced, almost certainly, by an unwillingness of the Left to attack while Clinton was president). Phillips' contribution to what the Left has already said is largely to bring the data up to date.

Most conservatives, whose thought centers on the purist forms of libertarian and free-market ideology, will consider the subject of economic polarity a non-issue. Wealth is the hallmark of