

A Collation of Birds

by Peter Hunt

Water Birds

Cold, rippled water tinged with red
In early afternoon; water hens
And grebes with bugled cries swim fast
Across the dam, silver-circled
Wavelets fanning out to shore;
When all at once, birds in joy
Go fluttering across the brim
Splashing crystal sprays into
The lucent spell of wintry sun.

Mid-Winter Scene

Grevillea and wattle,
red and yellow side by side,
wildly royal, glowing in
half-misty rain, half-sunlight.
On them an Eastern spinebill,
Itself a hovering, dipping
Black-beaked creature of a range
Of colours, light-dark brown,
White throat and breast of gold,
Its eyes circlets of fiery red
Around a star embedded in the dark.

The Wild Crested-Pigeon

So delicate amidst the greedy noise of drab
Brown mynas hungry after rain, it pecked
For seeds across the grass, with pointed crown
And smooth round breast in shades of lavender
And pink, all flecked with gold. Rare visitor,
It ventured close to me as if it felt
Lean years of some Egyptian famine made
It trust my morning hand; demure and mild
It seemed. Was that its voice I heard last night
Cooing in the safety of its nest,
Murmuring into dreams and waking thoughts
Like one I've heard before in other realms?
And what magic made the whirring music of
Its wings remind me of a fiddle played
In ancient sea-gulled streets of Donegal?

Yarramundi Evening

The car glides down the mountainside
Through forest briefly lit by shafts
Of light, and rain-cooled air that's stung
With wood-smoke scent and bell-bird notes;
A glimpse of shadowed water-birds
And poplars dark against the sky,
As elegiac evening settles in.

The War on Terror Ended

And the Winner Was Not the United States

by Leon Hadar

Baghdad, 2027 (Year of the Goat). Special for the Shanghai Post (proud member of the Global Murdoch Group).

Unlike some of my readers, I'm old enough to remember the time, during the American occupation of Baghdad, when this part of the city was known as the Green Zone. It was renamed the Yellow Peace Zone ten years ago, after Iraq joined the China-led Association of South-West Asian Nations (ASWAN). In fact, I'm digital-delivering this report on my Chinese-made RedPeony from Ali Baba's Pagoda Hotel, which is located near the embassy of Greater China and which was built in 2015 in exactly the same location where, two years earlier, a devastating explosion triggered by fighters allied with the al-Sadr brigades destroyed the gigantic U.S. embassy, forcing thousands of American citizens to flee Baghdad and make their way to the Turkish-controlled northern part of Iraq.

Indeed, I was there in Baghdad on that historic day, October 12, 2013, and I watched as Lauren Bush, the last U.S. ambassador to Baghdad (and daughter of Neil Bush, a brother of former President George W. Bush), as well as other U.S. officials and Iraqi public figures, including Ahmed Chalabi, were evacuated. That last U.S. helicopter left the city on its way to the aircraft carrier *USS Richard Cheney*, which was positioned somewhere in the Persian Gulf. It was a sad and traumatic moment for many older Americans, recalling memories of another humiliating evacuation of U.S. diplomats and citizens from Ho Chi Minh City, following its liberation by the People's Army of Vietnam on April 30, 1975 (an event the Americans refer to as the "Fall of Saigon").

Long before the Americans decided to end their diplomatic presence in Baghdad in May 2013 (Mexico, a member of the North American Union, represents U.S. diplomatic interests in Iraq now), American pundits had already started debating the question of "Who lost Iraq?" After the Americans decided to close their last naval base near Haifa in Israel-Palestine, on September 17, 2016, the most popular topic at major conferences in think tanks in Washington, D.C., became "Who lost the Middle East?"

As an old Middle East hand, I was invited to address one such conference, at the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) in Washington, D.C., on June 11, 2017. The event, held in the Richard Perle Auditorium at the Leo Strauss Building and sponsored by the *Weekly Standard*, was bursting with symbolism. After all, it was in the offices of this think tank that the so-called neoconservatives, in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington of September 11, 2001, had drawn up the plans for the ousting of Iraq's Saddam Hussein

and for "remaking" the Middle East under U.S. leadership. The neoconservative agenda of trying to establish U.S. hegemony in the Middle East—or an American Empire, as some had referred to it—as a way of advancing American interests and values was embraced by the administration of President George W. Bush. That, in turn, created the conditions for the collapse of U.S. power in the Middle East. In the aftermath of the Five-Year War (2008-13) between Iran and the Arab-Sunni Coalition headed by Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Syria, the Quartet (China, India, Russia, and the European Union) helped bring some stability to the region, with Turkey playing a leading role in ending the civil wars in Iraq and Lebanon.

The conference at AEI brought together some of the surviving neocons, including former *Weekly Standard* editor (and advisor to failed Republican presidential candidate John McCain) Bill Kristol; Michael Ledeen, who, with aging Italian politician Alessandra Mussolini, is now running the Gabriele D'Annunzio Institute in Rome; and Paul Wolfowitz, the president of AEI, then writing *The First Neocon*, his biography of Leon Trotsky. Unfortunately, Perle, after whom the auditorium was named, passed away three years ago after choking on a bone in a fish restaurant in Paris—although some conspiracy theorists allege that he was poisoned by an agent of a "foreign power" who was worried that Perle was planning to reveal in his memoirs new details about the events that led to the U.S. decision to oust Saddam.

The title of my address was "The Gulf Wars: Was U.S. Strategic Loss Inevitable?" Discussing the dramatic events that unfolded in the first decade of the 21st century, starting with the September 11 terrorist attacks, I tried to draw the outlines of the counterfactual "what if" scenario and contrast it with what really happened. I started by suggesting that September 11 had highlighted the costs of the strategy of maintaining U.S. hegemony in the Middle East after the end of the Cold War and, particularly, in the aftermath of the Gulf War of 1991. That strategy had been embraced by both Republican President George H.W. Bush and the Democratic administration of President Bill Clinton, and it was based on the notion that an "over the horizon" presence of U.S. troops in Saudi Arabia and other Arab Gulf states would be sufficient to contain the anti-*status-quo* powers of Iraq and Iran (a policy known as "off-shore balancing") and that continuing American diplomacy aimed at fostering peace between Israel and the Palestinians would help win the support of the moderate Arab regimes in the region. In short, it was a low-cost strategy aimed at deterring potential challenges from regional players, such as Baghdad and Tehran, as well as global powers such as the European Union.

But the collapse of the Camp David talks between the Israelis and the Palestinians in 2000 and the start of the Second

Leon Hadar is a research fellow in foreign-policy studies at the Cato Institute, where he analyzes global politics and economics.