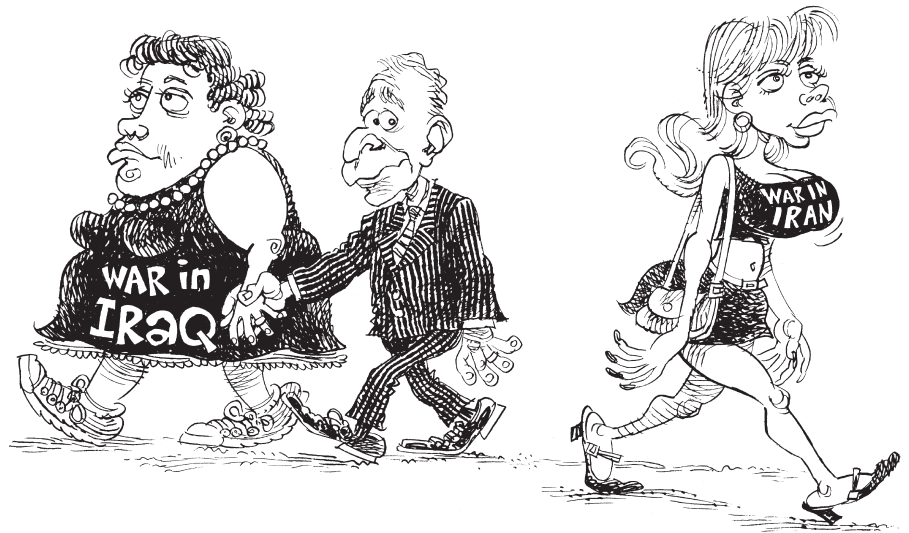


[MEDIA]

AN AMERICAN INTEREST

At some point during their socialization process, prominent Americans learn that it is wiser not to discuss the Israel lobby at all, and certainly not at a length. Occasionally a retiring senator or general will blurt out that passionate attachment to one country in the Middle East harms America's broader national interest; ritualistic expressions of shock and horror follow, and the luminary meekly apologizes for being misunderstood, his reputation no better for the enterprise.

Perhaps because the U.S. may be on the verge of war against the entire Arab world, plus Iran—and Israeli leaders are urging Washington to Attack! Attack!—there appears a greater urgency to question what is going on. John Mearsheimer, a leading international relations scholar at the University of Chicago, and Stephen Walt, the dean of the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard, have authored a comprehensive and uncompromising analysis of the Israel lobby in *The London Review of Books*. The authors write: “For the past several decades, and especially since the Six-Day War in 1967, the centerpiece of US Middle Eastern policy has been its relationship with Israel. The combination of unwavering support for Israel and the related effort to spread ‘democracy’ throughout the region has inflamed Arab and Islamic opinion and jeopardised not only US security but that of much of the rest of the world. This situation has no equal in American political history. Why has the US been willing to set aside its own security and that of many of its allies in order to advance the interests of another state? One might assume that the bond between the two countries was based on shared strategic interests or compelling moral imperatives, but neither explanation can account for the remarkable level of material and diplomatic support the US provides.”



The essay continues for 42 pages, documenting the exceptional level of support the U.S. gives Israel, and the many instances in which the Jewish state has hardly behaved like an ally, and then analyzes the interlocking institutions that make up “the Lobby” that guarantees American support. There are surely points to quibble with here and there, but the overall impact of the document is extraordinary and all the more important coming from academics of considerable eminence.

The authors rightly claim that Israel is a legitimate state, deserving of American backing. Their quarrel is with the degree of that support. The extent to which America caters to Israel's wishes, at the expense of its own, is remarkable and worthy of explanation.

The reaction has been severe—and may heat up further. Major donors have threatened Harvard. The *New York Sun* contacted David Duke and got him to “endorse” the essay in order to smear Mearsheimer and Walt without actually having to engage their facts and argument. The *Wall Street Journal* ran a column maligning the piece, all the while claiming it would attract only ridicule. The ADL's Abe Foxman is waiting to see if the essay garners more attention in the mainstream media. Warns Foxman, “we will have to attack it with greater vigor.”

At this moment it seems possible that Mearsheimer and Walt will ignite a debate that should have been taken place years ago—one that occurs behind closed doors in Washington all the time but hardly ever in public. If Mearsheimer and Walt succeed in dragging this topic into the open, where Americans can debate it freely and without fear, they will have performed a singular public service, a deed of truly historic importance.

[IMMIGRATION]

SENATE OPENS DOOR

With the polls showing overwhelming public support for tighter immigration control, nothing would seem more calculated to turn Middle America against the open-borders crowd than the sight of hundreds of thousands of illegal aliens angrily asserting their “right” to remain in this country. Protests against the strong enforcement bill passed by the House in December brought out 500,000 in Los Angeles alone. While there were more American flags on display than at the anti-Proposition 187 demonstrations of the '90s—on the advice of organizers, no doubt—all the Mexican flag-waving seems likely to generate an anti-illegal backlash.

Unless you are a member of the Senate Judiciary Committee, that is. They eagerly complied with the illegals'

demands by gutting enforcement provisions and prying the borders open even further.

The language regarding aiding undocumented migrants was diluted in response to canards about soup-kitchen workers being hauled into jail for giving bread to illegals. An amendment was adopted making illegal presence a misdemeanor. And the committee voted 12 to 6 for an amnesty grab-bag. Included in the Senate legislation: a plan to give illegals a path to citizenship, a new agricultural temporary-worker program, an increase in visa caps for alien nurses, and an additional 400,000 guest workers per year.

As the Center for Immigration Studies' Mark Krikorian pointed out, in the House, Republicans united behind enforcement while the Democrats divided; in the Senate, the Democrats were unanimously for amnesty while Republicans split. But there was a more important difference—the congressmen listened to the American people, while the senators capitulated to the mob.

[OCCUPATION]

FACE IN THE CROWD

Republicans secure in their partisan cocoons continue to maintain that Iraq is transforming into a democratic Disneyland. Those less vested in the vindication of the Bush Doctrine note the rising chaos, though after three years of grim news it's easy to become anesthetized to the carnage that still marks daily life.

But a recent *New York Times* story caught our attention. It told of roaming Shi'ite death squads, taking vengeance on their Sunni neighbors with impunity. "The period from March 7 to March 21 was typically brutal," Jeffrey Gettleman reported from Baghdad. "At least 191 bodies, many mutilated, surfaced in garbage bins, drainage ditches, minibuses and pickup trucks." But it wasn't the evidence of a deepening Shi'ite-

Sunni divide or the senseless of the violence that had us recalling the piece days later. It was the story of one man, Mohannad al-Azawi.

Mr. Azawi, 27, ran a pet shop in southern Baghdad and lived with his parents. He wasn't religious and didn't follow the news. His passion was his birds: nightingales were his favorite. He was feeding them on what seemed a usual March morning when three carloads of gunmen pulled up to his store and dragged him out. Azawi's body was found the next day—bound, tortured with an electric drill, and shot.

From far away, it's easy to recite the language of liberation. But on the mean streets, the results of our policies aren't always so charitable. Next time a man in Washington speaks of cakewalks and crowds throwing flowers, we would do better to think of nightingales and power tools and account in advance for the forces our benevolence may unleash.

[CULTURE]

BANNING THE BUNNY

When a St. Paul City Council secretary arranged a stuffed bunny and a few pastel eggs into an Easter display, proselytizing city hall was probably the last thing on her mind. But the city's human rights director decreed that the decorations come down because apparently rabbits are now Christian symbols. Or perhaps the Kwanzaa crowd needs time to invent a parallel spring festival so that equivalent kitsch can be added to make the display suitably multicultural.

No citizen had complained, but according to council president Kathy Lantry, "As a government we have a different responsibility about advancing the cause of religion, which we are not going to do." That coloring eggs constitutes an act of worship will come as a shock to countless retailers, but St. Paul has a bigger problem: they're going to need to rename their city. ■

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Conservative Crack-Up

Is George W. Bush a conservative? In the title of his book, *Impostor*, Bruce Bartlett sums up his view of the claim that George Bush is the great conservative of the

Baby Boomer generation. In *Rebel-in-Chief*, Fred Barnes contends that Bush is redefining conservatism and has, in his brilliance and boldness, often surpassed the gold standard, Ronald Reagan.

At the heart of the clash between the authors lie colliding views of what constitutes conservatism in 2006.

What does it mean to be a conservative? And if George Bush has governed as one, how do we explain his collapsing support, when the economy is growing at 4 percent and the Dow is back over 11,000? Is 60 percent of the nation rejecting conservatism? Or just George Bush?

Consider three issues on which conservatives yet remain united: judges, taxes, and sovereignty.

In nominating judges who reject the activism of the Warren Court and its progeny, Bush has a record superior to that of any president in modern times. Justices Roberts and Alito put him within one justice of succeeding where his predecessors since Ike have foundered or fallen short.

On taxes, Bush peeled back marginal rates and rolled back U.S. revenues below 17 percent of GDP.

On sovereignty, Bush's rejection of the Kyoto treaty on global warming and his refusal to submit U.S. armed forces to the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court have the backing of conservatives and also the nation.

On these three crucial issues, where the Right remains united and Bush has delivered, he seems to have succeeded with the country.

It is on four issues where no conservative consensus exists, and where populists are in open rebellion, that the old Reagan coalition has shattered: trade, immigration, foreign policy, and Big Government.

Bush's failure to veto a single bill, the soaring sums for social spending, the deficits of 3-4 percent of GDP in good times, have demoralized pay-as-you-go Republicans. The question for the Right is: are we still fiscal conservatives? Do deficits matter? Is a balanced budget in a growing economy the only course consistent with political principle?

Conservatives are split also on free trade and globalism. Always have been. In 1962, the diehards who opposed JFK's Trade Expansion Act were named Thurmond, Goldwater, and Prescott Bush.

But in Middle America, the loss of three million manufacturing jobs, a trade deficit that in January crossed the \$820 billion mark, the impending death of GM and Ford, the Wal-Martization of working America are sending the Reagan Democrats packing. Had Kerry been less of a wind-surfer and more of a populist, he could have ripped Ohio and the presidency away from Bush on the jobs and trade issue.

On immigration, there is no Middle American constituency for amnesty or bringing guest workers in to take jobs Americans cannot accept at the pay offered and still support their families. The *Wall Street Journal* may babble on about open borders and globalization, but to Americans who seek to conserve the country they grew up in, this is the

stuff of national sellout.

It is, of course, Iraq, and the growing despair over the lives lost, the soldiers wounded and maimed, the absence of an Iraqi government to take control that has taken a toll on Bush. If the Mexican War was "Jimmy Polk's War" and World War I was "Wilson's War," Iraq is surely Bush's war. Upon its outcome hangs his legacy.

Yet no matter that outcome, the day of the interventionist appears to be over. Whatever we do to or about Iran, years will pass before this country marshals another large army and sends it into some strange and hostile land to establish "democracy."

Thus, the GOP and the conservative coalition at its heart are as irreconcilably divided over many Bush policies as is the nation.

Is immigration too high? Should illegal aliens be given amnesty? Do we really need guest workers? Is a border fence essential to our security and survival as one nation and people?

Do these mammoth trade deficits matter? Is outsourcing good for us? Should we pursue the Bush democracy crusade? Is Bush's intervention in Iraq a model for America or the kind of historic mistake America must never again make?

The crisis for conservatives is that while there is no consensus, there is also no debate. John McCain, the likely successor as party leader, is as committed to the Bush policies as Bush himself. And his rivals seem to echo McCain.

What is the alternative the nation is likely to be offered by the Democrats? Hillary, who supports free trade, open borders, amnesty, the war in Iraq, etc.

Question: Is the future decided no matter what the people want? Have the establishment and corporate money killed politics? ■