

country could have forgotten what it owed the unions, how it could fail to see that the unions had prevented America from becoming the property of the rich and greedy" (p. 60). One can only echo the medieval scholastics: *puerilia sunt haec.*■

## THE OPEN CONSPIRACY

### *The Reluctant Sheriff: The United States After the Cold War*

Richard N. Haass  
Council on Foreign Relations, 1997, 148 pgs.

**Y**ou don't have to be a believer in the conspiracy theory of history to feel suspicious about the provenance of Mr. Haass's book. Its publisher is the Council on Foreign Relations, long familiar to "right-wing extremists" as the center of the foreign policy establishment. The thought of a foreign crisis unmeddled in by the United States is enough to induce palpitations in the heart of a CFR member. Those sympathetic to our traditional policy of noninvolvement will fear the worst, and they will not be disappointed.

Before turning to the substance of our author's argument, I note with interest that he lends support to the alarmism about the CFR of the aforesaid extremists. During

the Cold War, the foreign policy panjandrums painted the Council as an impartial source of enlightenment. Mr. Haass tells a different story: "In the wake of World War II, there were few institutions and few publications devoted to international affairs. The Council on Foreign Relations and its quarterly *Foreign Affairs* were dominant. Three networks and a handful of newspapers shaped elite opinion" (p. 16). Dan Smoot could not have put it more succinctly.

To turn from the CFR to Mr. Haass's main thesis, our author reacted to the end of the Cold War in an unexpected way. The end of worldwide conflict with the Kremlin, with nuclear brinkmanship a constant threat, was to most Americans an occasion for joy. Not so Haass.

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Under conditions of superpower rivalry, the world may have been a dangerous place. But it was regulated: other nations had to conform to the rules, both formal and informal, of the two superpowers: "We have moved from a highly structured world dominated by two or at most a few to a less structured world of

the many. New technologies have emerged and spread in the process transforming political, economic, and military relationships. The effects of the change are anything but uniform.... The result is a world that may well be safer, in that the chances of cataclysmic conflict

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are arguably less, but also a world that is less stable, where smaller but still highly destructive conflicts within, between, and among states are more common than before" (p. 25).

To someone with Mr. Haass's cast of mind, a world not under control generates foreboding. People of his sort do not find appealing the thought that the world is a very big place, too large for the United States to control, even in conjunction with a group of associated lesser powers.

Our author has at least the virtue that his interventionist prescriptions rest on more than an itch to regulate. He directs several arguments against isolationism or "minimalism," which I shall endeavor to assess.

Haass recognizes the force of one key isolationist contention: in a period of

reduced threat, we need not be so anxious as during the Cold War to extend ourselves overseas. "We no longer live in a world in which a rival possesses missiles aimed at us with the capacity to destroy us in an instant. Nor is the United States engaged any longer in a global struggle for influence or advantage" (p. 56). Is this not a time when we can avoid costly commitment abroad? (The thought that "minimalism" ought to have been followed even during the Cold War era is for Haass unworthy of discussion.)

Mr. Haass replies to the isolationist point with straightforward denial. Threats to the United States still abound: "there are still potential problems in the world—crises in the Persian Gulf or northeast Asia, a breakdown of trade, a renewed Russian threat to Europe, a Chinese bid for regional hegemony, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, terrorist attacks, and so on—that could directly and dramatically affect U.S. well-being at home" (p. 56).

Mr. Haass's ability to conjure up potential threats commands our admiration, but I cannot think he has met the isolationist's point. That point, to reiterate, is that a direct threat by a superpower to the United States constitutes a much stronger reason for an interventionist policy than a plethora of potential threats. Why not deal with these latter dangers if and when they arise, instead of engaging in the Herculean task of containing them all at once?

Our author has in part anticipated this response. To the argument "that we can

do little about the state of the world,” he answers: “The problem with this perspective is that it ignores what we can usefully do. U.S. diplomacy alone cannot bring peace to the Middle East, but it can facilitate the process. U.S. arms can deter conflict in the Persian Gulf and the Korean peninsula and protect U.S. interests and restore stability if deterrence fails” (p. 57).

Clearly, Mr. Haass has failed to grasp the full nature of the isolationist contention. To the point that absent a direct threat to the United States, there is insufficient reason to intervene abroad, it is idle to reiterate that the United States *can* intervene, and to good purpose. How does this go any way toward showing that we *should* intervene? Further, it does not follow from the United States’ ability to cope with one crisis that it can cope with all potential crises at once. To imagine otherwise involves a fallacy of composition.

For Haass, we have not yet reached the most important isolationist argument. In my view, he holds, mistakenly, that the “theme most central to the minimalist, or neo-isolationist, perspective...is the economics: the cost of our national security effort—defense, intelligence, assistance, diplomacy, and so on—is one we can ill afford” (p. 57).

I venture to suggest that Mr. Haass’s rejoinder will not carry conviction with most readers of *The Mises Review*. Although he grants that the United States spends a considerable sum, about \$300 billion a year, on national security, he solemnly informs us that it really does

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not matter. “Spending on national security now comes to under 4 percent of GNP” (p. 58). Why should we scruple to spend this; do we not spend an equal amount on Medicare?

Further, “what good would it do if people at home had more money? Many of them [domestic problems] are not the result of lack of resources. It is doubtful that what most ails us at home—crime, illegitimacy, drug use, divorce, racism and the like—would be fixed by further drawing down resources devoted to our presence abroad and shifting them to domestic purposes. It is even possible to argue that in some cases—welfare comes to mind—resources have exacerbated social problems” (p. 59).

Mr. Haass’s last sentence is insightful: spending on welfare programs has indeed worsened the problems it was

designed to end. Unfortunately, he does not carry forward his insight to make the elementary point that suffices to overturn his argument. The goal of a reduction in defense spending is of course not to make funds available to the government for domestic spending, but to enable people to retain more of their own money to spend, save, or invest as they please. This, I fear, is more than is dreamed of by any good member of the CFR.

Our author has yet one more argument against noninterventionism, and this is I think his most substantial. What if failure to intervene now leads to more costly intervention later? "Neglect will prove to be malign" (p. 59). The reluctance of the United States to deter aggression may make attacks more likely; and we may find that when intervention is at last unavoidable, it is more costly than it need have been.

I do not think that there is an *a priori* refutation of this line of reasoning. Perhaps events will happen exactly as Mr. Haass surmises; but what reason is there to think so? Against his conjectures must be set the sure costs of intervention now. And, as Eric Nordlinger has cogently argued in *Isolationism Reconfigured*, does not a firm commitment to nonintervention, known to all nations, make aggression against the United States far less likely? The alleged need to counter aggression wherever it may occur, as urged by our author, is a twice-told tale that does not improve in his revival of it.

I have thought it more useful to discuss Mr. Haass's criticisms of isolationism than

to describe at length his own prescriptions for foreign policy. As will come as no surprise, he is an interventionist; but the United States ought not to act unilaterally. Instead, we should avail ourselves of the help of shifting coalitions, as the crisis at hand may dictate. In pursuit of multilateralism, foreign aid should play an important part. True, some may object that foreign aid is wasteful, "but we are talking about a small amount of money by federal government standards" (p. 110). No doubt. ▀

## SINGLE-ISSUE SCHOLARSHIP

### *The Racial Contract*

Charles W. Mills

Cornell University Press, 1997, 171 pgs.

Charles W. Mills has, by his own estimation, located a crucial gap in Western political and ethical theory from the Enlightenment to Rawls and Nozick. As Mills rightly says, the social contract dominates modern Western thought. But the contract, as described by Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, and Kant, leaves out a crucial component of the way society actually operates.

Readers who have attended to the title of Mr. Mills's book will have no difficulty