

every "what we can learn from Japan" article. More recent analysis points instead to techniques of quality manufacturing and also notes that not all Japanese companies do well. Toyota and Ford have more in common, for instance, than Toyota and Isuzu. And Japan's white-collar workplaces have more to learn from American business than vice versa.

When business people draw the wrong conclusions from international comparisons, they lose money. When scholars do, they lose academic reputation. In both cases, they bear the burden of their mistakes.

Policy makers can also learn from the international scene. But they, too, will make mistakes—no matter how smart or careful or well-meaning they are. And

their mistakes will have far greater consequences, because they are playing with other people's money and other people's lives and because a mistake, once written into law, is hard to correct.

The interventionist ideologues who populate the Clinton administration don't understand their own limitations. In their common conviction that the government must direct the economic choices of the nation, deciding where and how much to invest, they are substituting their monolithic decision making for the experimentation of thousands of businesses. By doing so, they are increasing both the risk and the cost of error. And, judging from the Little Rock conference, there will be errors aplenty. ■

THE RESCUERS

JACOB SULLUM

An Olympic swimmer is walking on a beach when he notices a man who has ventured out too far in the water. Buffeted by waves, he is flailing about, disoriented, calling for help. The only other people in the vicinity are a few children and an old woman.

For George Bush and many supporters of the American intervention in Somalia, the United States is the Olympic swimmer, and Somalia is the drowning man. Because we are uniquely qualified to help, we are morally obligated to do so.

"The people of Somalia...need our help," Bush said when he announced the operation in December. "America must act....Only the United States has the global reach to place a large security force on the ground in such a distant place quickly and efficiently and thus save thousands of innocents from death."

The implicit analogy to bystander intervention is powerful, but it obscures a crucial distinction: The United States is not a person. It is a collection of some 250 million individuals. When the U.S. government acts on their behalf, using the resources of many and risking the

lives of some, it is morally constrained in a way that the Olympic swimmer on the beach is not.

American taxpayers have a right to expect that the money they are compelled to contribute to this nation's defense is used for that purpose. American military personnel have a right to expect that their missions will have something to do with protecting U.S. security, the function they have agreed to serve.

Granted, this leaves much room for debate about what constitutes a threat to U.S. security. But the possibilities are not limitless. At the very least, those who argue for U.S. military intervention have the burden of demonstrating some plausible link to national defense. In the case of Somalia, the interventionists have abandoned any pretense of doing this—without a word of protest from a single member of Congress.

The operation in Somalia expands the range of acceptable grounds for military action. It will no longer be an adequate argument against intervention to note that U.S. security interests are not involved.

This does not mean, as some have

argued, that the United States from now on will have to intervene everywhere people are suffering and dying. Cost-benefit analysis always plays a role in foreign-policy decisions, as it should. It's relatively easy to get food to starving people in Somalia, considerably harder to rescue Bosnians from Serbian aggression. That might be reason enough to intervene in one case but not the other. A future famine caused by civil war in Africa (an all too likely prospect) may threaten fewer lives or present more formidable strategic challenges. If so, the Somalia precedent need not dictate U.S. policy.

On *This Week with David Brinkley*, Tom Wicker rightly warned against "broad-scale policies, where you say you've always got to do this or that or the other thing." But the alternative he offered, an "ad-lib" approach to foreign policy, is at least as dangerous. Without principles, the United States would have no definitive reason to act, but neither would it have a definitive reason to refrain from acting. Ideally, "broad-scale policies" should establish conditions that are necessary but not sufficient for intervention. Such conditions do not eliminate cost-benefit analysis, but they do dictate when that analysis comes into play.

If intervention can be justified by purely "humanitarian" reasons, U.S. leaders will have to analyze costs and benefits more often. This multiplies the possibilities for disastrous error. At the same time, the humanitarian rationale makes detecting error harder because potential critics of intervention don't want to appear cold-hearted. In the current climate of opinion, for example, questioning the intervention in Somalia is tantamount to endorsing mass starvation.

Even Sam Donaldson, who stressed the risks of setting a precedent during discussions on the Brinkley show, could not bring himself to oppose the operation. "It's a noble impulse," he said. "Who can be against it?" ■

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LETTERS

Cutting the Static

Ronald Reagan twice demonstrated the ease with which a political constituency can be built for the principles of a "dynamic" society ("Dynamic Tension," Nov.). Had George Bush stuck to those principles, he would not be retiring.

The problem is finding a way to detoxify a society of government addicts. Consider the North American Free Trade Agreement. One political group says scrap the agreement. Another advocates wage-based "mandate" taxes that will cause more jobs to move to Mexico. A third group says that if you lose *your* job to Mexico, well, that's just a small price to pay for the economic good of the rest of us.

A growing economy doesn't help. Increasing tax revenues are used to get more people addicted to government. This ultimately sabotages the economic expansion. Then we need more government "help" to get us through the "hard" times. Unless a viable political strategy is found to deal with this problem, government will continue to grow until the "static load" collapses our economy, as it did the economy of the Soviet Union.

*Jim Ober
 Baton Rouge, LA*

VIRGINIA POSTREL INVITES us to believe that libertarians are superior because they do not crave a static utopia, achieved by drastic action. But what is a libertarian if not one who craves the utopia of zero government, achieved by abolishing most government agencies?

*Dan Kegel
 Altadena, CA*

VIRGINIA POSTREL STATES that Pat Buchanan "supports cultural stasis." How do you differentiate between "stasis" (mindlessly clinging to the status quo) and *selecting* a given status-quo approach to a

particular situation or problem because it seems to be the best available option?

*John R. Smith
 Tallahassee, FL*

I AM A VETERAN of Pat Buchanan's presidential campaign who registered as a Libertarian last May. While the editors of REASON like to have fun with Mr. Buchanan, a few words need to be said on his behalf.

Pat Buchanan was an outspoken opponent of many programs signed into law by President Bush. As a candidate, his proposals included abolishing racial hiring quotas, eliminating the capital-gains tax for people with incomes under \$50,000, and allowing parents to use tuition vouchers at religious schools.

In foreign affairs, he sought to end foreign aid, to call home many of our overseas troops, and to just say no to the New World Order. While his protectionist leanings were misguided, he favored repealing many regulations that have crippled American industry.

Moreover, Pat Buchanan does not exaggerate when he speaks of a "religious war" in America. Many of today's liberals are busy eradicating Christianity from every aspect of American life. We may not be able to silence the Hollywood trendoids, but we can press for greater emphasis on the Free Exercise Clause of the First Amendment.

*Douglas F. Newman
 Tempe, AZ*

Ms. Postrel replies: Mr. Kegel's letter contains several misunderstandings. First, I believe that a dynamic society requires a relatively hands-off government if social and economic experiments are to proceed and to succeed or fail on their merits. But I do not equate the dynamic vision with libertarianism. Some people who share a vision of social and economic life as a continuing process of discovery support a substantially larger