

decision of the Catalan authorities to mandate a mere two hours a week of Spanish language in the provinces' school system.

This slight discussion of Eta leads uneasily to a longer consideration of al-Qaeda. English perhaps neglects the degree to which this amorphous entity is a collection point for displaced men with myriad local grievances against regimes which the West opposes as well as supports, either as a hangover from the Cold War or by virtue of their oil and gas resources. Its deracinated ranks include Afghans, Algerians, Egyptians, Indonesians, Libyans, Moroccans, Palestinians, Pakistanis, Saudis, Uzbeks, and Yemenis.

The author endeavors to give a fair-minded account of the war on terror, yet there is too much here on Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo rather than any reasoned discussion about the extent to which the U.S. and its allies have contained al-Qaeda in the last eight years. It remains to be seen whether al-Qaeda will be able to branch out successfully to Mali, Mauritania, or Somalia, especially since it is increasingly likely that Osama bin Laden is dead, he being indispensable to its global franchise. Ayman al Zawahiri is too locked up in the local Egyptian struggle to replicate bin Laden's strange charismatic appeal.

In his concluding chapter, English makes a number of sensible suggestions about how we should respond to terrorism, although his "we" does not range beyond the U.S. and Britain to include various other schemes to deradicalize former jihadists. Using the Northern Ireland example, he says that we should get used to living with terrorism, or what one former Northern Ireland Secretary called "acceptable levels of violence," for the lethality of the IRA was not constant from decade to decade. All terrorism is protean. Quite rightly, English adds that intelligence-led activity is better than increasing the number of boots on the ground in problem areas, although the ability of the British state to infiltrate the IRA is bound to be greater than any Western capacity to get

inside such a clannish entity as al-Qaeda or the Af-Pak Taliban. English is also right to say that we need to adhere to our own legal precepts, not only by eschewing torture, rendition, and extra-territorial detention, but also by resisting the temptation, most wordily represented by American lawyer Phillip Bobbitt, to introduce a raft of legislation designed to anticipate a hypothetical mass-casualty atrocity.

The rest of the author's prescriptions, including hardening public spaces against attack and interdicting terrorist financing, are more or less already ongoing in most Western countries and quite a few further afield, too. What English seems to underplay is the need to construct more appealing metanarratives to counter the powerfully simplistic ones put about by the jihadists, notably their belief in atemporal Muslim victimhood at the hands of "Crusader-Zionists." Surely we have derived enough intelligence on the squalid internal dynamics of various Islamist groups to be able to play to their human weaknesses?

I also wonder about English's argument that we need to detoxify "the roots of the problem." Of course, there is not one problem, synonymous in the Islamist case with Israel and Palestine. Rather, on that front, we need to think hard about how to help manage a series of transitions from the Middle East's more or less unsavory presidential dynasties and absolute monarchs to such moderate fundamentalists and members of the cosmopolitan bourgeoisie that exist in every Arab capital. That will help address the inequitable distribution of oil and gas revenues, rampant male youth unemployment, and the unjustified status that various clerical loudmouths derive from those circumstances. Unfortunately, terrorism is merely a symptom of more tragic complexities. ■

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*[Why America Fights: Patriotism and War Propaganda From the Philippines to Iraq, Susan Brewer, Oxford University Press, 352 pages]*

## Selling War

By John Schwenkler

AS DETAILS CONTINUE to emerge about the U.S. government's interference with the press and manipulation of public opinion during the Iraq War, one inevitably hears the lament that such actions are out of keeping with the tradition of American democracy. Susan Brewer's *Why America Fights* makes it clear that this is premised on a massive historical misunderstanding. From President McKinley's war for conquest in the Philippines through both of the World Wars and the costly misadventures in Korea, Vietnam, and Iraq, the American government has been nothing if not interfering and manipulative in dealing with the press and the public.

The reader learns in detail the processes by which one federal administration after another has suppressed or misrepresented basic facts, stoked public fears, played to base nationalistic impulses, and gradually replaced the customary noninterventionism of Americans with a mythology of a country that must go abroad in search of democracies to promote. If the Bush administration comes off looking less deceitful than many of its predecessors, that is only because those earlier administrations were so successful in their duplicity that the public mindset Bush needed to gain support for his wars had already been well established.

Brewer begins her account in 1898 with President McKinley, Assistant Secretary of the Navy Theodore Roosevelt, and others selling a nakedly imperialistic power grab in the Philippine Islands as a "divine mission" to extend the benefits of civilization to our "little brown brothers." (If this sounds familiar to veterans of a more recent war, that is as it should be.) McKinley was a master manipulator of

public opinion by way of the press: he established the executive mansion as a central depot for war news, assigned a secretary to meet daily with the media, and put together a staff of dozens to monitor opinion and issue carefully timed press releases to ensure that the administration's angle would dominate the news. "Having destroyed their government," the president said, in response to critics of his plans to occupy the Philippines after the end of the Spanish-American War, "it is the duty of the American people to provide for a better one." Colonialism was equated with respect for sovereignty, war with peace, and critics of U.S. battlefield atrocities were said to "walk delicately and live in the soft places of the earth." Opponents of war had no business speaking ill of the "strong men who with blood and sweat" went about the business of spreading civilization.

With minor modifications to suit changing circumstances, subsequent presidents retained this basic framework. Woodrow Wilson's liberal internationalism "kept the world safe for democracy" even as his official Committee on Public Information interfered with media freedoms, jailed citizens who spoke out in protest, and misled the public with materials put out by its literal Madison Avenue Division of Advertising. During the buildup to the Second World War, opponents of internationalism were pegged by the Roosevelt White House as subversives and Nazi sympathizers, and once the war began the administration censored press and personal communications, used extensive polling statistics to tailor official statements and government propaganda to the shape of public opinion, and leaned heavily on radio and film to promote the right messages.

By the time of the wars in Vietnam and Iraq, state propaganda had become less overt and dissent was more openly tolerated. Yet the success of prior administrations in establishing the White House as a key media player and, more important, enshrining the idea of the U.S. military as bringer of freedom and defender of the civilized world meant that war had become a much easier sell. Brewer docu-

ments in excruciating detail the ways in which the Johnson, Nixon, and Bush II administrations routinely twisted information to suit their own ends and, when mere twisting wasn't enough, simply created the "facts" they needed. But the reality of American global dominance, and President Truman's success in defining the Cold War agenda, rendered the project of encouraging pro-war sentiments in place of noninterventionist ones largely unnecessary. Despite receiving little support from the international community, both the Iraq and Vietnam wars were initially quite popular among Americans.

It is a shame that Brewer does not similarly assess the Bush administration's promotion of the wider framework of the war on terror, which is likely to define American military affairs for decades to come, even as Iraq fades from the nation's memory. She also displays an unfortunate willingness to acquiesce in the false understanding of "patriotism" as unblinking support for one's nation's wars and fails to make a consistent distinction between governmental use of the media as a tool for outright propaganda and the recognition among self-interested filmmakers and journalists that war sells and that a few citizens are inclined to trust an excessively negative messenger. When 19th-century "yellow journalists" realized that they could sell papers by filling their pages with tales of Spanish atrocities, it was surely propaganda of a sort. But this is a different phenomenon from the creation of federal agencies designed to manipulate news accounts and win the public over.

Least satisfying of all is Brewer's claim—made in both the introduction and the conclusion, and in each case entirely without argument—that even deceitful state propaganda can be tolerable if the cause is sufficiently noble. Brewer notes at the start that she believes World War II—"a legitimate war," she calls it—fits this billing. She supplements this diagnosis with her attempt to distinguish the "censorship, exaggeration, and lies" relied on by the likes of the Bush administration from the "strategy of truth" adopted by FDR. But the facts

make it hard to sustain such an interpretation: from Brewer's own account, Roosevelt lied to the public about his intended policies as he ran for a third term in 1940, censored news reports that were deemed insufficiently optimistic, and of course sent 180,000 Japanese Americans to concentration camps. ("Pioneer communities" was the official term.) Even the truth-telling strategy Brewer champions was itself an advertising move, based on the recognition that "too much salesmanship" on the part of the Office of War might turn people off, while more "straightforward and practical" instructions on what to do and believe would "regain public confidence in official propaganda." If the cartoonish film and poster campaigns of the Wilson administration are the point of comparison, then the Iraq War's salesmen come off rather well, too. But that doesn't change the fact that in each case the public was being dishonestly sold a war by men who would barely have to sacrifice, much less fight and die, to implement their preferred policies.

These qualms aside, this is an important book. It sheds light on an aspect of U.S. political history that American citizens in general, and members of the press in particular, ought to examine more closely before being taken in again by bellicose state propaganda. The present debate over healthcare reform shows that the role of the executive branch as a de facto advertising agency is unlikely to recede, and it has become far too easy to use the authority and free airtime that come with political power as a means to manipulate public opinion on matters domestic and foreign. Obviously it is possible to imagine cases when such propaganda can be used for good rather than bad ends, but it is surely better for people to meet official publicity campaigns by residents of Pennsylvania Avenue with an instinctive mistrust. Our government's proper role is to represent the popular will, not to manipulate until it aligns with the president's agenda. ■

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[*The New American Economy: The Failure of Reaganomics and a New Way Forward*, Bruce Bartlett, Palgrave Macmillan, 272 pages]

## We Are Not All Keynesians Yet

By William A. Niskanen

MOST OF BRUCE BARTLETT'S new book is an account of American macroeconomic policy from the Great Depression to today. Bartlett offers the valuable perspective of a real inside witness, having served on the staffs of several key members of Congress and as a senior policy analyst in the administrations of Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush. He is, moreover, a good economic historian and provides a well-documented summary of the last 80 years of American macroeconomics.

But Bartlett is not a good macroeconomic analyst, and at various points this undermines his case. His most important mistake—one made by many others—is to accept the Keynesian explanation of the Great Depression: “the Fed’s effort to expand the money supply was like pushing on a string,” he says. “Fiscal stimulus was necessary to compensate for the collapse of private spending in the economy and thereby mobilize monetary policy.”

In fact, federal expenditures increased by 47 percent from 1929 to 1933. The 46.1 percent decline in nominal Gross National Product during these years was the result of the Fed’s mistake of reducing M2, the broader money supply, by 30.9 percent at a time of substantial decline in the velocity of money, rather than any inadequate fiscal stimulus.

Economic growth was unusually high from 1933 to 1937, a consequence of a dramatic change in monetary policy that involved increasing the dollar price of gold in 1933, the implementation of deposit insurance in 1934, and a sub-

stantial increase in the money supply. Fiscal stimulus was inadequate to prevent the decline in nominal GNP from 1929 to 1933 and unnecessary to increase economic growth from 1933 to 1937.

The same Keynesian perspective leads Bartlett to endorse Obama’s 2009 fiscal stimulus plan. By the time this review is published, however, it will be clear that the initial distribution of the stimulus spending increased private savings but has had no effect on private consumption or investment through the second quarter, and that the recent recession ended long before most of the stimulus expenditures were distributed. Monetary policy was again the most effective macroeconomic policy instrument and was not dependent on a corresponding fiscal stimulus.

To his credit, Bartlett recognizes that Keynesian economics is “mainly a rationale for things that governments everywhere wanted to do anyway.” That appears to have been the guiding principle for Obama’s stimulus package: as White House Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel put it, “You never want a seri-

Nixon famously declared in 1971, “We are all Keynesians now.” Bartlett documents that a Keynesian perspective dominated U.S. macroeconomic policy through the 1970s and became suspect only after it failed to prevent the recessions of 1974-75 and 1980 or the rapid increase in inflation through 1980. Even in 1981, the major critics of President Reagan’s economic program claimed that his policies would lead to increased inflation and slow growth—just the opposite of what happened.

The book’s best passages are those on the conservative revolution in economic policy, probably because Bartlett was directly involved in those events. This revolution, he explains, was a combination of changing monetary policy to control demand and using marginal tax-rate cuts to increase economic growth—the first promoted by Milton Friedman, the second by Robert Mundell, both from the University of Chicago and both recipients of the Nobel Prize. By the late 1970s, their perspective was shared by many members of Congress, supported by the *Wall Street Journal*’s editorial page, and endorsed by a prospective

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ous crisis to go to waste. And this crisis provides the opportunity for us to do things that you could not do before.” But *The New American Economy* goes on to claim that Keynes should be regarded as a conservative, based on Bartlett’s view that good macroeconomic policy would reduce the political demands for microeconomic policies—such as the Smoot-Hawley tariff and the National Industrial Recovery Act—that reduced the growth of output and employment. (He should also have mentioned that Keynes opened his Cambridge home to Friedrich Hayek when London was subject to German bombing during World War II.)

Liberal Democrats certainly were not alone in embracing Keynes; Richard

Republican presidential candidate. As president, Ronald Reagan gave Fed chairman Paul Volcker strong support to reduce inflation and won the approval of a divided Congress for a major reduction of income-tax rates. As a consequence, the consumer price inflation rate fell from 12.5 percent during 1980 to 3.8 percent during 1982, and economic growth was unusually strong for the remainder of the decade.

In later chapters, Bartlett summarizes how the supply-side of this revolution came apart—primarily because it promised too much. Some supply-siders claimed that tax cuts would increase output enough to avoid a reduction of tax revenues; others said that tax cuts would reduce federal spending by