

Communitarian Observations

I often write about rather different matters, but in my mind they all deal with one core question: the guidance our shared values, especially the common good, provides to our public policies.

Announcements

On January 27, 2014, from 1:00pm-2:30pm, the Institute for Communitarian Policy Studies will hold a public meeting on [Mutually-Assured Restraint \(MAR\) for U.S.-China Relations](#) at The Murrow Room of the National Press Club, 529 14th St. NW, Washington, DC. The meeting will be co-chaired by Tu Weiming, Lifetime Professor of Philosophy and Dean of the Institute for Advanced Humanistic Studies at Peking University, and myself. Speakers to be announced. The media is invited. We hope you will consider joining us. Due to space limitations, we ask that you RSVP to Kenneth Megan at kmegan@gwu.edu.

On Sunday, November 17, public television stations in the United States and Voice of American aired a segment of the White House Chronicle on the subject of Mutually-Assured Restraint (MAR). Panelists featured included Jeffrey A. Bader, John C. Whitehead Senior Fellow in International Diplomacy at the Brookings Institution, who served for the past four years at the White House on the subject of China policy; Robert Daly, Director of the Kissinger Institute on China and the United States at the Wilson Center; and myself. The episode can be watched [here](#). (For more information, see "[Who Authorized Preparations for War With China?](#)" and "[Accommodating China](#)" at the ICPS website.)

From My Diary

"A real tradition is not the relic of the past that is irretrievably gone; it is a living force that animates and informs the present." (Igor Stravinsky)

The more people get American economic aid—the less the likely they are to favor the United States. A [report](#) from the Pew Research Center's Global Attitudes Project finds that in 2013, "in Egypt and Pakistan, two nations that are major recipients of U.S. assistance, evaluations [of the U.S.] are very different [from those in most countries that receive small amounts of U.S. assistance, such as Ghana and Kenya]. A 55% majority of Egyptians say American economic aid is having a mostly negative effect on their country. In Pakistan, 43% think the impact is mostly negative, while just 8% say it is positive."

Joe Nocera finds, in an [article](#) in *The New York Times* about documentary filmmaker Fred Wiseman's latest film, *At Berkeley*, that "Wiseman is asking whether, for all its dazzling breadth, Berkeley can still be that first step on the ladder of upward mobility for California's middle class, which is what the university system was originally designed to do." Really?

I Read

In a *Wall Street Journal* [book review](#) of Michael Allen's *Blinking Red*, David Feith describes the challenges of dealing with Iran's nuclear program. "A central assumption," he writes, "behind the Obama administration's approach to the Iranian nuclear program is that the U.S. would be able to detect the mullahs crossing the nuclear threshold. Yet the U.S. was caught off guard by the

Soviet bomb in 1949, by China's bomb in 1964, by Iraq's weaponization process in 1991 and by Syria's plutonium-production facility in 2007. This history should temper confidence in Washington's ability to divine the most closely held secrets of its adversaries. So should America's inability to 'connect the dots' before al Qaeda's 9/11 attack and our belief in 2003 that Saddam Hussein still had stockpiles of chemical and biological weapons." For additional discussion along these lines, see a recent [article on the subject](#).

The Financial Times recently published an [article](#) on the [Harmony in the World 2013: The Ideal and the Reality](#), by Daniel Bell, a noted communitarian, and Yingchuan Mo. The article discusses the importance of "rich and diverse social relations" to human happiness, and proposes a Harmony Index that attempts to capture these factors as a measurement of social progress.

Short Publications

"Practically all of the scores of articles that have been published since China announced its new [Air Defense Identification Zone](#) (ADIZ) have focused on China's moves and on how the United States and its allies – Japan in particular – have responded and should respond. Analysts have examined China's motives, seeking to determine whether the ADIZ is defensive, meant to protect China's sovereignty and security; offensive, meant to prepare for a land grab; a reaction meant to indicate displeasure with Japan's recent [threat to shoot down](#) unmanned aircraft in Japanese airspace; or meant to test U.S. resolve now that it has come to be viewed as having allowed other nations to cross one red line after another. Analysts of the U.S. response have noted signs of weakness in Washington's instructions that civilian airlines should abide by China's new rules, and they fear that accidental clashes between U.S. military planes engaged in overflights and the Chinese fighters that shadow them may lead to a shoot-out. Still other articles examined the [side effects of China's ADIZ on Japan](#), which was moving away from its pacifist orientation even before this recent development. All of these rightful concerns deal with the immediate situation. The time has now come to also explore how to address the underlying conflict on two levels: that of the status of the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands and that of China's rising power and regional role. Unless this is done, the U.S. is limiting itself to dealing with symptoms while ignoring the underlying lingering tensions." (Read more of "A Three-Pronged Approach to the ADIZ" at [our website](#) or at [The Diplomat](#).)

"I have come to dread President Obama's speeches. They are often thoughtful, nuanced, highly evocative, and exceptionally well-delivered—and worse than inconsequential. They raise expectations—a world without nukes! Ending global warming! Finally curbing gun violence!—but are not followed by much of anything. These barren speeches are one reason the public, and especially the young, are becoming disaffected from politics, bad news for any democracy. I am not so ambivalent about Obama's December 4 speech focusing on inequality, though perhaps not in the way one might expect. I *hope* it gains little traction—though truth be told, his track record means I am not losing much sleep over the matter. The speech's flaw is that it seems to align the president with the Elizabeth Warren and Bill de Blasio wing of the Democratic Party. For though this left wing may be hot during the primaries, it is most unlikely to produce a winning candidate for the 2016 election." (Read more of "Obama's Misguided Focus on Inequality" at [our website](#) or at [The Atlantic](#).)

"Jonathan Rauch, one of the keenest observers of American public life (and a contributing editor at *The Atlantic*), reminded a group of worried progressives recently that whenever extremist forces seem poised to take over the United States, moderate counterforces move in and save the day. He had no need to mention the key examples, because they are well-known: Ted Cruz

ought to take note of what happened to Joe McCarthy, the John Birch Society, and, above all, the Moral Majority. In recent days, Representative Paul Ryan has set out to develop an anti-poverty program—a compassionate libertarianism?—not something Ayn Rand would have approved of. While the details are still forthcoming, the Wisconsin Republican is emphasizing the need to enhance social mobility and to encourage volunteerism to help those in need. Perhaps this stems from little more than Ryan’s desire to differentiate himself from another Tea Party favorite, Senator Ted Cruz of Texas, who has cornered the extreme libertarian position. But it sure is winning him conservative kudos. Bill Bennett approves, according to the *Washington Post*: “You can’t be the governing party unless you offer people a way out of poverty.” Scott Winship, a senior fellow at the conservative Manhattan Institute, adds: “There’s definitely a feeling that conservatives need to get in this arena.” The very fact that someone like Ryan is willing to go beyond blunt individualism is a sign—however early and tentative—of some softening in the Republican Party’s libertarian wing.” (Read more of “Are Libertarians Going Soft?” [on our website](#) or at [The Atlantic](#).)

We posted these observations on November 22, 2013. On December 11, Dana Milbank wrote an [op-ed](#) pointing out that the Republican Party is increasingly willing to compromise and rebuke its most radical fringe. The same day, the House reached a [federal budget compromise](#) that was subsequently [passed by the House 332-94 on December 12](#). Earlier in the day, before the budget vote, Speaker Boehner [lambasted the ultraconservative](#) groups that opposed the budget and “pushed [Republicans] into the fight to defund Obamacare and shut down the government,” calling them “ridiculous” and saying that “they’ve lost all credibility” and had stepped “over the line.” Stay tuned...

Long Publications

“This article argues that there are strong normative reasons to treat American terrorists, abroad and within the United States, as individuals who have committed treason. For the purposes of this article, ‘American terrorists’ refers to persons recognized as American citizens under the Constitution of the United States who commit acts defined under one of [several statutes]. It is important to note that these statutes are not the only statutes available to prosecute terrorism related offences in the United States. In fact, often perpetrators recognized by the American public as ‘terrorists’ are actually prosecuted for various non-terrorism related offenses. Americans who commit or materially support terrorist acts are widely held as commanding rights above and beyond those to which other so called terrorists are entitled; however, Americans commit a serious offense when they raise their arms against their nation, a crime that other terrorists are incapable of committing. To put it differently, when Americans attack the United States, they often commit two offenses: acts of terrorism and the undermining of trust that Americans invest in each other—trust that serves as the basis for a robust civil society.” (Read more of “American Terrorists as Perpetrators of Communitarian Assaults” [on our website](#) or in [American University International Law Review](#) 29(1), December 2013.)

“Now that I am about to turn 85 and the hourglass is almost empty, I have come to understand better than ever before an odd meeting I once had with the late Czech president and playwright Václav Havel. I was part of a group he had assembled at the ornate presidential castle in Prague. The participants included Hillary Rodham Clinton, Henry Kissinger, Adam Michnik (a Polish historian and journalist, and a much-revered dissenter), Meir Lau (a chief rabbi from Israel), Ashis Nandy (an Indian political psychologist), and Bishop Jonas Jonson of the Church of Sweden. We were each invited to speculate about where we thought history was headed next. It took a private chat with Michnik and an exchange with Havel, mediated by an interpreter, for me to realize that Havel (like other leaders of the anti-Communist uprisings that drove the

Soviet Union out of Eastern Europe) was desperately looking for another wave to ride. As a hero of the masses who rose up against their oppressors and prevailed, Havel had every right to feel that he had played a crucial historical role, after which all that followed paled in comparison. It was clear to me then and even more apparent now that Havel and his comrades would have given almost anything to move history just one more time.” (Read more of “My Kingdom for a Wave” [on our website](#) or in [The American Scholar](#), Winter 2014.)

“There are some who believe that there will be an inevitable ‘clash of civilizations’ between the Muslim world and the West. By contrast, this article contends that there are many opportunities for constructive dialogue between the two that can bridge the cultural divide. Specifically, the article proposes a cross-cultural dialogue on social justice as a promising starting point.” (Read more of “Socioeconomic Rights: A Dialogue with Islam” in [Digest of Middle East Studies](#) 22(2), October 2013.)

New Endorsements of the Communitarian Platform

Alona Hagay Frey, PhD Candidate at Bar Ilan University, Israel

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