

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.

Short Pieces

“On the eve of U.S. President Barack Obama’s eight-day trip to Asia, Thomas E. Donilon, until recently the president’s National Security Adviser, provided *The Washington Post* with [an overview of America’s strategy](#) in Asia. He makes no reference to “pivoting” to Asia—the new catchphrase is “rebalancing.” Instead of being portrayed as increasing its commitment to the region, the United States is now said to be merely restoring its commitment to a previous, unspecified level. For instance, the number of American troops in the area, which was decreased as units were moved from Asia to the Middle East, is being restored to its pre-Afghanistan and Iraq level. This emphasis on rebalancing is supposed to reassure U.S. allies in the Middle East and Europe that they are not being abandoned or even short-changed—and to reduce the concerns the pivot has raised in China.” (Read more of “Obama’s ‘Rebalancing’: A Fig Leaf” at [The Diplomat](#) or at the [ICPS website](#).)

“Simon Schama’s new TV series and book [The Story of the Jews](#) is particularly timely, although he’s covering well-ploughed ground. Schama shows, in fine detail, the ways the Jews tried, in any way they knew how and inventing new ones, to become accepted by societies in which they found themselves over the 1900 years that passed since they were exiled after the destruction of the first state of Israel. They tried to “assimilate” by praying on Sunday instead of on the Sabbath, by using the local language instead of Hebrew, by playing an organ instead of the shofar—and so on. They zealously served the rulers of their host countries and contributed richly to their cultures and commerce. However, as Schama shows, again and again and one more time Jews were (a) never fully accepted and (b) sooner or later kicked out in the most violent ways. They found new host countries, only to have their bitter fate repeated.” (Read more of [“Israel and Palestine: There’s Still Room at the Inn”](#) at *The National Interest* or at the [ICPS website](#).)

I Read

Salt, Sugar, Fat: How the Food Giants Hooked Us (New York, NY: Random House, 2013), by Michael Moss, is a must-read for anyone who wants to understand how ads manipulate the public and how the industry captures legislators and regulators. It discusses very serious changes to the United States food industry and is very well-documented.

Michael Swaine. [“Chinese Views and Commentary on the East China Sea Air Defense Identification Zone.”](#) *China Leadership Monitor* 43. 2014.

The following excerpt from Robert Gates’ *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014) seems especially relevant to the ongoing crisis in Ukraine: “From 1993 onward, the West, and particularly the United States, had badly underestimated the magnitude of Russian humiliation in losing the Cold War and then in the dissolution of the Soviet Union, which amounted to the end of the centuries-old Russian Empire. The arrogance, after the collapse, of American government officials, academicians, businessmen, and politicians in telling the Russians how to conduct their domestic and international affairs (not to mention the internal psychological impact of their precipitous fall from

superpower status) had led to deep and long-term resentment and bitterness. What I didn't tell the president was that I believed the relationship with Russia had been badly mismanaged after Bush 41 left office in 1993. Getting Gorbachev to acquiesce to a unified Germany as a member of NATO had been a huge accomplishment. But moving so quickly after the collapse of the Soviet Union to incorporate so many of its formerly subjugated states into NATO was a mistake. Including the Baltic states, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary quickly was the right thing to do, but I believe the process should then have slowed. U.S. agreements with the Romanian and Bulgarian governments to rotate troops through bases in those countries was a needless provocation (especially since we virtually never deployed the 5,000 troops to either country). The Russians had long historical ties to Serbia, which we largely ignored. Trying to bring Georgia and Ukraine into NATO was truly overreaching. The roots of the Russian Empire trace back to Kiev in the ninth century, so that was an especially monumental provocation. Were the Europeans, much less the Americans, willing to send their sons and daughters to defend Ukraine or Georgia? Hardly. So NATO expansion was a political act, not a carefully considered military commitment, thus undermining the purpose of the alliance and recklessly ignoring what the Russians considered their own vital national interests. ... The relationship between the United States and Russia during my time as secretary under George W. Bush would be dominated by the president's decision to emplace missile defenses against Iran in eastern Europe, U.S. efforts to expand NATO to include Georgia and Ukraine, and Russia's invasion of Georgia. Our commitment to missile defenses in Europe would also dominate U.S.-Russian relations during Obama's first term."

From My Diary

Two of my grandchildren prepared a creative gift for my 85th birthday. They composed a Jeopardy!-like game based on trivia from my life, with questions such as "Which family event caused Saba to miss the first inauguration of President Barack Obama?" We divided the family into two groups, each of which competed for points. To compose a trivia game of your own, go to [JeopardyLabs](#); the one my grandchildren made can be viewed [here](#).

A fancy private high school in the Southwest requires students to do 150 hours of community service in order to graduate. Students, when asked how they viewed the requirement, shrugged and replied, "You know, you can get credit for 10 hours if you spend two hours taking around visiting parents who tour the school as a possible one for their kids."

Chuck Hagel and Daniel Russell have both recently called for restraint in United States-China relations.

Long Pieces

["Rules of Engagement and Abusive Citizens."](#) *PRISM* 4(4): 87-102. 2014. The time has come to draw lessons from the war in Afghanistan. One major concern is how the U.S. military ought to deal with civilians who are sporadic combatants, and civilians who act, part of the time, as support forces for combatants (by serving as intelligence agents, manufacturing ammunition and bombs, supplying provisions and transportation, and so on). Discussion of this topic has often focused on ways to deal with those civilians after they have been caught fighting us and whether they should be treated as soldiers or as criminals, a matter that has not yet been resolved. (My own position is that they should be treated as a third category: as terrorists, subject to distinct rules and authority.) This article focuses on an earlier phase: when these civilians are still acting as combatants or supporting them.

New Endorsers of the MAR Platform

Mel Gurtov, Professor Emeritus of Political Science, Portland State University and Editor-in-Chief, *Asian Perspective*

B. Welling Hall, Plowshares Professor of Peace Studies, Professor of Politics and International Studies, Earlham College

Lok Sang Ho, Professor of Economics, Lingnan University

Ole Holsti, George V. Allen Professor of International Affairs (Emeritus), Duke University

Paul R. Pillar, Nonresident Senior Fellow, Center for Security Studies, Georgetown University

John Rutledge, Senior Research Professor of Economics, Claremont Graduate School

Shi Yongming, Associate Research Fellow, China Institute of International Studies

Graeme Smith, Research Fellow, China Studies Center, University of Sydney and College of Asia and the Pacific, Australian National University

Suisheng Zhao, Director, Center for China-US Cooperation, University of Denver and Editor, *Journal of Contemporary China*

Augusto Soto, Director, Dialogue with China Project and Global Expert, Global Experts of the United Nations

Peter Van Ness, College of Asia and the Pacific, Australian National University

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