

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.

New Position Paper

Twelve public intellectuals and academics from a variety of backgrounds issued a joint statement on ways to improve the relationship between the United States and China and avoid the two powers sliding towards conflict. The position paper can be viewed on the ICPS website. We call on you to consider endorsing it and sharing it with others. If you are willing to endorse the paper, please send an email with your name, affiliation, and a statement of endorsement to icps@gwu.edu.

From My Diary

“I was born as a Jewish child in Nazi Germany and I have some feeling about countries dealing with their past,’ Etzioni told a group on Monday at the National Press Club in Washington. A renowned professor of international affairs at George Washington University, Etzioni said Germany has recognized its past, apologized for the atrocities, made amends and educated their children and army every year [about] what went wrong in their nation’s history. ‘Unlike Japan, they faced their past, came to terms with it and learned from it. Japan should do the same.’” Chen Weihua. [“Japan should take a lesson from Germany.”](#) *China Daily USA*. January 28, 2014.

Short Pieces

“As a Jew who escaped Nazi Germany as a child in 1935, I have a lifelong interest in the ways nations deal with their pasts. I am closely following developments in Japan, in particular the moves to revise Japanese textbooks in a nationalistic direction, the debate about the implications of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s visit to the Yasukuni Shrine, and, above all, steps to turn Japan’s military from a strictly defensive one into one with “normal” capabilities. [...] I hence suggested at a recent press conference that Japan should send 200 public intellectuals and political leaders to Germany to learn how a nation can come to terms with the darkest parts of its history.” (Read more of “Japan Should Follow – Germany” at the [ICPS website](#) or at the [Diplomat](#).)

“In a recent essay in the *New York Review of Books*, Alan Rusbridger, the editor of the *Guardian*, employs three arguments to justify his publication of leaked documents whose release has caused major damage to the national security of the U.S., the U.K., and their allies, according to their governments. The U.S. director of national intelligence has stated that the leaks have done ‘huge, grave damage’ to intelligence-gathering efforts. NSA Director Keith Alexander has argued that revelations have caused ‘significant and irreversible damage to our nation’s security.’ And the director of the Government Communications Headquarters (the NSA’s U.K. counterpart) recently testified that the leaks have been ‘very damaging’ and will make the job of pursuing terrorists ‘far, far harder for years to come.’ Rusbridger’s first argument, a libertarian claim, is contradicted by his second. The second claim, a liberal communitarian argument, leaves a major question unaddressed. And the third argument is so specious that one must wonder if Rusbridger realized his case was unconvincing and ended up grasping at straws.” (Read more of “Who Will Guard *The Guardian*?” at the [ICPS website](#) or at the [Atlantic](#).)

“Former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates—who presided over the failed war in Afghanistan and the failing intervention in Iraq—claims that Vice President Biden was ‘wrong on nearly every major foreign policy and national security issue over the past four decades.’ Because of my interest in communities—including ethnic and religious ones—I followed particularly closely two major recommendations Joe Biden has made. I found that as far as can be determined, the United States—and many millions of people in the Middle East—would be much safer and better off if Biden’s counsel was heeded.” (Read more of “Maligning Biden” at the [ICPS website](#) or at the [Huffington Post](#).)

“Recent news reports indicate that a major stumbling block in the negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority is the insistence by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s government on maintaining a military force on the border between the future Palestinian state and Jordan, along the Jordan Valley. This demand, and the fact that Secretary of State John Kerry seems to support it, so infuriated Mahmoud Abbas, head of the P.A., that Abbas went over Kerry’s head and appealed directly to President Obama. My suggestion for a way out of this impasse, which follows below, makes sense only once one realizes why both sides feel so strongly about this matter and why they both have good reasons for feeling this way.” (Read more of “Breaking Through the Impasse on the Jordan Valley” at the [ICPS website](#) or at the [Jewish Daily Forward](#).)

Long Articles

“[On Curbing Obesity](#).” *Society* March/April 2014. Abstract: Public policies to combat obesity (with the notable exception of Let’s Move, initiated by Michelle Obama) tend to focus on reducing caloric intake (dieting). These efforts often fail and have some negative effects and multiple economic and human costs. To the extent that we are dealing with individuals (rather than societal factors) a more effective policy would give more weight to exercise as compared to dieting and, above all, focus on parents (and thus on young children) rather than on adults. This is the case because as children become adults, their BMI is set to a very considerable extent.

“[Humble Decision-Making Theory](#).” *Public Management Review* 16(1): 1-9. Abstract: Behavioral economics provides unusually robust data that show that people have hardwired, systemic cognitive biases that greatly limit their intellectual capabilities. From these observations follows a set of general guidelines for decision-making—humble decision-making theory—that if widely adopted may prevent decision-makers of all types from erring, encourage wiser decisions, and enhance overall contentment by helping those making and affected by decisions to moderate their expectations.

“[NSA: National Security vs. Individual Rights](#).” *Intelligence and National Security* 2014: 1-37. Abstract: This paper draws on liberal communitarianism to analyze two National Security Agency programs: the bulk phone records collection program and PRISM. Specifically, the paper addresses the following questions: Does the threat to national security justify such programs? Can this threat be addressed through standard criminal procedures favored by civil libertarians? Are the programs effective? To what extent do they violate the privacy of American citizens? What are the rights of non-Americans with respect to the programs? Are the programs in line with the Constitution and the various laws that govern them? Is there sufficient accountability and oversight of these programs?

I Read

“Henry Stimson, as secretary of state in the late 1920s, famously shut down Washington’s code-breaking ‘black chamber’ on the grounds that, as he later put it, ‘gentlemen do not read each other’s mail,’”

notes a book review in the [Wall Street Journal](#). Some contemporaries still yearn for such a gentle world. They call for granting privacy rights to foreigners overseas, privacy rights that other countries do not dream of according United States citizens. These countries would continue to spy on us while we would punish those who violate their citizens' privacy.

Videos

On Sunday, February 23, the White House Chronicle aired a [segment](#) on the subject of defense in the 21st century. Featured panelists included Mark Gunzinger of the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments and Amitai Etzioni.

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