

people in perpetual doubt as to what it in fact is and whether they have achieved it. So we get “wellness goals,” the accomplishment of which undoubtedly involves shelling out a bunch of money for detox treatments supervised by some self-styled guru.

The wellness craze draws its force from giving exercise and diet a veneer of transcendent meaning—a sort of vanity cult whose liturgy takes the form of spa treatments and personal training sessions. But it seems also to be a legitimate response to the concept of total work, a way of regaining some sense of balance. This hits on another point made by Pieper: celebration, and especially divine worship, is essential to leisure. It requires entering a place where “calculation is thrown to the winds and wealth deliberately squandered.”

He continues, “Separated from the sphere of divine worship, of the cult of the divine, and from the power it radiates, leisure is as impossible as the celebration of a feast. Cut off from the worship of the divine, leisure becomes laziness and work inhuman.” We can invent sham feast days unrelated or perhaps even opposed to the divine, but these inevitably devolve into boredom in the same way wellness eventually reveals itself to be a form of workaholism.

In the end, we can’t help wanting to find a place where the clock ceases to be an enemy, where we can do something wholly gratuitous, something “good for nothing”—not in the same way that, say, reality television is good for nothing, but in a utilitarian sense. And while it’s hard to know what the insights of an Aristotle, an Augustine, or an Aquinas—insights born of leisure—would go for on the open market, we must admit that whatever price they fetched would certainly be too little. ■

Brent Kallmer is a freelance writer in Washington, D.C.

Democracy Delusion

The misconception that values won the Cold War

By Andrew A. Michta

FOR CLOSE TO TWO DECADES, under both Democratic and Republican administrations, the United States has followed a security policy built around the ideology of democratic universalism and implemented through residual Cold War institutions. Unlike 1945-47, when vigorous debate prefigured the containment strategy, the post-Cold War years have seen little introspection and plenty of confidence. Instead of George Kennan and Walter Lippmann’s debate over national interests, we got Francis Fukuyama’s “end of history” and Charles Krauthammer’s “unipolar moment.”

It is a cliché to say that victory can be fraught with more danger than defeat, but the aftermath of America’s triumph in the Cold War may prove the maxim’s merit.

The scope of our success was breathtaking: not only did the United States avert an actual war with the Soviet Union, but by 1989, communism had been so discredited that it imploded across the Soviet empire. The totality of that victory and the rapid transition of the post-communist world to democracy enticed American elites to believe in the universal applicability of our political institutions and our cultural reference points.

We emerged from the Cold War with no peer competitor, no immediate security threats, and a feeling of unprecedented power. That sense of a preponderant America liberated from its Soviet counterweight translated into a newly assertive foreign policy—and a new impatience with the complexities of world affairs. Efforts to reduce the United States’ international commit-

ments were caricatured as “isolationist.”

A clear indication that democratic ideology now drove policy was the rapid expansion of American commitments in Europe—and the rapid expansion of NATO, our chosen vehicle for democratizing post-communist states. In two cycles of enlargement since the end of the Cold War, NATO has added ten new members, notwithstanding their failure to meet the requisite military capabilities and an absence of consensus among the allies about the nature of NATO’s new mission. Though the United States insists on the “expeditionary” NATO, a large number of the key old European allies have a different vision of its future. And those new allies who follow the American lead by contributing forces offer support mainly as a *quid pro quo* for American security guarantees against resurgent Russia.

Amid rising tensions in NATO, American security commitments have continued to grow. Several policy landmarks defined the expansive post-Cold War policy. In the Middle East, after the 1990 Gulf War, the first Bush administration abandoned offshore balancing, opting instead for a large American military footprint in the region. In the Balkans, the Clinton administration relied on American power to stop ethnic violence, but rejected ethnic consolidation as a path to security. The resultant NATO/EU Balkan protectorate will endure as long as there is an open-ended commitment of allied resources.

The final step in replacing realism with democratic universalism came after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, when

the Bush administration declared that indefinite war against terrorism would be the country's primary national-security goal.

The unlimited scope of the global war on terror was matched by its equally striking conceptual confusion, with the conflict cast as an epic existential struggle between freedom and "Islamofascism." In an environment in which you are "either with us or with the terrorists," discussion is all but foreclosed.

The dilemma the United States faces today is not one of empire in the sense critics often invoke. Rather, we have embarked on a revolutionary course to transform not only power relations between states but also their domestic politics. The idea of exporting democracy to the Middle East and the neoconservative argument that American security depends on a "modernized" Arab world are nothing short of radical. The ideology at the heart of this transformative project mixes the most fundamental American values with a basic misunderstanding of how societies and cultures evolve.

Not until the end of the Cold War did democratic universalism become a catch-all, officially sanctioned solution to America's global challenges. Since then, successive U.S. administrations have narrowed the band of systemic differences they were prepared to accept. American policy has found ambiguity in world affairs increasingly intolerable, declaring instead the imperative to "restore communities," "modernize" cultures, win "battles for hearts and minds," and "nation build," in order to create a "world that favors freedom."

This rhetoric does not correspond to reality. Democratic transition requires broad-based public consensus that new institutions are historically legitimate and can be framed within a given cultural context. This has been overwhelmingly the case in post-communist Europe, where actual democratic transi-

tions were far more complicated than the institutional modeling suggests. The core contributing factors were the presence of emerging civil society and of legitimate political elites who supported the transition. Neither exists in Iraq.

In the two cases of successful "democratization from above," Germany and Japan, complete defeat in war followed by unconditional surrender formed the foundation for change. And both countries had a security imperative to work with the United States to defend against the Soviet and Chinese communist threats. Most importantly, in both cases, internal conditions favored systemic regime change. Germany had a history of nascent if ineffective democratic governance predating the Nazis. It shared Western cultural and religious traditions, and it had nationally recognized leaders who were able to articulate the country's democratic future. Legitimate leadership was likewise essential in Japan's transition, where the emperor, having renounced his divinity, remained as the symbol of continuity between the nation's past and its future.

In post-communist Europe, democracy took root because it was synonymous with independence, national self-determination, and security. There were both grassroots support and a strong elite consensus that joining the West constituted a historically legitimate path.

The 2003 invasion of Iraq, on the other hand, never accounted for the political history and culture of the Middle East. The full regional impact and long-term global consequences of this folly are not yet in sight. Neither have the full domestic political implications and economic costs been assessed. But in one area, the message from Iraq seems clear: the war has exposed the inherent limitations of Democratic Peace Theory as the underpinning of the administration's transformative policy.

That theory, which in the early '90s migrated from academic discourse to American policy debates, argues that democracies are not likely to go to war with one another. Its appeal has been all but irresistible, for it purports to explain political change and drive policy, even if the Kantian argument is reduced to a PowerPoint slide in the process.

The 2005 Congressional Advance Democracy Act declared, "wars between or among democratic countries are exceedingly rare, while wars between and among nondemocratic countries [are] commonplace." Similar assertions have become staples of successive post-Cold War pronouncements.

In the 1990s, as discussions of "institutionalizing democratic peace" proliferated in think tanks, advocacy groups, and in government, American universities experienced a precipitous decline in their Area Studies programs. They have all but given up on preparing regional specialists fluent in foreign languages and versed in different cultures—the type of education that was essential to our success against the Soviet Union. Instead, they turn out expert module builders capable of running Linde equations on data sets but largely indifferent to the most basic cultural realities of the countries they profess to research. Rational Choice and similar theories that promised to make political science truly "scientific" became the doorway to university tenure. Thus the argument for the Iraq War was forged not by Middle East experts keenly aware of the constraints imposed by the region's history and culture but by "regime changers" and "nation builders," who could not put together a coherent Arabic sentence and whose knowledge of the region derived from government briefings.

The tragedy of Sept. 11 transformed the democratic creed into a global democratic ideology. In the heat of the moment, the neoconservative blend of

hard power and Wilsonianism seemed to offer clear answers, and with few exceptions, both Democrats and Republicans signed on without asking how expending national power on a refurbished Wilsonian dream was going to make Americans safer in the 21st century. Few questioned how core democratic values that had evolved over the centuries of the Western liberal tradition could be transplanted into a Muslim community defined by ethnic and sectarian divisions.

The consequences have been dire for the U.S., our global prestige, and for the Iraqis themselves. The functioning Iraqi state, albeit run by a nasty dictator, has been dismantled and thrown into chaos. The country that used to be the regional counterweight to Iran has been knocked out by American power. (Lest we forget, during the Iran-Iraq War, the West, as well as the Soviet Union, expended considerable energy to deny victory to either side). Four years of fighting have degraded the power of the U.S. military, while Iran has gained more freedom of action to pursue its nuclear program and strengthen its position in the region.

The Middle East is only part of the gathering storm on the horizon. Despite our dominant economic position, we face serious internal imbalances that could further constrain our ability to protect our national interests. The national debt stands at \$8.8 trillion—almost 70 percent of the 2006 GDP—and increases \$1.5 billion per day. Though the U.S. will remain a superpower for the next several years, its ability to secure its interests will be in jeopardy unless its foreign policy returns to realism.

Moreover, the U.S.-European transatlantic relationship is no longer working according to the old rules. For European governments, unity with the U.S. is no longer the objective it once was, and they are becoming evermore selective in following Washington's lead. The United States no longer enjoys a large natural

constituency in Europe, and Iraq has underscored this new American weakness. Even if Europe had the political will to work with the U.S. in the Middle East and Asia, it lacks the capacity for sustained military deployments.

Meanwhile, Russia, awash in oil and gas revenues, is back in the game in both Europe and Eurasia, ready to flex its muscles as Vladimir Putin announced in Munich earlier this year and underscored in confrontations with Russia's neighboring states in the post-Soviet sphere.

In Asia, China's power will continue to expand, subsidized by increasingly de-Westernized economic globalization.

Other than hope that China's economic development will eventually lead to democracy, Democratic Peace Theory has little to offer in response to this shift in global power. Likewise, democratic universalism is irrelevant to challenges like devolving U.S.-European relations, the resurgence of Russia, and our inability to stabilize the Middle East.

If a new Western consensus is to emerge, America must foster regional stability instead of pursuing the current transformative agenda. In Afghanistan and Iraq, we need to recognize that regional problems cannot be divorced from our past and present policy choices or solved without the involvement of key regional players. We need to review our international commitments and eliminate those that offer only marginal value not commensurate with the cost.

And a return to realism in foreign policy has to include fiscal responsibility and rebuilding the economic base at home, including an energy policy that will wean the nation off imported oil. For our policy in the Middle East, this means returning to off-shore balancing in the short-term to ensure continued access to oil; in the long term, it requires America's progressive disengagement from the region in order to regain greater freedom of action.

For transatlantic relations, the return to realism means a serious reassessment of America's place in NATO. Alliances are about shared threats and interests, while "fostering communities of values" is merely derivative. Since 1990, the United States and the Europeans have maintained that NATO can transform itself and remain the premier security organization in the world. But after two cycles of enlargement, in 1999 and 2004, the alliance has grown to 26 members that, with the exception of the U.S., France, and Great Britain, have only limited deployable military capabilities and, except for Canada, Poland, Romania, Denmark, and the Netherlands, lack the political will to make meaningful contributions to U.S.-led out-of-area operations.

America's present international predicament has been caused by a synergy of trends, some obvious, others difficult to anticipate. The ideology of democratic universalism reached its pinnacle with the "neoconservative moment" and in the unquestioned embrace of globalization as the panacea for the nation's fiscal irresponsibility. But the post-Cold War era in U.S. foreign policy is fast coming to a close. It will be critical to our future security to speak honestly about our global overcommitment and make the necessary adjustments.

The United States is the most powerful republic in history, but the supposed universality of our values doesn't inoculate us from the realities of international power relations. ■

Andrew A. Michta is professor of National Security Studies at the George C. Marshall European Center for Security in Germany. These views are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies, the Department of Defense, or the U.S. government.

Arts & Letters

FILM

[Sunshine]

Talk, Talk Against the Dying of the Light

By Steve Sailer

ON MAY 28, 1942, the *USS Yorktown* aircraft carrier, badly damaged at the Battle of the Coral Sea, squeezed into a Pearl Harbor dry dock needing an estimated 90 days of repair. But with four Japanese carriers steaming toward Midway Island, 1,400 repairmen swarmed over her, using so much electricity that Honolulu had to be partially blacked out. Two days later, the *Yorktown* sailed off to the decisive battle of the War in the Pacific.

On Jan. 16, 2003, a chunk of foam broke off the space shuttle *Columbia* during liftoff. NASA engineers asked their managers to have a spy satellite scope out the damage, but the higher-ups assumed, wrongly, that America couldn't improvise a repair or rescue during the 30 days the crew could survive in orbit, so why bother? Two weeks later, the *Columbia* disintegrated upon re-entry.

During the golden age of science fiction in the middle of the 20th century, the predominant plot—the space voyage—was essentially an updated sea story. (It's no coincidence that the greatest American science-fiction writer,

Robert A. Heinlein, who was born 100 years ago this summer, was an invalided U.S. naval officer.) Classic “hard” science fiction reflected the can-do culture of an era exemplified by the *Yorktown* repairs and going to the Moon in eight years.

We now live in a can't-do age, when merely building a fence along the border strikes our leaders as beyond our nation's capabilities.

“Sunshine” is a medium-budget (\$40 million) science-fiction thriller with art-house pretensions. Eight astronauts on a last-chance-for-mankind mission try to reignite the dying sun with a “stellar bomb” the size of Manhattan. The movie falls uncomfortably between the grand heroism of the old sci-fi and the petty self-absorption of our reality-television shows.

Granted, the physics of the premise are unworkable—for one thing, it takes a half million years for light to jostle its way out from the dense solar core to the surface, so by the time we noticed anything was wrong with the sun, it would be too late—but some of the film's conceptions of how much the freezing folks back on Earth could do if they had to are thrillingly old-fashioned. For instance, this bomb is humanity's final hope because “all the fissile material on Earth has been mined” to make it.

On the other hand, by 2057, NASA appears to have delegated personnel selection to a TV network. The crewmembers of *Icarus II* look great but display all the competence, cohesiveness, and cool-headedness of a losing tribe on “Survivor.” With the oxygen running out, they sit and debate whether it's morally justified to kill one person to save the entire species. (Uh, yup.) “Sunshine” isn't quite as inane as last year's apocalyptic “Children of

Men,” which kept getting distracted from its plot about saving humanity from extinction to protest the plight of illegal immigrants, but it's close.

Only the crewcut engineer (Chris Evans, the Human Torch in “Fantastic Four”) has the fighter jock personality you need when a man's gotta do what a man's gotta do. As Murphy's Law sets in with a vengeance, he has the right stuff to lead his squabbling, dithering colleagues, such as the pretty-boy physicist (Cillian Murphy), who, for unexplained reasons, is the only one trained to set off the detonation.

“Sunshine” reunites Murphy with director Danny Boyle and screenwriter Alex Garland. Together, they revived the zombie genre with 2002's “28 Days Later.” Many critics are praising the derivative “Sunshine,” presumably because it's fun for cineastes to play “Spot the Influence” of space and submarine classics such as “2001,” “Solaris,” “Alien,” and “Das Boot.”

In contrast, sci-fi fans will find their intelligence insulted by the careless plotting. In last year's “Thank You for Smoking,” a tobacco lobbyist and a Hollywood agent conspire to have the heroes of an upcoming sci-fi blockbuster smoke in space:

Nick Naylor: “But wouldn't they blow up in an all-oxygen environment?”

Jeff Megall: “Probably. But it's an easy fix. One line of dialogue. ‘Thank God we invented the ... you know, whatever device.’”

The makers of “Sunshine,” though, just don't care enough about science fiction to hire a script doctor to make the easy fixes. Like too many films these days, it ends up being just another movie about movies, which “2001,” for all its pompous flaws, definitely was not. ■

Rated R for violent content and language.