

discussion that is framed by Gannett and Clear Channel.”) Kauffman, like Berry, is a pacifist. I, like most people, am not, and despite the Iraq debacle, militant Islam does not grant us the luxury of being peaceable bystanders. Still, the discussion in this book of how war devastates communal and family life—and, in the modern industrial era, can lead to barbarism that mocks any pretense of humanity—cannot be easily gainsaid by the bellicose internationalists of the contemporary Right.

Kauffman can get carried away. His voice is strong, distinct, and engagingly poetic, but he takes you places that can be hard to follow and make you wonder about his judgment. (He reminds me of one of those big-hearted people who can't bear to turn away a stray dog.) We visit, for example, Carolyn Chute, a Maine novelist and gun enthusiast who, along with her illiterate husband, lives an aggressively unorthodox life in the Yankee backwoods. Let's just say that there is a fine line between hale eccentric and outright kook, and I'm not sure Kauffman recognizes it. “We could do worse than to heed our poets” is a characteristic Kauffmanian line, but some poets—paging Mr. Pound!—really are crackpots.

The book's only serious weakness, though, is its chronic digressiveness. In one typical passage, Kauffman ambles from fondly musing on the Black Panther Eldridge Cleaver(!) to a meditation on football and the American spirit. Huh? The chapter on American regionalist artists is studded with insightful miniatures on forgotten and near-forgotten creative types. But in trying to make a broader point about the value of local culture, Kauffman loses focus. The effect is of having just been led through a hodgepodge of an art gallery by a companionably pixilated docent.

Kauffman's worst indulgence on this point comes with the penultimate chapter, “What I Found While Hunting Civil War Artifacts,” which would have been more accurately titled “Obscure Local Oddballs I Esteem.” “May I first tell you about Millard Fillmore?” he asks. Come on, Bill, do you have to?

In the end, Kauffman seems to understand that the book is as much eulogy for what rock critic Greil Marcus once called the “old, weird America” as a celebration of same. There is, of course, no reason at all why any of us have to be prisoners of the zeitgeist, and all it takes to recover the America that Kauffman hymns is for creative people to refuse and resist the disorders of our age. Alas, the great American unwashed actually like their Wal-Mart, their cable TV, their junk culture. Kauffman and family roll into Columbus, Mississippi, hoping to see a *tableau vivant* out of some Delta Blues song and instead find a sullen teenager strung out on his boom-box and “four ladies with mellifluous Mississippi accents” sitting in a diner, chirruping happily about the plot of last night's episode of “Friends”:

I wanted to confront them, plead with them: Look. Here you are, citizens of the economically poorest yet culturally richest state in the Union, the state that gave us Eudora Welty, the Delta Blues, William Faulkner, Muddy Waters, Shelby Foote, and yet you not only consume but crave the packaged products of cocaine-addled East/West Coast greedheads who despise you as ignorant red-necks and stupid crackers. Get off your knees, Mississippi!

Preach it, Brother Billy. My heart's with you, even when my head can't follow. As it happened, I finished *Look Homeward, America* on a flight, put it away in my bag, then returned to the depressing, infuriating narrative of *Cobra II*, with its dismal tale of the Bush administration sophisters, calculators, and economists who, in violation of Kirk's fifth canon, tried to reconstruct the military and the Middle East upon abstract designs. The juxtaposition took me by surprise and made me realize that whatever Bill Kauffman's eccentricities and excesses, I know on whose side I'll take my stand. ■

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[*The Peace of Illusions: American Grand Strategy From 1940 to the Present*, Christopher Layne, Cornell University Press, 304 pages]

Lose Your Illusions

By Leon Hadar

AT SOME POINT while you're reading *The Peace of Illusions*, you may experience a “Matrix”-like moment. You know the feeling: when you suddenly recognize that reality as you understand it—that U.S. foreign policy since 1940 has been designed to protect Americans against threats to their national security—is actually a complex simulation created and manipulated by the powerful forces of the Machines—the foreign-policy establishment consisting of Washington's policymakers, the military-industrial complex, and Wall Street firms—that allows all of us to live mostly peaceful but occasionally very non-peaceful lives while the truth about our condition is hidden from us.

But being a “Neo”—that is, a “neo-realist”—you are troubled by the bloody occupation of Iraq, the mounting tensions with Iran and North Korea, and the growing sense that something is terribly wrong with our diplomacy. But you just can't put your finger on it. So you're browsing foreign-policy websites all through the night, reading the latest issue of *Foreign Affairs*, accessing the wisdom of Francis Fukuyama and Samuel Huntington, and searching for answers to those questions that prevent you from falling asleep. Is it possible that all the blame lies with President George W. Bush and his neocon advisors and their determination to maintain overwhelming U.S. geopolitical dominance, breaking sharply with what you assumed all along was the principle that guided earlier policymakers, that is, defending the U.S. from outside menaces?

But then what about our intervention in the civil war in Yugoslavia—Bosnia in 1995, Kosovo in 1999—and Haiti during the presidency of Bill Clinton? And it was Bush I who decided, after the Cold War ended in 1989, that we should continue to maintain troops in Korea and Japan and who invaded Panama that same year. Moreover, we don't hear John Kerry or Hillary Clinton challenging our commitment to protect Taiwan from China or criticizing our new military alliances with Poland, the Czech Republic, and the Baltic states. What does all of that—not to mention the two Gulf Wars—have to do with protecting the American homeland?

And then it happens. "You need to ask the question that drives our foreign policy," someone whispers in your ear. "Forget the 'Matrix,' neo-realist. Instead ask yourself what America's grand strategy has been from 1940 to the present." It is the voicing of that question that could start setting you free and help you put into words what you've suspected all along. As Christopher Layne reveals to you:

The story of American grand strategy over the past six decades is one of expansion, and that strategy's logic inexorably has driven the United States to attempt to establish its hegemony in the world's three most important regions outside North America itself: Western Europe, East Asia, and the Persian Gulf.

You need to wake up and let go of the old axioms—the foreign-policy fairy tales told to us by our leaders and pundits—that have guided your thinking about U.S. foreign policy. It's not about defense (as in the Department of Defense), stupid! The United States for most of the 20th century and leading straight into the invasion of Iraq has aimed at "extraregional hegemony," according to Layne, an associate professor at the Bush School of Government and Public Service at Texas A&M University. Washington has deliberately strived for that global hegemonic role since the early 1940s and with added force since

the end of the Cold War. From that perspective, the Bush II administration's decision to invade Iraq and overthrow Saddam Hussein is just another example of continuity in the U.S. grand strategy that evolved after Pearl Harbor and achieved a certain climax when the Berlin Wall collapsed. As Layne puts it:

As we know it, that decision had nothing to do with 9/11, the war on terror, or Iraq's nonexistent weapons of mass destruction. Rather it was a war of hegemony intended to establish U.S. military and ideological dominance in the Persian Gulf and the Middle East.

Contrary to what we've been told again and again, the al-Qaeda attacks on New York and Washington, D.C., didn't "change everything":

After 9/11—and before—geopolitical dominance has been the ambition of the United States. If anything, 9/11 gave the Bush II administration's 'hegemonists' a convenient—indeed, almost providential—rationale for implementing policies they would have wanted to pursue in any event—including the 'regime change' in Iraq (and possibly Iran); the projection of U.S. power into the Middle East and Central Asia; a massive five-year defense buildup, which, when completed, will result in U.S. military outlays exceeding the combined defense budgets of the rest of the world's states; and a nuclear strategy that aims at attaining meaningful nuclear superiority over peer competitors and simultaneously ensuring that regional powers cannot develop the capacity to deter U.S. military intervention abroad. In short, the Bush II administration has sought security by expanding U.S. power and pursuing hegemony. In this respect it has stayed on—not left—the grand strategic path followed by the United States since the early 1940s.

On one level, Layne's *Peace of Illu-*

sions is a devastating critique and a remarkable revisionist history of U.S. foreign policy from World War II to the Iraq War that is grounded in extensive historical research and the original application of political-science theories that support the Layne's main thesis—that American foreign policy has been driven by one objective: global military, economic, and political hegemony in Eurasia. Memo to the lay reader: don't be put off by the political-science jargon. You'll be compensated by a lot of entertaining historical anecdotes, including counterfactual "What if?" scenarios like my favorite: what would have happened if the U.S. had not intervened militarily in the Great War? (Hint: we and the rest of the world would have been better off.)

On another level, this is a policy-oriented study that proposes a coherent grand strategy to replace the current one. Layne's alternative is offshore balancing, which is not a hegemonic but a counter-hegemonic strategy that posits that the only U.S. strategic interest at stake in Eurasia is preventing the emergence of a Eurasian hegemon. Note to policymakers and pundits in Washington: read this book. It might be too late to implement Layne's grand strategy, but you could still learn something.

As a historical study and theoretical analysis, *The Peace of Illusions* succeeds in demonstrating that America's extraregional hegemony is not driven by security considerations but by economic and political interests and by a powerful ideology. U.S. global military power provided the U.S. with the opportunity and means to seek hegemony in Western Europe and other parts Eurasia. But the real motivations that animated the hegemonic grand strategy are found at the domestic level. According to Layne, it was the economic and political "Open Door" strategy—in other words, American liberal (Wilsonian) ideology—that caused the United States to seek hegemony. The Open Door is a complex set of economic and political linkages between openness abroad, U.S. prosperity, and the security of America's "core values" domestically:

Since World War II, the Open Door has reflected what present-day U.S. policymakers call the virtuous circle (which is based on a circular logic): international economic openness and the spread of American ideology create peace and security for the United States, and the U.S. military presence in Europe, East Asia and the Middle East creates the conditions that allow for international economic openness and the spread of American ideology.

The Open Door assumes that the United States can only be secure if it enjoys absolute security. It's not surprising, therefore, that since World War II, U.S. policymakers have aimed at establishing unipolarity by reducing Britain to an adjunct of American might, by ensuring that Germany and Japan could never rise again as great powers, by eliminating the Soviet Union as a great power rival, by preventing Europe from emerging as a unified force that could challenge U.S. hegemony, and by eventually establishing the current U.S. global hegemonic posi-

tion. Two of the more controversial points that Layne makes are that even if there had been no Soviet threat the United States would have maintained a permanent presence in Western Europe after World War II and that the United States could have encouraged the formation of a Western European security power to contain the Soviet Union, creating the conditions for the withdrawal of U.S. troops from the continent as early as the 1960s.

I personally wish that Layne had devoted an entire book—as opposed to one chapter in this book—to detailing policy prescriptions for a strategy of offshore balancing. Still, at a time when the U.S. foreign-policy establishment is divided between those who support total American primacy in the world (Bush II) and those who back a more selective engagement aimed at achieving that hegemony, an Empire Lite (favored by Democrats and those Republicans associated with Bush I), Layne's ideas are an intellectual breath of fresh air. His offshore strategy would have four key objectives:

- Insulating the United States from possible future great-power wars in Eurasia
- Avoiding the need for the United States to fight “wars of credibility” or unnecessary wars on behalf of client states
- Reducing the vulnerability of the American homeland to terrorism
- Maximizing both America's relative power in the international system and its freedom of action

Unlike America's current hegemonic grand strategy, offshore balancing is a multipolar strategy that can accommodate the rise of new great powers while simultaneously shifting or devolving to the great powers of Eurasia the primary responsibility for their own defense. By drawing back from Eurasia—terminating U.S. military alliances with Japan, Korea, and NATO; withdrawing U.S. troops from the Middle East immediately and more gradually disengaging militarily from Europe and Asia; and

accepting that other powers, including Iran, Japan, Korea, and Japan will “go nuclear”—the United States would give other states “a lot less reason to push back” against our interests, Layne argues. Rather than focusing their grand attention on the United States, other nations would pay more attention to their neighborhood rivals.

As an offshore balancer, the United States could maximize its relative power effortlessly by standing on the sidelines while other great powers enter into security competition with each other. And in fact, Eurasia would be more stable if, acting as an offshore balancer, the United States went ahead with strategic devolution and allowed other states to defend themselves. At the same time, the U.S. should be prepared to assist friendly nations with arms sales and technology transfers and maintain close military contacts with them. And it should be ready to reinsert U.S. military power into Eurasia in case the balance of power there collapses and U.S. interests are directly threatened by an aggressive hegemon.

All of this makes a lot of sense to me. But as Layne makes clear, the chances are slim that Washington will abandon its hegemonic grand strategy so long as it continues to serve the interests of powerful elites that will probably continue to dominate the U.S. foreign-policy establishment for some years to come. “It probably will take a major domestic political realignment—perhaps triggered by setbacks abroad or a severe economic crisis at home—to bring about a change in American grand strategy,” concludes Layne. In short, we'll probably be waiting a long time for “the One” who will lead us to freedom from the strategy of hegemony and overthrow the Machines that benefit from hegemonic policies. Bush and the neocons will soon be out of power, but we'll still be residing in the foreign-policy Matrix. ■

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[*Attention Deficit Democracy*,
James Bovard, Palgrave
Macmillan, 291 pages]

While You Were Sleeping

By Jesse Walker

IN NINE BOOKS and hundreds of articles, the libertarian muckraker James Bovard has returned repeatedly to three themes: government repression, government incompetence, and government deceit. All three go under the microscope in his newest tome, *Attention Deficit Democracy*, but the focus is on the deceit—and, even more, on the deceived. To Bovard, the public is so easily snookered that America's democratic rhetoric has become a fraud. "The 'will of the people,'" he writes, "is often simply a measure of how many people fell for which lies, how many people were frightened by which advertisements, and which red herrings worked on which target audiences. Rather than the 'will of the people,' election results are often only a one-day snapshot of transient mass delusions."

That isn't a passing flash of cynicism. He says it on the first page of the book, and he never goes long without declaring something similar. "In the same way that some battered wives cling to their abusive husbands, the more debacles the government causes, the more some voters cling to rulers." "After the 2004 election campaign, the clearest mandate is for people to be sheep with the president as their shepherd-in-chief." "Many voters don't understand or don't care about freedom." Other books attacking Leviathan read like a call to arms. This one reads like the despairing cry of a man who has issued many calls to arms already and has lost hope that any angry army of patriots will ever show up.

So *Attention Deficit Democracy* does not just give us the stacks of facts about official misbehavior that are Bovard's stock in trade. It offers reason after

reason that the American public neither knows nor cares what is being done in its name.

There is a long chapter, for example, about the ongoing torture scandal. It covers the extent of the abuses committed by American soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan—not just the humiliation documented in the Abu Ghraib photos, but electric shocks, anal rape with a chemical light, and violent beatings that sometimes left prisoners dead. It points out how few of the detainees at Abu Ghraib were actually involved with ter-

rorism. It makes a strong case that the maltreatment proceeded from official U.S. policy and not, as some apologists insist, from the misbehavior of a few bad apples.

But those are only secondary arguments. The real point of the chapter isn't the torture; it's the fact that the administration got away with it. "The Bush administration," Bovard writes, "has shown what it takes for the U.S. government to get away with torture: almost nothing—or just some happy talk about the spread of democracy and freedom.



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