

## BOOKS

[*Devil's Game: How the United States Helped Unleash Fundamentalist Islam*, Robert Dreyfuss, Metropolitan Books, 370 pages]

# The Devils We Knew

By Leon Hadar

THE TWILIGHT YEARS of the Cold War were a lot of fun for guys like me who imagined that killing a few commies was kind of cool, especially if you could cover it from the safety of Washington. Think of us as "Chickenhawks: The First Generation." So there I was, on a cold but sunny day in Washington, Feb. 11, 1985, a young reporter standing on the White House lawn. And like Dean Acheson and Robert Kagan—*vive la différence*—I was Present at the Creation.

Sam Donaldson's toupee was blocking my view as I witnessed history. The Leader of the Democratic West, Custodian of the U.S. Constitution, and a former gay divorcee—"gay" like in the famous Fred Astaire movie—was schmoozing with a Muslim King, Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques in Arabia, the ruler of a medieval theocracy where gay men—"gay" as in "Brokeback Mountain"—were stoned during lunch breaks. The two were proclaiming their commitment to shared ideals and pledging their support for Muslim guerrillas fighting an atheistic Evil Empire. Opposites attract. And love was in the air.

"I'd like to take this opportunity to express admiration for the responsible manner in which Saudi Arabia has conducted its economic affairs," was the way President Ronald Reagan welcomed King Fahd bin Abdul Aziz. "King Fahd and other Saudi leaders, conscious of the global impact of their financial and economic decisions, have earned our

respect and gratitude. Their many humanitarian contributions touch us deeply, as well," Reagan said. Yes, indeed. Thanks for that 1973 oil embargo.

And then, like in the final scene from "Casablanca," when Rick and Captain Renault decide to join the Free French to fight the Nazis—Renault even throws a bottle of Vichy water into the bin—Reagan turned toward his new pal Fahd and asserted that the two were now blood brothers. "The people of the United States share with the people of Saudi Arabia a deep moral outrage over the continuing aggression and butchery taking place in Afghanistan," Reagan declared. "The citizens of the Western democracies and the Muslim world, by all that they believe to be true and just, should stand together in opposition to those who would impose dictatorship on all of mankind," he said, suggesting that we were in a midst of a Clash of Civilizations pitting all Christians, Muslims, and Jews against those nonbelievers in the Kremlin. "Marxist tyranny already has its grip on the religious freedom of the world's fifth largest Muslim population. This same grip strangles the prayers of Christians, Jews, and Muslims alike. We all worship the same God. Standing up to this onslaught, the people of Afghanistan, with their blood, courage, and faith, are an inspiration to the cause of freedom everywhere." And

the young chickenhawks who in 1985 were watching cartoons instead of following Sam Donaldson's reports probably imagine that my When-Ronny-Met-Abdul recollections are a "Saturday Night Live" parody. After all, at a time when the warblogs are warning us of the coming war of civilizations between the Judeo-Christian West and Islam, the notion that the leaders of the Abrahamic civilizations were once joined together in support of the ideological forerunners of today's "Islamofascists" sounds like a bad joke.

As Dreyfuss makes clear, it was certainly not a joke. It was all dead serious: like thousands of dead Soviet soldiers, hundred of thousands of dead Afghans, and eventually, on that tragic day of 9/11, more than 3,000 dead Americans. In short, it was the devil's game. And ironically or paradoxically, not only did some of the same radical Islamists that we had trained in Afghanistan mastermind the 9/11 attacks, Saudi citizens carried them out. As Dreyfuss sees it, the same kind of mindset and cast of characters that helped cement the alliance with the mujaheddin as part of the Cold War strategy and created the conditions for the blowback of 9/11 have been driving our policy of ousting secular Saddam Hussein and forming a partnership with the radical Shi'ites—who we are putting in power in Baghdad to assist us in spreading secular democracy in the

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then Ronny and Abdul started fading into the sunset, holding hands and on their way to the Khyber Pass. And bin Abdul Aziz threw that Stolichnaya bottle into the bin.

Those were the days when the Cross and the Crescent would shine together and overpower the Sickle and Hammer. And they were coming back to life 20 years later as I was reading Robert Dreyfuss's *Devil's Game: How the United States Helped Unleash Fundamentalist Islam*. The Soviet Union is no more. And

Middle East even as we continue working with the same Saudi theocracy.

But forget about ironies or paradoxes, and welcome to the "Mullah Horror Show," where Dr. Frankenstein—played by British imperialists, State Department officials, CIA spooks, Cold War ideologues, and Israeli leaders—helped give life to and energize the monster that is now haunting us. Dreyfuss, providing a valuable history lesson to the ignorant chickenhawks, explains that U.S. officials "found political Islam

to be a convenient partner during each stage of America's empire-building project in the Middle East, from its early entry into the region to its gradual military encroachment, to its expansion into the on-the-ground military presence, and finally to the emergence of the United States as an army of occupation in Iraq and Afghanistan."

The author, an investigative journalist who covers national security for several publications, provides a concise and readable historical account of the evolution of America's partnerships with radical Islamic groups and regimes. He describes the emergence of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt into a Pan-Islamic movement and the rise of Saudi Arabia as a promoter of its strict interpretation of Islam (Wahabbism), and he exposes the way the Americans—and earlier the British—used these and other players as part of a Cold War strategy to counter the power of secular nationalist and socialist

leaders, including Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser and Iran's Mohammad Mossadegh, who challenged U.S. interests in the Middle East and in some cases allied themselves with the Soviet Union. In that context, that America teamed-up with the Saudis and the Pakistanis to help the Islamic guerrillas in Afghanistan evict the Soviets should be seen as part of a pattern: it made a lot of sense as way of inflicting a painful defeat on the Soviets. And from that perspective, it worked.

Dreyfuss isn't a Middle East scholar and the limited number of sources he utilizes to tell his story include English-language texts and interviews with former officials. That explains perhaps why his analysis of the Islamic political movements is somewhat shallow. At the same time, much of what he recounts, including the employment by the CIA of Islamic clerics to oust Mossadegh from power in 1953, the U.S. co-operation with members of the Muslim Brotherhood to weaken Nasser, and Israeli efforts to build up Hamas to counter the secular Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), has been told before and is familiar to anyone with minimal knowledge of Middle East affairs.

And *Devil's Game* loses some of its punch when the author tries to do Big Picture conceptualizing and advance certain ideological themes. Dreyfuss is correct when he points to the costs involved in using the Muslim Brotherhood to counterbalance Nasserism and when he argues that American values are incompatible with the tenets of radical political Islam. But his romanticization of Nasser and the secular Arab nationalist movements and regimes is off the mark, as when he suggests that the "United States didn't need an alternative to Nasser—it ought to have embraced him, and helped him undermine the Islamic right," when he refers to Syria's unification with Egypt under Nasser's United Arab Republic as an "exciting experiment in unifying the Arab world," or when he decries free-market reforms as a plot against progress manufactured by "Economic Islamists." There was nothing "exciting"

in Nasser's Egypt, Assad's Syria, or Saddam's Iraq—as independent entities or as part of an Arab bloc—as far as Western interests or values were concerned. These were fascist-like military dictatorships with state-controlled economies that not unlike the Soviet Union proved to be failed experiments in political-social engineering. Western support was not the determining factor in explaining the rise of political Islam; it has emerged as a potent alternative mainly because of the bankruptcy of secular Pan-Arabism. If anything, Muslim countries like the United Arab Emirates, Oman, and Lebanon, not to mention Turkey, Malaysia, and Indonesia, have thrived after they have moved to liberalize their economies.

But if the book lacks some depth and originality, it compensates for that by its success in demonstrating in a crisp and lively manner how a series of one-night stands with dubious characters in the Middle East didn't always advance American long-term interests and have given birth to a collection of anti-American baddies. Those Cold War-era affairs with the Islamists were motivated not by love but by realpolitik considerations and in some cases—evicting the Soviets out of Afghanistan—helped to checkmate the Kremlin. But with the end of the Cold War, America had an opportunity to end its many affairs in the Middle East and start the process of disengagement. Instead, the current spin-masters in the White House are choreographing new media events like the one I witnessed 20 years ago, starring another U.S. president and another devout Arab Muslim. But after reading the *Devil's Game*, we shouldn't project a sense of irony when our policies don't exactly have a happy ending. As they say in the Middle East, when you sleep at night with dogs, don't be surprised when you wake up with fleas. Or with the devil lying next to you. ■

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[*The Untied States of America: Polarization, Fracturing, and Our Future*, Juan Enriquez, Crown, 352 pages]

## One Nation, Divisible

By Peter J. Lynch

"HOW MANY STARS, do you think, will be in the U.S. flag in fifty years?" This is the question posed by Juan Enriquez in *The Untied States of America*. If the fault lines in American society widen, will cities, states, or entire regions decide they would be better off charting their own course under a banner other than the Stars and Stripes? As Enriquez suggests, the outcome remains far from certain, but not for the reasons he thinks.

The CEO of a biotech venture-capital firm, Enriquez likens citizenship to "buying into a national brand." That word "buying" is key. Much like Thomas Friedman, he insists that, for the sake of competitiveness in the global marketplace, America ought to be a place where the world's best and brightest can come to strike it rich—those who perhaps aren't as gifted but will work hard picking fruit, building McMansions, slaughtering animals, and washing dishes are invited too. That's right, only by filling the country with all manner of unassimilated foreigners whose primary allegiance is to the Almighty Dollar can we prevent it from becoming "untied."

It's doubtful that Enriquez actually believes this nonsense, since he acknowledges that English-speaking Americans born in America don't have as much in common with one another as they once did. In fact, people in the blue states "have a lot more in common with Canadians than they do with those living in red states. They are, in general, wealthier, more liberal, more secular, pay more taxes, believe in some government ..." He illustrates this disconnect by comparing the hugely successful *Da Vinci Code* to the equally popular *Left*

*Behind* series; yet how many people have read both? When you can't relate to your fellow countrymen because they listen to talk radio instead of NPR, watch Fox News not CNN, and shop at Safeway rather than Trader Joe's, the odds are not good you'll identify with those who listen to "El Zol," watch Telemundo, and shop at the Latin American grocery.

These differences—while superficial—are nevertheless indicative of more serious divisions in the American body politic. What Enriquez doesn't seem to notice is how these divisions become exacerbated by the close quarters necessitated by the unitary political system. Witness the ferocity of the abortion, stem-cell research, or intelligent-design debates. This is in part due to the fact that almost everything is now a national issue. There was a time when the Kansas Board of Education could make decisions for the schoolchildren of Kansas without input from the Upper East Side. Not any more. The situation creates the perfect recipe for resentment of one's fellow citizens, particularly in light of the correlation between geographic and ideological proximity these days. Hatred of George W. Bush on the coasts and in big cities, for example, can transform into blanket animosity toward the Middle American yokels who foisted him upon the entire country.

To Enriquez's mind, any tension in America is attributable not to this phenomenon but to the Neanderthals who refuse to "buy into the national brand," which presumably entails climbing aboard the globalist, open-borders, multilingual bandwagon. For someone who unquestionably regards himself as a tolerant person, he doesn't have a lot of patience for those who feel their way of life is threatened by the brave new world's "knowledge economy" that so excites him and his colleagues in the biotechnology field.

Anyone with a strong metaphysical inclination that influences him beyond the cozy confines of his chosen house of worship also needs re-education in matters American, according to Enriquez. He claims the United States was better

off when it "made science its dominant religion." What a remarkable statement. In one sentence, the author makes his readers question his understanding not only of science and religion but history as well. Enriquez sees the unfortunate, heavy-handed politicking surrounding the premature death of Terri Schiavo at the insistence of her husband as evidence of an attempted theocratic plot perpetrated by hypocrites giving lip service to the sanctity of life. After all, President Bush signed off on the executions of a lot of criminals in Texas, and Bush's fellow Texan, Tom DeLay, "allowed his father to die in 1988 after a similar tragedy" to Mrs. Schiavo's.

Eventually, if a sizable segment of the American population persists in its mossbacked ignorance and fails to embrace every dubious scientific fad and Third World immigrant wholeheartedly, its more enlightened neighbors might begin to consider whether remaining tied to it is in their best interest. Enriquez realizes that the Northeast will most likely lead the drive for secession or devolution. Drawing on examples from across the globe, he shows that the impetus for devolution arises most often in wealthier regions, such as Northern Italy, Biafra, and Slovenia, whose inhabitants view their poorer, less sophisticated countrymen as dead weight. Although he overlooks the Second Vermont Republic movement, profiled by Bill Kauffman in the Dec. 19, 2005 issue of *TAC*, he does mention secessionist agitation in antebellum New England and that today Northeastern states pay far more into the U.S. Treasury than they get in return. However, it is not entirely outside the realm of possibility that, at the other end of the ideological spectrum, the people of a deeply God-fearing red state—maybe Utah or Alabama—will some day try to sever their ties to an increasingly godless federal government carefully scrubbed of the values they hold dear.

Secession may seem a somewhat drastic measure, and it really is. A vastly simpler solution can be found by restoring an aspect of American government