

run by conservative but relatively moderate people, no Nazis and no Communists—a vigorous Germany, full of energy and confidence, able to play a part again in the balancing-off of Russian power in Europe, in many ways it would not sound so bad.” In other words, U.S. intervention in World War I, undertaken with the best of intentions, had been an exceedingly costly mistake. My point exactly.

Boot also criticizes me for having written, shortly after Sept. 11, “the barbarism of recent American foreign policy was bound to lead to a terrorist catastrophe on American soil.” See how neoconservatism so easily degenerates into moral relativism. Is American foreign policy *ipso facto* admirable and beyond criticism simply because it is American? For that matter, why am I permitted to criticize our country’s abortion policy in no uncertain terms and be a decent citizen in good standing but not American foreign policy? Older conservatives, informed by the just-war tradition and more sensitive to the idea of absolute moral standards than to the amoralism of Machiavelli, were capable of rendering critical judgments on their own governments. Richard Weaver, for instance, condemned the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, as did Felix Morley, one of the founders of *Human Events*.

Given that Boot appears to have no serious gripe with much of anything in the mainstream narrative of American history—indeed, perhaps he should write *The Politically Correct Guide to American History*—it’s not surprising that he would become so hysterical at the sight of a book that really does take issue with that narrative. Since in my judgment Max Boot embodies everything that is wrong with modern conservatism, his opposition is about the best endorsement I could have asked for. ■

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[*The Neocon Reader*, Irwin Stelzer, ed., Grove Press, 328 pages]

## The Genius of Neoconservatism

By David Gordon

IRWIN STELZER BEGINS this useful collection with a warning: it is wrong to think that all neoconservatives share a fixed set of beliefs. “There is no such thing as a neoconservative ‘movement,’ in the dictionary definition of ‘a body of persons with a common object.’” Nevertheless, he acknowledges, there is a neoconservative “tendency” or “persuasion.” Though neoconservatives differ among themselves—Charles Krauthammer, for example, views the chances of worldwide democratic revolution much more skeptically than does Joshua Muravchik—their ideas have become influential in American foreign and domestic policy.

Why is this so? Stelzer and other contributors have a simple explanation. The neoconservatives have ideas of outstanding merit. And they defend these ideas with unmatched acuity: is it any wonder, then, that President Bush and Condoleezza Rice hasten to embrace their wisdom? As Max Boot tells us, “Neocons have been relatively influential because of the strength of their arguments, not their connections.”

Given this endorsement by a thinker so eminent as Max Boot, we can hardly wait: what are these new and wonderful ideas? Let us turn first to foreign policy, since the war to make Iraq safe for democracy is principally responsible for the vast public attention now devoted to neoconservatism. Like Marx in the *Communist Manifesto*, the neoconservatives “disdain to conceal their views and aims.” They begin from an undoubted fact: America is the most powerful nation in the world. We must use this power, not only to counter any threats directed against us, but also to

act pre-emptively against even the slightest possibility of a threat from a foreign power.

We must here avoid a mistake. We must not conceive of threats in an overly narrow fashion. It is not only the possibility of a threat to America that cries out for pre-emptive action; any threat anywhere in the world may require a violent American response. William Kristol and Robert Kagan say that were America to follow the policy they desire, “It would act as if instability in important regions of the world, and the flouting of civilized rules of conduct in those regions, are threats that affect us with almost the same immediacy as if they were occurring on our doorstep.... In Europe, in Asia, and in the Middle East, the message we should be sending to potential foes is: ‘Don’t even think about it.’” In an article not reprinted here, Kristol and Kagan responded to John Quincy Adams’s claim that “America goes not abroad in search of monsters to destroy” with a remark of stunning brilliance: “why not?”

In particular, “rogue states,” such as Iran and Syria, might give atomic or biological weapons to terrorist groups. To counter this threat, the solution, as the neoconservatives see it, is obvious. We must overthrow the governments of these nefarious states: if we do so, we may breathe more easily, at least until the next possibility of a threat arises. Fortunately, this policy need not involve us in constant wars: it may suffice that we finance opposition groups, whose policies are more to our liking, within these states. Why start a war when a little subversion will do the trick? We can always bring out the big guns later.

As befits thinkers of acute intellect, the neoconservatives have more on offer than frightened endeavors to wipe out dangers before they become manifest. They hold before us a high ideal: America must bring the blessings of democracy to the world. To assume that some peoples are unsuited to our form of government is simply racist and condescending.

If one objects that this is warmed-over Wilsonianism, our thinkers stand ready with a pre-emptive response: "Not at all! Wilson had faith in international organizations, but we are not so foolish. Much better a guided missile or a 'smart bomb' to spread democracy than a resolution of the League of Nations." Max Boot puts the point well: "The neocons have scant regard for Wilson himself, whom they regard as hopelessly naïve. Instead they are 'hard Wilsonians', who place their faith not in pieces of paper, but in power, specifically U.S. power."

The mighty minds responsible for this concoction have overlooked a vital point. Is not foreign policy properly subject to the restraints of morality and international law? By what right does any country, however powerful, pre-

Iraqi civilians have died in massive numbers; every day brings news of American soldiers killed in bombing attacks; the war has cost billions of dollars; and policies of torture by American forces throw an ironic light on President Bush's repeated statements that we are bringing the blessings of liberty to the people of Iraq. Would it not be better, strictly from the point of view of defense itself, to adopt a less expansive view of what must be done to preserve America's security? Why not, for example, confine ourselves to countering likely threats rather than any possible threats?

Stelzer has had the good sense to include an essay by George Will that undermines the rationale for the idealistic side of neoconservative foreign policy, the attempt to impose democracy on all

sense of the word; it attains completion, only in the final victory of the new society on our entire planet." Likewise mistaken and risible are Adam Wolfson's efforts to find an antecedent for neoconservative foreign policy in John Locke's call for resistance to tyranny in his *Second Treatise*. Can he be unaware that Locke was writing about the conditions of political allegiance, not about foreign policy?

Wolfson is on stronger ground when he reminds us that neoconservatives do not confine their attention to foreign affairs. The neoconservative godfather, Irving Kristol, makes clear that their domestic agenda has little to recommend it. Kristol informs us that we must not worry about excessive government spending: "we should figure out what we want before we calculate what we can afford, not the reverse, which is the normal conservative disposition."

Kristol and company do not wish to finance bloated government expenditures with higher taxes; they rightly fear the malign effects of tax increases on incentives to productivity. Instead, deficits are the order of the day. Will not high government spending, though, crowd out private investment and inhibit economic growth? Robert Bartley appeals to the theory of Ricardian equivalence, as developed by Robert Barro, to defend deficits. Deficits, he tells us, "are in their economic effect indistinguishable from taxes." Perhaps so, but this hardly shows that worrying about deficits is foolish. It is not a good argument for the view that cyanide is not poisonous to point out that it is no worse than arsenic.

The neoconservatives' support for deficits rests on a benign view of big government. Friedrich Hayek's famous warning in *The Road to Serfdom* that economic planning can lead to totalitarianism does not commend itself to our authors. "Where libertarians worry that big government is liable to stamp out nearly all personal liberty," Adam Wolfson remarks, "neoconservatives see things quite differently. In their view, democracies tend to encourage the pur-

#### KRISTOL INFORMS US WE MUST NOT WORRY ABOUT GOVERNMENT SPENDING.

sume to subvert or forcibly overturn governments not to its liking? One would expect that supporters of policies so much at variance with traditional diplomatic practice would have something to say about the ethics of their revolutionary approach, but this volume leaves the topic unmentioned.

No doubt the neoconservatives will respond to this objection by invoking the need for defense. Can alleged dictates of morality or international law be invoked to hobble our efforts to defend ourselves? Surely, as German Chancellor Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg said when justifying the invasion of Belgium in 1914, "Necessity knows no law!"

As the case just mentioned aptly shows, appeals to the supposed necessity of immoral action often prove to be miserable failures by their own standards. Bethmann's policy did not preserve his nation but rather contributed essentially to a war that cost millions of lives and led to the fall of the dynasty it was his duty to defend. In like fashion, the neoconservative view that the bare possibility Saddam Hussein might threaten us with weapons of mass destruction justified a war to topple his regime has led to disaster.

and sundry. Will makes a simple but devastating point: "Iraq lacks a Washington, a Madison, a Marshall—and it lacks the astonishingly rich social and cultural soil from which such people sprout.... So, Iraq in its quest for democracy lacks only—only!—what America then had: an existing democratic culture."

The radical policy of forcing recalcitrant nations to be free has put some critics—one thinks in this connection of Claes Ryn's brilliant *America the Virtuous*—in mind of Trotskyite schemes of world revolution. Neoconservative rejoinders to this charge are singularly weak. Joshua Muravchik maintains that critics have misunderstood Trotsky's doctrine of "permanent revolution." Trotsky meant by this "an immediate seizure of power in hopes of somehow telescoping the bourgeois and socialist revolutions into one seamless sequence." Permanent revolution, Muravchik alleges, does not mean a movement to spread socialism from one country to another.

In point of fact, it is Muravchik who is in error. Trotsky made clear in his 1930 work *The Permanent Revolution*, "the socialist revolution becomes a permanent revolution in a newer and broader

suit of private interests to the neglect of all else, and thus it is the general welfare that is more likely to wither. The Hayekian analysis of big government has always seemed to the neoconservative overly simplistic as well as somewhat naïve.”

No argument is offered to refute Hayek; what would one expect from a group that regards Irving Kristol, an intellectual journalist, as a more profound analyst of capitalism than one of the most distinguished economists and social philosophers of the 20th century? The neoconservatives fall far short of the intellectual virtues that they shamelessly ascribe to themselves, and our country is much the worse for their influence. ■

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*[The Secret Wars of Judi Bari: A Car Bomb, the Fight for the Redwoods, and the End of Earth First!, Kate Coleman, Encounter Books, 261 pages]*

## The Red and the Green

By Marian Kester Coombs

BERKELEY INVESTIGATIVE journalist Kate Coleman has tackled such a madly fascinating subject that the Left has got to be kicking itself for failing to nip in first. Susan Faludi is slated to produce her own version of the Judi Bari story but not for another year. In the meantime, Coleman’s book reverberates around the country, rekindling old feuds and provoking an entire political generation to re-examine the fates of some of its own.

Judith Beatrice Bari was born in 1949 to closet-Communist parents who were themselves the red-diaper babies of immigrants from the Old World. (Her elder sister, departing somewhat from

the family tradition, is the first-rate *New York Times* science writer and author Gina Kolata.) In her brief, high-testosterone life, Bari was an antiwar activist, college dropout, brown belt in karate, self-taught carpenter, divorced mother of two, and fiddle-playing Maoist labor organizer turned Wobbly turned Earth First! eco-heroine. Mysteriously carbombed in 1990, she survived only to succumb seven years later to a cancer even more aggressive than she was.

The book rests issues of immense consequence on the shoulders of this tiny woman—like the Rodgers and Hammerstein song, “only 60 inches high/Every inch is packed with dynamite”—and she proves tough enough to bear them. Born a leader and spoiling for a fight, Bari seems also to have been born to shine in tense situations that demanded immediate action. No word-mincing theoretician, she believed in the propaganda of the deed. Hers was a life of nonstop provocation, which exhilarated but endangered her (and others) as well.

Bari was one of those radicals who vault beyond the Marxist demand for “social justice” to insist on justice for “the earth.” Modernity’s totalization of the planet makes it possible to think of mankind as a thing in itself—either a part of or outside of nature, depending on how one conceives of nature—and to judge our relative worthiness as a species in ways that would never have occurred to earlier generations. The peculiar loathing that the French reserve for the Germans, that Armenians reserve for Turks, and Muslims for infidels can now be applied to the entire human race on behalf of its nonhuman “victims.” Some have called this self-loathing the senile phase of mankind.

In the Pacific old-growth-forest wars, the contradiction at whose heart Judi Bari inserted herself was loggers’ job security and right to work versus the claims of “deep ecology”—the right of sequoias and spotted owls to live unmolested by man. Bari tried to synthesize these antitheses by evoking the old Industrial Workers of the World (IWW or “Wobblies”) ideal of green trade unionism, with little success.

Earth First! meant just that: all human priorities were to be considered last. In addition, her charge that lumber-company policies were driven by that great evil “profitability” ignored the well-known reality that socialism has been no guarantor of wilderness preservation either—quite the contrary.

Earth First! under Bari took the long-simmering, slow-acting contraries of the north woods and accelerated them to a sudden, violent head. Bari and her allies brought an alien sensibility not only to the small logging communities of Mendocino and Humboldt counties but to Earth First! itself, whose founders and idols like Dave Foreman and Edward Abbey liked to call themselves “Red-necks for Wilderness” and cared as little for egalitarian class-war ideology as Bari and company cared for EF’s “sexist,” “nativist” indifference to the proletariat.

Among the riches of *Secret Wars* is its confirmation that in terms of eccentrics, fabled England has nothing on the U.S. of A. Coleman’s evocation of California’s North Coast as a truly Wild West of lesbian collectives, “tree-huggers,” pot-heads dwelling in geodesic domes, radicals on the lam, organic-gardening goddesses, troglodytic Vietnam vets, and every other kind of dreamer, dooper, and dissenter makes you hug yourself with delight at all the wondrous ways of being that freedom affords. What a great country! With Voltaire, one is moved once more to affirm the fervent oath defending to the death others’ right to differ.

The book also shows, rather than preaches, that such true alternatives can only persist in an environment of extreme *laissez faire*, both in social attitudes and in political practice. Once self-righteous intolerance, dogmatism, and the chance to enrich or empower oneself through government arise, the fun is over.

Coleman’s title and subtitle imply that after she was bombed, Bari increasingly came to war in secret against that all-purpose bogeyman “the FBI” and her own ex-husband, Mike Sweeney, to the detriment of her fight to save endangered old-growth redwoods, and that as a result she is at least in part responsible