

rian William Appleman Williams's landmark 1959 study, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*, took apart the "legend" of interwar isolationism in great detail and laid the foundation for revisionist Cold War historiography as now practiced by libertarians, anti-interventionist conservatives, and radicals alike. (Williams, as a man of the Left, is surely one of those anti-American ideologues that the *Washington Times* warned us about—that Williams was also an Annapolis graduate twice wounded in the Pacific theater should not get in the way of a good smear.)

In a splendid article published earlier this year in *Foreign Policy Analysis*, political scientist Bear F. Braumoeller refutes "The Myth of American Isolation" all over again for a new century, with special attention to the 1930s. Braumoeller helpfully adduces a few examples of what real geopolitical isolation looks like: Tokugawa Japan, Cold War Albania, and contemporary North Korea.

Today, with American bases spread out over a hundred nations, the possibility of our metamorphosing into a hermit kingdom is not even farfetched. Yet the deeply ingrained dichotomy between open-ended global warfare and autarkic solitude endures, with even the mildest proposals for retrenchment or partial demilitarization evoking new scaremongering. Suggest, for instance, that Iran's joining India, Pakistan, and Israel as a nuclear power is not a national-security threat, and even well-educated Americans, the kind who have traveled to other countries, are liable to respond that "we can't just retreat within our borders."

All myths survive for a reason, and the longevity of this one is easy enough to figure. As Bacevich explains, "Isolationism survives in contemporary American political discourse because it retains utility as a cheap device employed to impose discipline. Think of it as akin to red-baiting—conjuring up

bogus fears to enforce conformity in the realm of foreign policy."

Will our elites ever unlearn this cherished campfire frightener? As William Appleman Williams wrote in 1959, this myth "not only deforms the history of the decade from 1919 to 1930, but it also twists the story of American entry into World War II and warps the record of the cold war." Fifty years on, our foreign-policy discourse is choked with the same

spurious folklore, and we should not be surprised if Obama starts making noises about imaginary isolationists to justify his expansive vision of the U.S. military's mission. With American grand strategy badly in need of recalibration, it is long past time to get rid of the ridiculous myth of isolationism. ■

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## Shock and Waugh

The most anarchic writer of our age was a man of the Old Right.

By Neil Clark

*Thank you for your letter. Would it give you comfort if I suggest you call yourself the Official Auberon Waugh Appreciation Society rather than the Unofficial Auberon Waugh Appreciation Society? I know of no rivals.*

*Of course I am trying to get Blair indicted for war crimes. It will take a bit of time and I fear I have rather squabbled with the Crown Prosecution Service over the years, but we must always hope for the best.*

*Yours sincerely,*

*Auberon Waugh  
Combe Florey, Somerset*

A COPY OF THE FAX that my friend Stuart Carr and I received from the late Auberon Waugh on June 6, 1999 is among my most treasured possessions. As two antiwar paleo-leftists living in Budapest, we had been appalled at Britain's leading role in the bombing of neighboring Yugoslavia. Reading the British papers at that time was depressing—they were full of NATO propaganda about alleged Ser-

bian atrocities; how Slobodan Milosevic, the Yugoslav President, was the new Hitler; and why the war on one of Europe's most Anglophile nations was such a good thing. But one voice stood out against the legion of bloodthirsty laptop bombardiers. It belonged not to a leftist but to a man described as the most reactionary conservative of his age.

Auberon Waugh hated war. He loathed the pomposity of Western politicians who thought they had a divine right to go around the world intervening in the affairs of sovereign states. Lots of people are calling for the arrest of Tony Blair for war crimes in 2010, but very few were doing so in 1999, when Waugh was. "The charge against Tony Blair is not so much that he took a very stupid decision ... or even that his high moral pose may have been a front for ordinary self-importance and power mania," Waugh wrote in the *Sunday Telegraph*. "The reason that he must be arrested and brought to trial for war crimes is that we cannot allow this sort of thing to happen again. We cannot accept that the U.S., supported by any

group of countries, may bomb any nation whose domestic policies it finds objectionable. Such a system would only work if the President of the United States were God, which he obviously isn't and never has been."

Sadly, Waugh did not succeed in his attempt to have the "twerpish" Blair arrested. Just 18 months after he penned his article, Bron was dead at the age of 61. No one else took up the task of trying to hold Blair to account, with the result that four years later the British Prime Minister did it all again—as Waugh had predicted—this time in Iraq, with even more bloody consequences than in Yugoslavia.

Much like his father, the novelist Evelyn Waugh, Bron was dismissed by his liberal-left critics as an flippant eccentric whose Old Right opinions were of no account in the Brave New World of late 20th-century Britain. Yet Auberon Waugh's work—laugh-out-loud funny as most of it is—was far more profound and prescient than most supposedly serious writers of the time. Ferdinand Mount called him "the prophet of a generation." Rereading his articles and columns, one is struck by just how far ahead of the game Waugh was. On foreign affairs, he was truly in a class of his own.

"How can any intelligent person be expected to believe that a country of ... mostly impoverished desert dwellers, poses a threat to world peace?" he wrote of Iraq in 1998, five years before the neocon WMD hoax went into overdrive.

During the first Gulf War in 1991, Waugh was almost alone in challenging the belief that Saddam Hussein's regime, by virtue of being a dictatorship, lacked popular support. "For the purposes of this war, we were assured that Saddam Hussein ruled by terror and was detested by all his people. Yet we see him cheered by huge crowds with every sign of genuine enthusiasm wherever he goes in Iraq. How are we expected to know which are the propaganda dupes,

the Iraqis or us?"

In 1999, while the vast majority of Western political commentators fell into line and regurgitated the Clinton-Blair line that the Serbs were the new Nazis and needed a good dose of humanitarian bombing, Waugh defiantly claimed that Serbian crimes had been "deliberately exaggerated"—which, of course, they had been.

Waugh got it right more often than the more serious-minded members of the fourth estate because he acted on the premise that politicians are inveterate liars, especially when they try to drum up support for military interventions.

He rejected the notion that Western leaders—because they had nice smiles and wore nice suits and had come to power through democratic elections—were necessarily more virtuous than the heads of other nations. "The main trouble with our limited democracy is the scope it gives to the power maniacs in society to impose their bossy urges and fatuous opinions," he wrote. "It may be lovely for bossy people who like deciding how the rest of us should live, but it is hell for those at the receiving end."

The basic problem, according to Waugh, was that politics attracts all the wrong people. "Politics is for social and emotional misfits. The purpose of politics is to help them overcome their feelings of inferiority and compensate for their personal inadequacies in the pursuit of power." By contrast, the people who would make the best leaders have no interest in public office—they are far too nice and modest to think they should have authority over others.

Although strongly opposed to what he labeled "the socialism," Waugh was no fan of modern globalized capitalism either, holding that it led to a world of "noise, smell, dirt and accompanying moral pollution." He had a soft spot for sincere and sweet-natured communists like his friend Paul Foot, a leading light

with the Socialist Workers Party. "For those who find it hard to believe how anyone can claim to believe in workers power without being a knave or a rogue, I produce Footie as my first exhibit. He is clever and funny and kind. Obviously there is a screw loose somewhere, but we all have our oddities." When the left-wing magazine *LM* (formerly *Living Marxism*) was threatened by a lawsuit brought by the media giant ITN, Waugh rallied to the journal's defense.

Waugh's basic political creed was that Britain and the world would be a lot happier if everyone minded their own business. His son Alexander writes that the only time he can ever recall his father being rude to anybody was when a "whining American lady with blue-rinse hair" in the Doge's Palace, Venice berated him for walking the wrong way down a passage between two galleries. "Go away you ugly old tart" was Waugh's reply, which earned him instant hero status in his son's eyes.

Waugh's pen could be cruel, but more often than not his targets earned their treatment. He remorselessly lampooned the bossy, the boring, and the pretentious. "Anyone who claims to understand who is fighting whom in Bosnia, or why, should be exposed immediately as a posturing braggart," he declared. When the model Jerry Hall, a judge for the literary Whitbread Prize, announced herself a devotee of the works of James Joyce, Waugh sprang into action. "*Ulysses*, in which a single character, Leopold Bloom, wanders round Dublin for a day, was possibly the worst idea for a novel that anybody ever had, but it has been seized upon by generations of insecure students and academics to demonstrate their intellectual superiority. ... The danger of dumbing down is equally balanced by the danger of dumbing up. Jerry Hall would appear to represent the second danger."

Always the contrarian, Waugh took great delight in ridiculing the latest pop-

ular fads and fashions. He rubbished claims that AIDS posed a huge threat to Western heterosexuals or that passive smoking could seriously damage one's health.

He railed against drunk-driving laws—"Only three percent of drivers in accidents involving injury or death give positive breath tests. A case can be made for saying it is more dangerous to drive without having had any alcohol at all"—and at politicians lecturing us on how we should live our lives.

Waugh had the traditionalist's hatred of modernity in all its forms. "He shared his father's distaste for modern art, which he considered to be largely fraudulent, modern architecture, which he relentlessly attacked, and modern politics," observed the novelist A.N. Wilson. He was no great fan of the modern Conservative Party either: "the new Conservatives are a small minority of the electorate, odious to everyone except themselves. Like most traditional conservatives, I will have nothing to do with them. If [William] Hague ever comes to power, I will go and live in Bergerac."

He reveled in his ignorance of popular culture. "For more than 10 years I have been reading about Rod Stewart's marital and amorous adventures in the tabloid press with great interest. This week it suddenly occurred to me that I did not know whether Stewart is a racing car driver, a footballer, a radio comedian or a television soap actor. On Thursday, for reasons which I cannot now remember, I decided to inquire. I was told he is a pop singer."

Vituperative in print, in private Waugh was a genial and kindly man. He listened attentively to others and never sought to dominate a conversation. "People were terrified of meeting my father," Alexander Waugh recalls. "They imagined him to be sharp, aggressive and impatient of other people's opinions, but he was none of those things."

James Fergusson remembers an occasion when Waugh had to deal with a drunken and boorish speaker at a lunch of the Royal Society of Literature. Despite being patronized by the man, Waugh was "civility personified" and later on in the evening, "without an unkind word," steered "the wretch" into a taxi.

If Waugh the traditional conservative was out of step with the times in left-leaning 1970s Britain, he was even more of a fish out of water in the shallow, money-obsessed 1980s. In one of the most poignant passages in his autobiography *Will This Do?* he recalls attending his last *Spectator* party in the summer of 1989.

I was asked to dinner afterwards but found myself sitting next to some young persons on the business and advertising side who not only did not recognise me but had no idea, when I told them who I was, that I was a journalist and contributor to the magazine. They were perfectly polite and we had a good conversation about their career prospects, which was the only thing which appeared to interest them.

Waugh entered the 21st century in failing health, and his death on Jan. 16, 2001 was no surprise to friends and family. But how very sad and unfortunate that he died at the start of a decade when we required his brand of High Tory skepticism more than ever.

In 2002 and 2003, we desperately needed him to have been around to poke fun at scare stories about Iraq's nonexistent weapons of mass destruction. He would have been equally scathing about the War on Terror and the way our governments were deliberately hyping the terror threat in order to increase their control over us. If Waugh were alive today, I'm sure he'd be mocking the latest outlandish neocon conspiracy theory—namely that the Islamic Republic of Iran is rapidly developing

nuclear weapons and poses a threat to the peace and security of the world. And he'd be appalled at the way that Britons, who never surrendered to the Nazis, tamely allowed their bossy-boots government to pass one of the most draconian bans on smoking in public places in the world.

When leading journalists die, it's routine to claim that they were "irreplaceable." But Bron Waugh, the most anarchic writer of his generation, truly was irreplaceable, as Charles Moore, his editor at the *Daily Telegraph*, conceded, and his death was good news only for the power-hungry, warmongers, and serial deceivers.

The tenth anniversary of Waugh's death is marked by the publication in Britain of a new anthology of his work, *Kiss Me, Chudleigh: The World According to Auberon Waugh*. But much more ought to be done to honor him. Waugh believed that mankind did not divide "into the rich and poor, the privileged and the unprivileged, the clever and the stupid, the lucky and the unlucky, or even the happy and the unhappy," but into "the nasty and the nice." While keeping our sense of humor intact and not becoming too earnest—Waugh would have hated that—we need to build a left-right alliance against the nasty: to stand up to the control freaks, blow raspberries at the thought police, and ridicule the moral imperialists who wish to interfere in the running of other sovereign nations, most of which have much healthier and happier societies than our own. We must do all we can to turn the clock back to a gentler, less egotistical age. In short, it's time to get the Official Auberon Waugh Appreciation Society fully operational. ■

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# America Alone

What ever happened to the “Coalition of the Willing?”

By Ted Galen Carpenter

BRITISH PRIME MINISTER David Cameron recently reassured President Obama that Britain would remain a “robust ally”—America’s wingman—in confronting threats around the world. Of course, that comment might have been a little more comforting if it had not come on the heels of his government’s decision to cut Britain’s already modest defense budget by another 8 percent. Cameron and his colleagues approved that reduction despite Washington’s frantic lobbying.

London’s decision to pare down military spending as part of its strategy to close the government’s huge budget deficit is symptomatic of what’s happening with many of America’s security partners, but Britain’s maneuver was especially painful to hawks in the United States. Even as other allies became less and less willing to follow Washington’s lead on military interventions in recent years, Britain remained doggedly loyal. Indeed, former prime minister Tony Blair endured the label “America’s lap dog” with the proverbial stiff upper lip as the war in Iraq became increasingly unpopular in his country.

And unlike some allies, Britain did more than provide rhetorical support for Washington’s global adventures. It put boots on the ground and planes in the air. Now, though, there are doubts not only whether a British government would assist future U.S.-led interventions, given the negative tenor of domestic opinion, but also whether London would have the troops and hardware to do so even if it wanted to help. It’s as if

the Lone Ranger could no longer count on Tonto—or Don Quixote was being abandoned by Sancho Panza.

American leaders seem to be in denial about what is happening in various allied countries. How clueless Washington has become was apparent when the Obama administration issued its first National Security Strategy document last May. The United States, the NSS stressed, cannot afford to be the world’s sole policeman; it needs partners who are willing and able to meet security challenges.

But Washington will increasingly look in vain for partners who are willing or able, much less both. America’s \$700 billion military budget, which consumes about 5 percent of our gross domestic product, has soared over the past decade. In contrast, allied defense spending has been in free fall. With the new budget, London’s outlays will decline to a mere 2.7 percent of GDP. And Britain is a veritable Sparta compared to other NATO members. Germany’s once credible defense force is now a shrunken husk, with Berlin’s spending down to 1.4 percent of GDP. Such key countries as Italy and Spain skimp even more.

The administration can’t count on newer NATO members to fill that gap. The military efforts of many of those countries are too small even to matter. Such nations as Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Croatia, and Albania, which joined the alliance in the last two rounds of enlargement, collectively spend less on defense in a year

than the United States spends in Afghanistan in three weeks. Whatever their desires, they are incapable of providing more than token military deployments. That might be useful for political symbolism—Washington can create the illusion that an intervention is multilateral—but such commitments are useless from a military standpoint.

Washington doesn’t have much reason for optimism about help from its East Asian allies either. Japan, by far the most significant friendly power in the region, strictly adheres to spending no more than 1 percent of GDP on the military. South Korea devotes less than 3 percent to defense. And both Tokyo and Seoul are largely concerned about possible security threats from North Korea or China. Neither the governments nor the populace in those countries show much interest in helping the United States in any future nation-building mission in the Middle East or Africa.

Even when allied forces have been deployed in such missions, the results have ranged from frustrating to comical. Japan sent members of its Self-Defense Force to Iraq in 2003, but Tokyo required them to be non-combat personnel. That meant that Japanese forces had to be surrounded and protected by the troops of other countries in the U.S.-led coalition. South Korea sent true combat units, but Seoul insisted that they be stationed only in Iraqi Kurdistan—the northern portion of Iraq that was so peaceful that there were very few incidents, in marked contrast to the chaos that gripped the rest of the country.