



Michael Ledeen

OPERATION DESERT SHAME

As President Bush has learned to his chagrin, Realpolitik can justify short-term tactics, but not long-term strategy.

No one should have been surprised at our government's decision to stay out of the way when Saddam Hussein slaughtered his Kurds and Shi'ites. This is a respectable administration, and there are certain things that respectable administrations just don't do, like meddle in an Iraqi "civil war." Indeed, as the President has said so many times, he never promised to march on Baghdad, he only promised to liberate Kuwait, which he did. And yes, he feels bad about the poor Kurds (there has been no sympathy expressed for the Shi'ites in the south, even though they seem to make up 60 percent of the country), and he'll help the Kurdish refugees, but don't expect us to occupy Iraq, impose a government, and manage the place.

Up to a point, the President has been quite consistent about his Gulf policy. He took great pains to define his objectives and limit them, and there was nothing about removing Saddam in the various U.N. resolutions and congressional votes. Just liberating Kuwait. Of course, with very few exceptions, nobody believed him. Most everyone out there assumed that, while the publicly announced policy was Liberate Kuwait, the real policy was Smash Saddam.

This reminds me of an interesting episode in the history of Italian Communism. At the end of World War II, the Italian Communist leader, Palmiro Togliatti, announced that the Communist party had abandoned the insurrectionist strategy of the Leninists, and would only come to power through parliamentary means. He said this over and over again, but hardly anyone believed him—least of all, the Leninist members of his own party. Everyone thought these statements were a ruse to lull the bourgeoisie into a false sense of security, the better to slit their throats while they slept. Then, in 1948, someone shot and

wounded Togliatti in Rome, and the insurrection broke out. When Togliatti was told of this, he was furious: "How could they? I told them, no insurrection."

The dirty secret was that the secret strategy was the public strategy, and the assumed strategy was not the real one.

So it is with Bush and the Gulf War. The secret was that the public strategy was the real strategy all along, to most of the world's astonishment. And Bush was surprised that everyone was surprised.

The world was surprised because most people refused to believe that the President had actually sent all those troops such a long way, just to drive the Iraqis out of Kuwait. It seemed inconceivable that so much power would be mobilized for such a limited objective. So it was assumed that there was a more serious, albeit unannounced objective all along, and what could it be but the

destruction—that is, removal—of Saddam Hussein? After all, that would truly serve notice on future would-be aggressors that, in the New World Order, no leader would survive an act of gratuitous savagery on his or her neighbor.

And it was not just the logic of the situation that led most of the world to assume that Bush and Baker wanted the destruction of Saddam Hussein; it was also the President's words, urging the Iraqi people to rise against Saddam. The Shi'ites and Kurds assumed that this meant the United States would at least act to give them a fair shot at winning, but they forgot the lessons of Hungary in the fifties, and Poland and Nicaragua in the eighties.

There is no cause too worthy to be abandoned by the American government. And, between you and me, I don't think that this administration thinks of the Kurds and Shi'ites as particularly worthy. They certainly wouldn't qualify for membership in the sort of club that the Baker Boys like to frequent.

Strange to say, there is a status element in our current Middle East policy. We seem to love the upper class neighborhoods, like Saudi and Kuwaiti palaces. Kings are also okay, even when they call us names (this administration's love affair with the wretched little king of Jordan, who has elevated appeasement of Arab radicals to the basic principle of his foreign policy, is the most dramatic case in point). Ragtag people without much clout are not good dinner partners, so Kurds and Shi'ites just don't qualify. But ragtag people with high incomes are just fine, so the Palestinians—thanks to longstanding Saudi funding—sit at the big table. The Israelis are the unwanted guests, accepted because somehow they got an invitation, but snubbed because of their shabby dress and poor manners.

Status must be a large part of the ex-

planation, because there isn't very much logic in the distinctions currently being made in the White House and Foggy Bottom. If the partitioning of Iraq is so bad, then why is the partitioning of Israel so desirable? If the Palestinians are entitled to an entity, why not the Kurds and Shi'ites? The answer must be that the Saudis don't want to see any other Arab country partitioned, because they think that somebody might get the idea of partitioning them. And since Bush and the Baker Boys really like the Saudis, they wouldn't do anything that makes the royal family nervous.

This is foolish, because it puts us at loggerheads with our own principles, and with the great democratic tidal wave that is sweeping the world at this moment. I believe that our objective, in the Middle East as elsewhere, must be to support the democrats. That means Yeltsin, that means the Africans struggling for some sort of multiparty system in country after country, that means the Kuwaiti reformers as against the Emir, the Chinese students (and the Dalai Lama) against the gerontocracy, and the anti-Castro forces in Cuba. It most assuredly does not mean the Saudi royal family, which, I believe, will have to reform and share power if it is going to survive this period. There are too many Western-educated Saudis now, who share our notions of fairness and accountability, for the Kingdom to go back to business as usual. King Fahd is going to have to share power with these people, or share the fate of the Shah of Iran (in Iran, a Westernized middle class joined with an alienated radical Islamic movement to remove what was at the time the most civilized regime in the Muslim Middle East). Unfortunately, it does not appear as if King Fahd is going to do this, or take the great opportunity given him by the war, and make a deal with Israel. If he were truly smart, Fahd could offer a



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partnership between Saudi money and Israeli entrepreneurship that could transform the region and really make the desert flower (think of all those Russian Jewish scientists and engineers!). If he offered that, he could undoubtedly get some kind of timesharing arrangement for parts of Jerusalem—after all, the Temple Mount, which is what matters most to him, is currently under Arab rule (one of the least-known facts about the Middle East) and Israeli security. He has only to substitute himself for Little King Hussein as protector of the Mount. But we don't seem to be encouraging him, either to share power or to join in a partnership with Israel. More's the pity.

The United States has never been very good at this sort of diplomacy, because it means that you have to bring bad news to people. At the moment, given the constraints of the kind of respectable society in which this administration likes to travel, it is hard to imagine the Secretary of State explaining to his buddy King Fahd that it is better to democratize now than to face insurrection later on. We should have said that to Gorbachev some years ago, as to the inscrutable masters of Peking, but we opted for good manners and polite chitchat. Gorbachev in the Soviet Union, Fahd in the Middle East; same lyrics, slightly different tune, but the message is the same in each case. We're not playing our music, but theirs.

By betraying our own principles, we paradoxically hasten the doom of our high-society friends in the region, for American politics do not permit stable, long-term relations with dictators. After a while, we begin to ask why we are being so nice to people who are opposed to our values. In America, Realpolitik can justify short-term tactics, never long-term strategy. That is why, in the end, we will have to abandon the Saudi royal family, just as we abandoned the Shah, and Ferdinand Marcos, and the others. It is as inevitable as it is proper, for we are the world's one truly revolutionary society, and when we abandon our own principles, those principles reassert themselves, sometimes to our embarrassment. That is why no long-term relationship with the Saudi royal family can work without the liberalization of their regime. It is also why our embarrassing nuzzling of Hafez al-Assad, one of the world's outstanding mass murderers, won't work either.

The current administration doesn't see it that way, for, in good conservative fashion, the President and his men seek to defend traditional boundaries as, in like manner, they enjoy the company of traditional leaders (or their concept of traditional leaders; the Saudis are Abu-come-latelies, after all). With such a

world view, one invariably adopts a traditional, balance-of-power foreign policy, just as Bush and the Baker Boys did with regard to the Kurds and Shi'ites. But we are a revolutionary nation, and our objective must be to advance our revolutionary values in the world. Those hostile to our values are automatically hostile to us, and they will attack us, regardless of our policies toward them. The world's dictators hate

the United States because of what we are, not because of what we do.

That is why we are obliged to support the Kurds and the Shi'ites in their just struggle against the tyranny of Saddam Hussein. Those in the White House and the State Department who say they do not wish to get involved in the Iraqi Civil War ignore the fact that we unleashed the anti-Saddam forces in the first place, in the name of the just strug-

gle against a tyrant who threatened to become the paramount force in a strategically sensitive area of the world. The peoples of the region see the defeat of the Kurds and Shi'ites as our defeat, and we should see it that way, too.

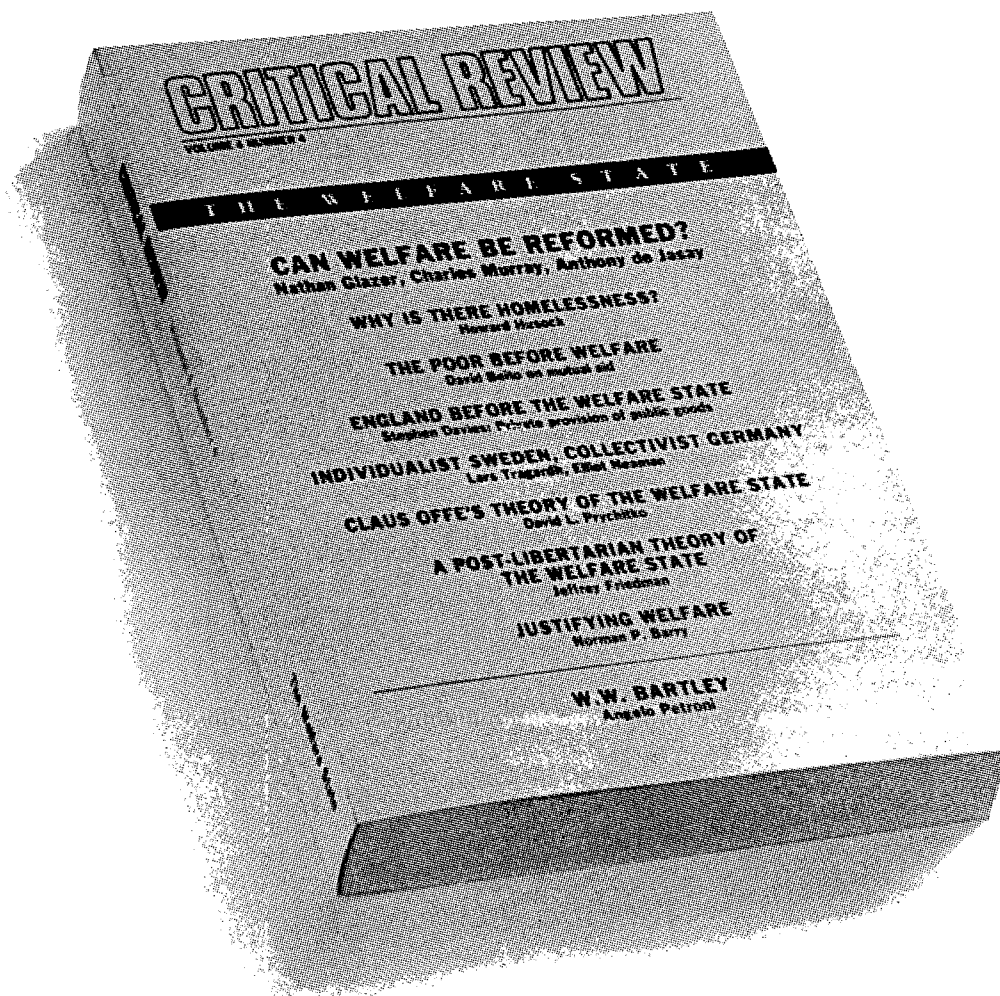
Desert Storm was a victory for American power and American values; its aftermath—let's call it Desert Shame—has left us and our principles bloodied and battered. □

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William Tucker

CHRONICLER WITHOUT A CLUE

Nicholas Lemann reports brilliantly on the great black migration from South to North in this century, only to stumble when trying to account for the disintegration of the black family that followed in its wake.

Nicholas Lemann's *The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration and How It Changed America*¹ is already being hailed as a seminal work. Hodding Carter III, himself an old Southern progressive, calls it a "heartfelt and brilliant achievement, which, if we are lucky, will force the complex questions of race and class back to the top of the national agenda." George Will praises it as "the definitive account of how the nation arrived at its current dangerous condition." Lemann has been feted by the Manhattan Institute and seems to be winning support among conservatives on the principle that any liberal willing to admit that not every black teenager is a budding rocket scientist held back by racial prejudice must have achieved enlightenment.

Indeed, the book is well reported, carefully detailed, and exquisite in its efforts to capture the heroic struggles of black people this century. But frankly, I can't see that it will change much. Lemann may be one of the first liberals to describe lower-class black life as it is: the tawdriness, the casual subjection to drugs, the easy illegitimacies, the almost complete inability to plan or sustain any effort toward future goals. But what took so long? The disintegration has been going on for twenty-five years. Honest journalists and scholars have described it hundreds of times, and millions of people have acknowledged it by moving as far away from black neighborhoods as possible.

Only liberals have stubbornly insisted on seeing things through the prism of their own misconceptions (while maintaining their own comfortable distance as well). Now that one writer is willing to admit the truth, is that such a cause for celebration? Much as Lemann is willing to look at black life as it is, he is not much willing to give up his own

preconceptions. The book's very structure suggests the liberals' first principle: that what happens in Washington is central to every social issue, that everyone's fate lies with the federal government.

The Promised Land is divided into five lengthy chapters, beginning with a portrayal of life in rural Mississippi in the 1930s and '40s. Lemann follows Ruby Daniels, Uless Carter, and several of their friends and offspring as they migrate north in the 1940s and '50s and witness (in some instances embody) the disintegration of the Chicago black community in the 1960s and '70s. The narrative eventually returns to Mississippi, where a few of his subjects find solace.

The opening chapter is the most beautifully realized in the book. The story begins in Clarksdale, Mississippi, a sultry Delta town where blacks make up more than half the population and where the civil rights movement eventually took root. Lemann uses as a central metaphor the mechanized cotton picker, a primitive bit of machinery in-

troduced in the 1940s that doomed the tenant farm. Under tenant farming—the system that replaced, and in many ways perpetuated, nineteenth-century slavery—black families living in isolated wooden shacks would contract with white farmers to raise a crop, then "settle" at the end of the fall harvest. Often as not, the black farmers were informed at the "settle" that they had accumulated unspecified debts and owed the owner money. (White sharecroppers did only marginally better.) Mostly illiterate and perpetually shackled by a strict and brutal system of racial segregation, the tenant farmers remained virtual prisoners to a system that offered them little more than a place to live and a portion of the crop. When Martin Luther King first visited Mississippi in the 1960s, he encountered tenant farmers who had never seen U.S. currency.

As a civil rights worker in Mississippi in 1964, I met a woman who, after telling me her family's story through several generations, concluded: "What I've never been able to understand is this: How come the colored people been working so hard all these years and still got nothing to show for it?" I don't

think I ever completely understood the answer to her question until reading this first chapter of Lemann's book.

In his second chapter, "Chicago," Lemann describes the odyssey of Southern blacks as they migrated to the northern cities—"the promised land." The road was well traveled. At one point in the 1950s, 2,200 Southern blacks would arrive at Chicago's Illinois Central station every week.

The world the former sharecroppers found, although equally segregated, was not chaotic. Several of Lemann's raconteurs report the pride and excitement they felt in discovering thriving black neighborhoods filled with bustling stores and plentiful job opportunities. Men and women who had worked for a dollar a day picking cotton were soon making more than a dollar an hour cleaning offices and working in factories. Certainly there was economic hardship and white prejudice, but there was a camaraderie among blacks that compensated in many ways. Prominent entertainers and legendary sports heroes like Joe Louis lived in the neighborhood and often walked the streets escorted by excited children. (Not for nothing do blacks refer to each other as "brothers" and "sisters.")

The Chicago political machine took this influx in stride. Mayor Richard Daley, although eventually branded a racist, was willing to incorporate blacks into the system. Like all machine politicians, he offered a simple exchange: patronage for votes. Black preachers were put on the payroll for the promise of delivering their congregations for the machine. Daley constructed a vast network of public housing that both kept blacks in their own neighborhoods and concentrated votes, so that the projects often delivered nearly unanimous majorities for the machine candidates.

Daley, who could do nothing if not count heads, saw that the burgeoning black population would have to be brought into the system in the traditional way. When Jesse Jackson first ap-



¹Alfred A. Knopf, \$24.95.

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