

Gilead showed the solace that faith and family can bring, *Home* reminds us that at least as often they do not.

Home is not always an easy book to read, but the beauty of Robinson's art tempers its melancholy. Her prose does not dazzle with formal ingenuity or syntactic coloratura, but it strikes at the heart with guileless precision, and abounds with scenes and passages of stirring beauty and insight.

Home succeeds, like *Gilead* and *Housekeeping* before it, because Robinson engages with the deep pre-political loyalties that sustain us. Reverend Boughton, a Stevenson Democrat, and Reverend Ames, an Eisenhower Republican, may spar over Dulles's position on containment, but it is a superficial disagreement. What matters to them, and to any healthy society, are not ephemeral party allegiances but family, God, and the culture they have inherited and hope to pass on to their children. This is a deeply traditionalist sensibility, one that Glory Boughton describes as a "voice heard from another room, singing for the pleasure of the song, and then you know it, too, and through you it moves by accident and necessity down generations."

Without artists such as Robinson, without books like *Home* and the institutions they celebrate, our civilization cannot last long. The chain reaching back to antiquity is in danger of breaking. If it does, do not look to government to restore it. As Robinson writes in "Family," "when the state attempts to instill morality, the attempt seems intrusive and even threatening precisely because that work has traditionally been reserved to family, community, and religion, to the institutions of our diversity, a thing we have cherished historically much better than we do now, for all our talk." Robinson's words should be a tocsin, an urgent appeal to reorder our priorities in order to preserve the distinctly Western and American values and traditions that animate her art. If Marilynne Robinson is a liberal, then America needs more liberals. ■

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[*America and the World: Conversations of the Future of American Foreign Policy*, Zbigniew Brzezinski and Brent Scowcroft, Basic Books, 291 pages]

Grown-Ups' Table

By Christopher Layne

FOR AMERICAN foreign policy, the last 16 years have been paradoxical. On one hand, it is now a truism that the Cold War's end placed the U.S. in a position of unprecedented global dominance. The past two administrations, however, did not employ this power wisely. The Clinton administration embarked on a foreign policy of social work, "democratic enlargement," and NATO expansion that culminated in U.S.-led interventions in Bosnia and Kosovo. As recent events in Georgia have made clear, these actions came with a price.

The George W. Bush administration, of course, has spent eight years outdoing its predecessor's muscular Wilsonianism. It recklessly invaded Iraq in the hope of bringing about the Middle East's democratic transformation. This policy has failed disastrously. Political reconciliation among Iraq's Shi'ites, Sunnis, and Kurds has not occurred, and the goal of a stable, unified Iraq remains a mirage. From the perspective of grand strategy, moreover, the Bush administration's policy has boomeranged, strengthening Iranian power and influence in the Middle East. Finally, coupled with the government's blunderbuss "with us or against us" approach to diplomacy, the military adventure in Iraq has resulted in the forfeiture of much of the international goodwill and diplomatic influence that the U.S. once possessed.

The missing ingredient from American foreign policy has been adult supervision—a point made clearly in *America and the World*, which is a transcription of a series of discussions between Zbig-

niew Brzezinski and Brent Scowcroft, moderated by the *Washington Post's* David Ignatius, that took place earlier this year.

Granted, the good old days were never as good as we remember. Both the Carter and George H.W. Bush administrations—which Brzezinski and Scowcroft respectively served as national security advisers—made their share of foreign-policy mistakes. Nevertheless, this book shows that these figures tower over their successors intellectually. Compared to Brzezinski and Scowcroft, the neocon foreign-policy mavens are intellectual pygmies. Both men are erudite, knowledgeable about the world, and understand the broad historical trends that have shaped—and are always re-shaping—international politics. Most of all, as enlightened realists, Brzezinski and Scowcroft appreciate a crucial point that seems to have eluded others: even in a unipolar world, there are limits to American power.

Had U.S. foreign policy been under better stewardship after 9/11, it would not now be bogged down in the Messopotamia. Brzezinski and Scowcroft both warned before March 2003 that the administration had embarked on a dangerous and unnecessary course with respect to Iraq. As Scowcroft puts it, "Saddam, in fact, was quite well contained. And we had a big problem following 9/11 in dealing with this greater threat of terrorism. I thought going into Iraq would be fundamentally a diversion from our efforts to deal with terrorism." Moreover, Scowcroft insightfully notes that wars often create more problems than they solve. "War has a momentum of its own," he observes, and "one shouldn't engage in it without a careful analysis of the consequences."

Brzezinski and Scowcroft also realized that the neocon-inspired attempt to instill democracy in the Middle East was naive and risky. The Bush administration blundered fatally in jettisoning the longstanding U.S. policy of trying to maintain a semblance of stability in the Middle East and instead embracing a policy of promoting radical change. This

approach, Brzezinski observes, “ignored entirely the fact that we were plunging headlong into a region which bitterly resents and remembers colonialism under the British. And we were now viewed as the new colonial intruder.” Moreover, he says, the Bush administration’s “strategy postulated that the only way to have stability in the Middle East is to destabilize it. That is to say, overthrow the existing regimes, create the grounds for democracy, and you will have the fruits of liberty. We know the fruits of that.”

It was foreseeable that, rather than advancing U.S. interests, the Bush administration’s regime change and democratization strategy would backfire. As Scowcroft says, “we can’t remake the whole world at once ... if we try... we’ll end up with a region in which nobody will want to live, which risks being the direction we are headed.” Later, Scowcroft stresses that Wilsonian ambitions outstrip America’s means: “When we say we are going to make the world democratic, that’s too much. And in the attempt, as we are seeing right now, we risk creating more harm than good.”

There are two other key pieces of the Middle East puzzle on which Brzezinski and Scowcroft focus: Iran and the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. On both issues, they are light years ahead of the current administration (and John McCain’s foreign-policy team). They understand the futility of threatening Iran militarily while isolating it diplomatically. Both men urge the U.S. to overcome its visceral hostility toward Iran and engage Tehran in direct negotiations. “We need to be able to engage Iran in strategic discussions that can lead to a framework in the region that will allow Iran to feel secure without needing to acquire nuclear weapons,” says Scowcroft. Brzezinski adds that there is “no reason to maintain a policy in which we seek to isolate Iran or we demand that they make fundamental concessions as a price for sitting down at the table with us.”

Brzezinski and Scowcroft recognize that the U.S. needs to take a more assertive role in forging a peace settlement between Israel and Palestine. As Scowcroft argues, “I think we have a moral responsibility, given who we are, to try to solve this problem.” In its own interests, and as a good ally, Washington has an obligation to warn Jerusalem against pursuing self-defeating policies. The status quo, Scowcroft notes, is not in Israel’s interest: “the risk for Israel of concluding an agreement is considerably less than the risk of remaining isolated in a bitterly hostile region and depending on the United States for its security.” And, of course, for the U.S., the widespread perception in the Islamic world that America is indifferent to the fate of the Palestinians helps fuel the animus of radical Islamic groups like al-Qaeda. “We have a vital interest in the Middle East,” Brzezinski observes. “But we are creating increasingly widespread resentment of America. At some point those chickens will come home to roost.”

Brzezinski and Scowcroft discuss much more than the Middle East. Indeed, this book is a *tour d’horizon* of contemporary foreign-policy agenda. While Brzezinski and Scowcroft are trenchant critics of America’s current Middle East policies, some of their other views are questionable. On China, for example, they are confident that the forces of economic globalization will enable Washington and Beijing to orchestrate China’s “peaceful rise.” They could be right, but most of what we know about great-power politics suggests that there remains potential for Sino-American conflict in the future.

Transatlantic relations are another issue where one can take issue with Brzezinski and Scowcroft. Both men are products of a generation shaped by the Cold War. They see U.S.-European relations as essential. Yet their notion of united West is nothing more than a socially constructed Cold War concept that policymakers used to engender solidarity in the face of the Soviet threat and to submerge latent transat-

lantic differences. Like most American policymakers, Brzezinski and Scowcroft profess to want a strong and independent Europe—including a robust European military capability—and the cohesion of the Atlantic Alliance. Those two goals have always been antithetical, however. Neither man can quite accept that with the Cold War’s end an erosion of the transatlantic alliance is inevitable.

The two foreign-policy titans do disagree sharply on one issue: the wisdom of expanding NATO to include Ukraine and Georgia. Here, Scowcroft has by far the better of the argument. Brzezinski reveals his historically—and culturally—rooted fear of Russia and argues for an enlarged NATO. Scowcroft alludes to the dangers of this policy and reminds us that the George H.W. Bush administration, in orchestrating the Cold War’s end, was determined not to repeat the mistakes of the post-World War I peacemakers at Versailles. The administration bent over backwards not to humiliate Moscow and sow the seeds of a “Weimar Russia.” This prudence was brushed aside by the Clinton and George W. Bush administrations, which indulged in unipolar muscle-flexing and giddily embarked on NATO expansion. It is not correct to say that Clinton and Bush ran roughshod over Russia’s security interests; rather, Washington acted as if those interests simply did not exist. That was short-sighted.

Russia may have been down and out during the 1990s—not for the first time in its history—but the U.S. policy of expanding its military reach to Russia’s borders was bound to come back and haunt Washington once the bear was back on its feet. Now the bill is coming. It is no surprise that Moscow has firmly opposed Ukrainian and Georgian inclusion in NATO. Scowcroft remarks that “we would invoke the Monroe Doctrine” if a rival great power sought to bring Canada and Mexico into its strategic orbit. He reminds us that these countries were integral parts of the Soviet Union. With respect to Ukraine, he adds, “there is a deep historic tie ... bringing

Ukraine into NATO would be seen by the Russians as a further attempt to humiliate them." Scowcroft emphasizes that America's long-term strategic interest lies in having a solid relationship with Moscow, which means accepting Russian predominance in its near-abroad—its historic sphere of influence. The United States should want a Russia that is "not irredentist, not hostile, not resentful." Achieving that, Scowcroft suggests, "may mean going a little bit out of our way to make them feel equal." Here we see the clear contrast between the views of a true foreign-policy "Wise Man" and those of the neocons who have been chomping at the bit for confrontation with Russia and comparing Georgia today to Czechoslovakia in 1938.

The next administration will face many daunting challenges. Perhaps the biggest will be dealing with the decline of American power. Historians might look back at August to October 2008 as the moment when U.S. hegemony ended. The Beijing Olympics heralded China's great-power emergence. The fighting in Georgia marked Russia's return as a great power. The financial meltdown underscored America's fiscal overextension. A bankrupt superpower is not a superpower. Inevitably, there will be a need to rethink the scope of America's external aims and ambitions. In the coming years, we can only hope that policymakers embrace the enlightened realism of Brzezinski and Scowcroft. As Scowcroft puts it, "realism is a recognition of the limits of what can be achieved. It's not what your goals are, but what you can realistically do." After 16 years of excess and hubris, it would be refreshing to see U.S. policymakers adopt this line. ■

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Untied States

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Sale, while the rise of the Lincolnian one led to the crushing of the Confederacy and dearth of later secessionist movement.

The Jeffersonian view, Livingston notes, is similar in many important ways to the theory of human society put forward in Aristotle's *Politics*. Aristotle not only holds that man is a "political animal"—that is, a creature suited to life in a *polis*, or city-state—but also claims that there are natural limits to the extent of a *polis*: "the best limit of the population of a state," as he puts it, "is the largest number which suffices for the purposes of life, and can be taken in at a single view." And what exactly is this number? Livingston points to Athens, Venice, and Florence, each of which had populations in the tens of thousands, as political communities large enough to have attained the Aristotelian values of "life and high culture."

The modern American empire, which Naylor eagerly compares to the Soviet Union in its declining years, may simply be too large for the good life—and it's not only the outright separatists who chafe against the strictures of centralized federal authority. The Free State Project, for example, aims to recruit enough liberty-minded citizens who are willing to move to New Hampshire to turn the state into a libertarian haven. At present, five years into their drive, over 8,700 individuals have committed to head to the Granite State once FSP reaches a critical mass of 20,000 members. The FSP agenda is a decidedly non-secessionist one: the goal is simply to carve out a corner of America where it is once again possible to live free.

Back in Yreka, the prevailing sense is that an arrangement more like what the Free Staters are after would be good enough, if only the powers that be would allow them to give it a try. The odds of that are slim, though, and as Jefferson activist

Brian Peterson shows me around the five-acre plot that he and his family recently bought on the south end of town, the frustrations of a rural resident in a state dominated by voters from coastal cities become apparent. The landowners and area environmentalists have "really been starting to work things out on our own," he says, "People have been finally sitting down and talking, and really beginning to make some progress." Ultimately, though, they're all subject to regulators living hundreds or thousands of miles away, whose standards for a reasonable compromise are likely to be quite different. That independence that Bergeron talked about seems a long way off.

Peterson, who grew up in San Francisco and then skipped town as a teenager to move in with his grandparents in Yreka, was instrumental in reviving the push for secession during the Clinton years, and he laughs as he talks about the number of phone calls he gets from reporters who want to interview him. Thanks to Bergeron, he says, the Siskiyou County Grange has made consideration of Jefferson statehood an official "project." But much of what that means is that they've formed a bunch of committees and rested content with that. "Now and then I ask myself if it's all worth it," he admits, "but then I ask myself, Who else would do it?" And so he finds the time, in between his gardening and his couple of jobs, to update the Jefferson website, respond to queries, and fill orders for dark green T-shirts with the double crossed logo on front.

"Sometimes it feels like we're back in the 1770s or 1780s," he muses, "sitting around at the Constitutional Convention or something like that." No doubt Thomas Jefferson would have been proud. ■

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Arrested Development

The West pours billions into backward countries to encourage economic development. Can it work? I fear not.

I live in Mexico and travel a lot in the “developing world,” most of which isn’t. I ask myself why not. Inevitably I conclude that a country’s progress depends on its human capital. Most countries just don’t have enough. They will adopt the portable forms of Western technology—cellphones, video games, cyber cafés—but not much more.

I wish this were not true. The poverty of countries like Bolivia and Cambodia is not pretty. If giving them billions in aid would transform them, I would favor it. But it won’t.

What exactly causes near intractable nondevelopment? A few reasons are painfully obvious:

First, a lack of interest in schooling. This is different from a lack of schools. You can build schools, but you can’t build a desire to attend them. In many countries, children go to school for three or four years, or not at all, and then care for the goats. Their parents also care for goats, this being all they have ever done. It is all the children will ever do.

I don’t say this to be cruel. I wish it weren’t so, but it is. There is just nothing in many cultures that recommends study. Kids will drop out to care for the goats when free schools are available, when tuition in universities is free.

A fourth-grade education may barely qualify them as literate for the CIA Fact Book, but it is doom in a techno-industrial world.

A second reason for irremediable backwardness, or something very close to it, is the lack of American-style ambi-

tiousness. I know: this sounds like contempt for the downtrodden. Yet it’s true. Pretending otherwise accomplishes nothing.

Pedro, aged 17, living in a village on the slopes of the Andes, thinks only of getting married the next year. He does so, has a kid or two, and that’s the end of his path. He may be very bright and work hard. Yet his world stops at the edge of what he knows. He will play video games in the local *tiendita*, slave away to buy a car, and then spend his life driving around the plaza and honking at his buddies.

By contrast, American kids are exploratory, wait eagerly to go to college on the other end of the continent, backpack through Asia, go for the Ph.D. in chemistry. Goals may change, but there are goals. Americans see life as a progress toward desired ends. The Third World thinks of life as a fixed condition.

And so the human capital in so many countries is wasted hoeing beans—often not because they couldn’t do things differently but because it isn’t how they think. American television, often the only exposure they have to a culture other than their own, isn’t enough to effect change.

Third comes corruption, to a degree that most Americans can’t readily imagine. In many countries, everything is for sale. A blind man could buy a driver’s license from a crooked cop, which is to say any cop. The government sells the country’s resources—teak, oil, whatever it has—abroad and the money goes to

Switzerland. The cops are actual criminals. Corruption rots the society at every level.

The problem is not that corrupt officials exist. Every country has them. The problem is that the culture condones corruption, expects it, regards it as part of communal existence. Corruption, not study, is the ladder up. And of course, pouring billions of aid into a corrupt country just transfers it to the bank accounts of the rulers.

Solving concrete problems is easy or at least possible. Changing a culture is hard.

The foregoing problems exist in varying degrees in different countries. For example, Mexico qualifies as Third World but distinctly upper Third World. People in the States ask odd questions (“Does it, you know, like, have paved roads?”) and think the country is primitive. It isn’t. Mexico operates two major airlines, has a good telecommunications system, a reasonably functional national health service, a sharply reduced birth rate, and works (successfully) to end its habit of subjugating women.

Yet though school is mandatory, many children don’t go or barely do. Where I live, my stepdaughter, seriously smart, is regarded as stuck up because she makes high grades in the Prepa, the feeder system for the University of Guadalajara. This is the exact parallel of the charge of “acting white.” (Both Prepa and university are free.) Bare literacy, or none, isn’t going to work in 2040.

When the Army was running its “Be All That You Can Be” ads, I saw a cartoon of a sergeant saying to a bedraggled private who was raking leaves, “But Ferguson, you are all you can be.” Would it were not so. ■