

**A Path Out of the Desert: A Grand Strategy for America in the Middle East**, by Kenneth M. Pollack. Random House, 2008. 539 pages. \$30.00, hardcover.

*Omar M. Kader, chairman, Pal-Tech, Inc., a government consulting firm*

In *A Path Out of the Desert*, Kenneth Pollack posits as his central thesis that the Muslim Middle East is in a “pre-revolutionary” state, on the verge of civil strife unless the United States begins serious long-term efforts to instigate reform. Pollack served on the National Security Council in the Clinton administration and is now the director of research at the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution. He is the author of many articles and books on the Middle East, but whether this record makes his policy statements and prescriptions worthy of being heeded is another matter; his works are always controversial and often wrong. His *The Threatening Storm: The Case for Invading Iraq*, was used by many, including Bush administration officials, to justify the 2003 invasion of Iraq, despite his later admission that he, along with “every other intelligence community with the capability to collect information independently against Iraq,” was mistaken. He never really accepts responsibility for his part in promoting the war without surrounding himself with others who made the same mistake. But “others” did not write 500-page books speculating wrongly about how easy it would be to eliminate Saddam and restore calm to Iraq. Pollack also attempts to help the reader by declaring, “I am a liberal internationalist (what sometimes gets called a liberal interventionist)” (p. xxiii). Most of his critics would put him squarely in the neoconservative camp.

Given Pollack’s dismal track record on the Middle East, he can hardly expect the people of the region to flock to his call for reform. His antipathy for Arabs and Muslims is clear. He begins his book by expressing “frustration” with the condition of the Middle East and claims that all Americans are afflicted by the same disgruntled state of mind: “Personally, I would love to be able to tell other Americans that we can just forget about the Middle East; that it’s just not important” (p. xvi). What he fails to realize is that the people of the Middle East have a very low opinion of what we in America think of them and are unlikely to change their ways to calm the nerves of Pollack and his colleagues.

Pollack rehashes existing research on the need for reform of the abysmal social, political, economic and educational institutions in the Muslim Middle East that can be found in the 2003 *Arab Human Development Report*, published by the United Nations and in hundreds of articles and books easily found on the Internet. He warns that urgent reform is necessary before serious instability erupts and engulfs the entire world, with consequences that could have broad and lasting effects on the global economy. He cites indicators that point to pending calamities in other regions when mass migration to urban centers, high unemployment and a youth demographic bulge combine with inferior education, visionless leadership and poor economic performance. Pollack’s conclusion is that the Middle East is headed for an explosion and that “America’s interests demand a focus on quelling the ongoing civil conflicts and preventing new ones. The time for ignoring the underlying problems of the Muslim Middle East is long past” (p. 167). This worry about

things going badly for the United States centers on two important interests: “Typically, Americans describe our interests in the Middle East as being ‘oil and Israel’” (p. 24). Thus, while “we should not neglect the importance of our friendships with the Arab states, we must also look past them to our nation’s strategic interests. In that light, the principal strategic rationale for our alignment with the Arab states is really an extension of our strategic interest in Middle Eastern oil” (p. 51). Additional strategic interests include limiting the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, combating terrorism, and stopping any hostile outside power from dominating the region — this would certainly include Iran and its threat to Israel.

For Pollack, the core focus in protecting U.S. national interests in the Middle East must be a multi-billion-dollar investment over decades to transform the whole region so that it will be led by democratic governments friendly to the United States.

Pollack predicts dire consequences if we do not start the reform process, but he says nothing about the consequences of initiating a process of reform that dismantles societies in the Middle East that are centuries old. For example, what is the likely outcome of opening the system in Egypt when Christian Copts and the Islamists clash? Who would have predicted that the Christian population of Palestine would diminish to less than 5 percent as a result of the violent clashes between Israelis and Muslim Palestinians? He assumes only good things will happen if we follow his advice, just as he did when advocating the invasion of Iraq. We were told that it would be inexpensive and less violent than predicted by those who opposed it. Without understanding what fissures might erupt in these traditional societies, we can only predict that more harm than good is possible if we take Pollack’s advice and that he has learned nothing from being wrong about Iraq.

Pollack, like a majority of observers, is on the right track in calling for improvements in the daily lives of the people in the Middle East. It should not take 441 pages, however, to state the obvious. He avoids analyzing how we could actually damage reform movements, for instance, by intervening and botching the effort. He attempts to present a panoramic vision of U.S. interests in the Middle East but bogs down in details unrelated to the national-security issues affecting Americans. He could have easily cut a third of the text and made his case more powerfully by sticking to U.S. national interests instead of attempting to pile up more and more evidence that the Middle East is really, really bad. In his quest to develop a Grand Strategy for the region, however, he attempts to take on the issues of oil, the Arab-Israeli conflict, Palestine, the Arab world, political Islam, Iran, Iraq and terrorism by tying each issue to U.S. national interests and prescribing how to deal with them. The complexity is beyond his reach.

Pollack’s informal style is at times careless, and there are many instances of logorrhea. In addition, he occasionally follows odd tangents that do not support his core thesis. He quotes an obscure source, Abdul Hadi Palazzi, an Italian convert to Islam and co-founder of the Islam-Israel Fellowship, who asserts that the thirteenth-century sage Ibn Taymiyyah “flatly stated ‘there is no Muslim holy place in Jerusalem’” (p. 210). The use of this questionable authority in a book intended to generate enthusiasm for reforming the Muslim Middle East is ludicrous, particularly from an author attempting to enlist Islamic support for the reform effort.

Pollack has the temerity to make the following claim: “The only approach known to mankind to eradicate, and not merely suppress, the kind of problems experienced by the Muslim Middle East is to embrace a long-term process of reform — toward a dynamic educational system, toward a market-driven economy, and toward a more ‘modern’ pattern of social interaction” (p. 219). It is not obvious that his ideas are the only solution “known to mankind,” especially with the U.S. experiment in Iraq having met with such very limited success. Therein lies much of the problem with this book: too often a patronizing tone dominates where reason and sound analysis should apply.

Pollack is better at outlining the data that explain the problems in the area, such as how Washington should deal with Israel and America’s Arab allies. Regarding Israel, I can state categorically, along with all mainstream foreign-policy experts in the field, that the international community led by the United States stands firmly behind its security. Israel is a very powerful state with nuclear capabilities and an economy of global reach, particularly in technology, pharmaceuticals and weapons. It does not depend on authors like Pollack to survive, nor does it need to be depicted as a pathetic little nation living on charity or, as Pollack claims, the “moral debt” from the Holocaust. Israelis have every right to feel insecure, but the United States is unequivocal in its support for a thriving, healthy, independent and secure Israel. Yet Pollack contributes to the fear-mongering by ignoring the one thing the United States can do to enhance stability in the region: help Israel and the Palestinians reach a peace agreement that results in the creation of a Palestinian state and normalizes relations between Israel and the rest of its Arab neighbors.

Pollack writes that America’s Arab allies have only one positive attribute: “The simple fact is that we have few strategic interests in the Arab world beyond oil” (p. 57), although he goes to great lengths to warn us about the Islamists and what they can do to harm U.S. national interests. But any undergraduate can tell you that a population of 300-400 million people is also a potential market. The West Bank alone is a \$2-3 billion annual market for Israel. With or without oil, large populations are valuable to a capitalist country. And why does Pollack ignore the fact that Mecca and Medina are important to over a billion Muslims throughout the world, when it is clear that they pay close attention to Israel’s treatment of their fellow Muslims?

The term “Grand Strategy” appears many times throughout the book, but little attention is given to just how to get the whole Muslim Middle East to begin a 20-30-year reform project aimed at destroying all the existing regimes — whose cooperation we need and whose interests will not be served by such a project. The benefits of reform in the Middle East must accrue to those most affected by it, and U.S. national interests may not be on their list of priorities. This does not come up in Pollack’s writing. Arab societies are not homogeneous; they may speak the same language, but they vary dramatically by tribe, ethnicity, religion and sect. Taking the region apart and putting it back together, even if it were feasible, might produce consequences that would undermine any outsider’s Grand Strategy.

**Beyond Regionalism? Regional Cooperation, Regionalism and Regionalization in the Middle East**, Cilja Harders and Matteo Legrenzi, eds. Ashgate, 2008. 222 pages. \$99.95.

*James A. Russell, professor, Naval Postgraduate School*

It is popular in international-relations circles to assert that the 9/11 attacks represented a watershed event in global affairs and that the international system somehow changed fundamentally in their aftermath. While this assertion makes for a nice sound bite and has been used as the basis for some interesting entertainment by television commentators masquerading as serious students of international affairs, one is left with nagging doubts about the veracity of the assertion. This is particularly true in the Middle East. How exactly has the region been transformed by al-Qaeda's murderously spectacular assault on the "far enemy" at the World Trade Center and the Pentagon and the follow-up attacks around the world? While the attacks certainly increased the world's awareness of the region's decades-old battles between the regional regimes and militant Islamists, it's not clear that the attacks had any measurable impact within the region except perhaps to further cement the regimes' resolve (and those of the outside powers) to throw a few more Islamists into their already crowded jails.

Cilja Harders and Matteo Legrenzi take the opposite view in their edited volume *Beyond Regionalism?* The authors assert that the region today is "confronted with a contradictory package of military intervention within the framework of the 'war on terror,' forced democratization, new types of security cooperation, and at least rhetorically strengthened Arab-European relations" (p. 3). These factors, according to the authors, have dramatically affected the dynamics of regional cooperation across the economic and political domains.

The ambitious and eclectic set of essays in the volume apply a variety of international-relations theories to address the phenomenon of pan-Arabism or Islamism and a number of detailed case studies to examine such regional organizations as the League of Arab States, the Arab Maghreb Union, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the Greater Arab Free Trade Area. What do the authors mean by the term "regionalism"? In his excellent survey of the literature (pp. 13-32), Fred Lawson draws upon a formulation in which "regionalism refers to the general phenomenon as well as the ideology of regionalism, that is, the urge for regional order, either in a particular geographical area or as a type of world order. There may be many regionalisms" (p. 16).

The editors correctly note that scholars reflexively and mistakenly dismiss the region's attempts to build effective regionwide institutions. The essays in this volume shed much interesting theoretical and empirical light on this heretofore largely ignored phenomenon. As is made clear in the volume's impressive series of essays, the region's variegated approaches to regionalization have yielded interesting theoretical and policy-relevant results for scholars studying global economic and political integration. One of the volume's particularly interesting essays is by Simone Ruiz and Valentin Zahrnt: "Regional Ambitions,

Institutions, Social Capital — Regional Cooperation and External Actors" (pp. 51-67). This essay builds a model of regional integration and regionalization that draws upon constructivist and rationalist approaches to international relations. Their model suggests that the prospects for further regional cooperation in the Mediterranean area are likely to gather momentum in the coming years. Another strong chapter, "Did the GCC Make a Difference? Institutional Realities and (Un)Intended Consequence" (pp. 104-124), is Matteo Legrenzi's analysis of the Gulf Cooperation Council, a subregional organization created in 1981 during the Iran-Iraq War to coordinate the reactions of the Gulf States to the crisis. Legrenzi argues that, while the GCC never materialized into the instrument of collective security that many had hoped for, the organization has helped build a distinctive subregional identity that has transformed regional politics. Legrenzi builds a meticulous case chronicling the GCC's slow but steady maturation into a viable instrument of regional economic and political integration. While not proceeding at breakneck speed, plans for an integrated market and common currency eventually will be realized.

This reviewer found Monica Gariup's argument framing the concept of regionalization in the context of neorealist international theory to be particularly relevant to the regional environment. Gariup argues that the GCC actions have been dominated by "the systemic logic of the balance of power." She concludes that the GCC is "thus a mere exercise in institutionalized cooperation rather than an incipit of a veritable regional security" (p. 82). The continual presence of external hegemony, argues Gariup, is a systemic factor limiting the development of mature regional-security institutions that can be viewed by states as viable instruments of regional security and stability.

As revealed by the volume's authors, the field of regionalization in the Middle East is indeed a rich and largely unmined trove for analysis and study by scholars of international relations. It is less clear, however, that any of the trends for or against regionalization either were strengthened or weakened in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. One vehicle that could perhaps have addressed this issue in the volume might have been the region's sudden and renewed interest in nuclear power and, in the Gulf at least, the use of the GCC as a political instrument to convey that interest to the global community. This quibble aside, the volume offers a series of rich theoretical and empirical studies on the largely ignored field of regionalization in the Middle East and deserves space on the bookshelves of all serious regional scholars.

**The Politics of Chaos in the Middle East**, by Olivier Roy. Columbia University Press, 2008. 160 pages. \$24.95, cloth.

*Jane Kinninmont, Economist Intelligence Unit, London*

This latest book by Olivier Roy, an eminent French scholar of political Islam, essentially argues that "the vision of a Muslim world at war with the West is a fantasy." There is no united Muslim world, and different Muslim groupings relate to the West in very different ways. Roy's stated aim is to contextualize the conflicts of the Middle East while

analyzing their relationship to issues of democracy and multiculturalism within Western society. The point is to show that these conflicts cannot be explained by any “geostrategy of Islam” or grand plot by a (non-existent) unified Islamic force. It is a book intended to appeal to a wide audience, being concise, readable and well-written (for which thanks must also go to the translator, Ros Schwartz). Roy also makes a clear case for why it is important for the West to understand the nuanced nature of Islamic politics: in order to develop policies that work.

Roy embarks on a critique of recent Western policy towards the Middle East and the Muslim world, starting with the U.S. “war on terror.” His criticisms are searing, if not unprecedented, targeting the “Third worldists” of the left who opposed the Iraq war but fell back on an anti-imperialism that merely defended dictators, and eventually moving on to European states’ varying policies towards Muslim immigrants and cultural integration. Roy suggests that all these approaches towards policy are confused because they are based on false dichotomies, on a muddled understanding of Islam and the Middle East, and on conflations of different political trends (thus, a schoolgirl wearing a headscarf equals a revolutionary). He argues that the “war on terror” has been paralyzed by its indiscriminate selection of enemies: “It is not possible simultaneously to wage war on al-Qaeda, the Taliban, Hezbollah, Hamas, Syria and Iran, and the Muslim Brotherhood, veiled women, inner-city imams, etc.” The reality of the Middle East, he argues, is that conflicts frequently pit Muslims against Muslims because of a complex and unstable mixture of ideological, national and ethnic divisions and rivalries, and, increasingly, because of Shia-Sunni differences exploited by rival states.

In a whirlwind tour of 90 years of Middle Eastern history, Roy notes that the Arabs sided with Britain against the great Muslim empire of the Ottomans and outlines what he sees as three “traumas” that have made pan-Arabism problematic. The first is the Sykes-Picot agreement through which France and Britain carved up the post-Ottoman Middle East into new states that suited their interests, despite their earlier promises to create a vast Hashemite kingdom. The second is the creation of the state of Israel and the failure of Arab armies to defeat it. The third is the destabilization of the balance between Shiism and Sunnism as a result of the Iranian revolution in 1979, and, more recently, the overthrow of Saddam Hussein. (At the same time, Roy notes that a new generation of Shia leaders were becoming more assertive in the Arab world even before the Iranian revolution, raising the question of how balanced this “balance” was.) He goes on to identify various political trends and groupings in the modern Middle East and broader Muslim world, arguing that nationalisms — including Islamist nationalisms like Hamas or the Chechen separatist movement — have more force than pan-Islamism. In perhaps the most in-depth and focused part of the book, he details the different interest groups in Iran and discusses the possible ramifications of a U.S. attack. In the final, shortest chapter, he assesses the background of typical al-Qaeda recruits and argues that the group is a collection of deracinated migrants and converts that acts more as a parasite on other people’s conflicts than a force capable of creating its own battlefields. In this last chapter, he is essentially revisiting the territory covered in far greater depth in his 2006 book, *Globalized Islam*.

In the current book, all of these themes are touched upon in a little over 150 pages. What it offers in breadth and brevity, it cannot offer in depth of analysis. Roy is an acknowledged expert on Islamist movements who has covered Iran for more than two decades, and he certainly has years of deep, detailed analysis to inform his writing here, full of assurance and conviction, as well as rhetorical flair. However, the details of Roy's arguments and rebuttals to the counterarguments are often lacking. In several key parts of the book, he makes declarations rather than demonstrations. One of the most striking examples is the paragraph summarizing his arguments for the failure of political Islam:

It does not work, as all the aftermaths of victory show (Iran, Afghanistan), and there are complex reasons for this: political, national and even ethnic or tribal loyalties have a more powerful hold than ideology; societies become secular when faced with the impasse of religious ideology; corruption makes the myth of the virtuous leader meaningless, etc.

Each subclause is a subject worthy of numerous books. Perhaps the reason that Roy does not delve deeper into these arguments here is that he has already outlined them in previous books, notably *The Failure of Political Islam* (1995). Yet that book has proven controversial, and the argument is by no means closed. If political Islam could be said to have failed 13 years ago, why are there so many parties still inspired by it? The generation of Iranians who were not born at the time of the Islamic revolution are often said to be more pro-American than their counterparts elsewhere in the region, lending support to Roy's argument that religious states prompt secular societies. But the same argument hardly seems to apply to Saudi Arabia. Certainly, there are young Saudis rebelling against religious restrictions, yet the kingdom's one experiment with elections in this century (the partial municipal polls of 2005) saw a strong vote for Islamist candidates endorsed by leading clerics. In what terms has political Islam failed?

Roy's view of its failure appears to rest on the existence of conceptual weaknesses in the theory of an Islamic state and on the compromises made by states that have, in various ways, made Islamic laws and principles part of their foundation. Thus, in the current book, Roy returns to *Political Islam's* distinction between "political Islamists" such as the Muslim Brotherhood, who see Islam as a political ideology and campaign for an Islamic state, and "neofundamentalists," whose priority is sharia law as the sacrosanct cornerstone of society. As he sees it, Islamists have two options: a "Muslim-style Christian democracy" that could potentially govern a state (his example is Turkey's AKP) or "neofundamentalism interested in neither state nor nation" (he includes Salafism and the Taliban here). Roy argues that these two trends are essentially separate and contradictory, "even if there is some overlap or interference." Yet perhaps the two categories would be better viewed as two extremes on a single spectrum with multiple shades of grey in between, given the array of movements inspired by Islam and the overlap he acknowledges between the two strands that he identifies. Roy explains what he sees as the inherent contradiction between the two: for the neofundamentalists, the state cannot legislate, except on issues not covered by the Sharia, whereas for any government, accepting this would be tantamount to "suicide." Thus, Muslim states have come up with a range of compromises, frequently relegating the Sharia to the family and personal-status

spheres; or, in Saudi Arabia, declaring the Sharia to be state law (and making the Quran the official constitution), while also creating separate rules to govern political succession; or, in Iran under Khomeini, asserting that politics sometimes supersedes religious duties (as in Khomeini's ban on pilgrimages to Saudi Arabia in 1987). As governments cannot fully accept the Sharia, Roy argues, radical groups can gain ground by promising that only they would truly implement it. His implication is that this position is only really sustainable in opposition.

Roy argues later in the book that pan-Islamism, pan-Shiism and pan-Arabism all present imaginary political utopias that are “always a failure.” They compete and overlap with each other and are at a remove from actual political practices based on nationalism and more traditional solidarity groups (notably tribes or clans). Roy suggests that the gap between the utopian ideals and actual practice is the source of a great deal of frustration — and, indeed, conspiracy theories. All this suggests that Roy is fully aware of the currency that pan-Islamism still has as an ideal, even though he speaks of its failure in practice. Given the influence of Islamist ideas, the lack of exemplary Islamic states does not appear to be sufficient proof of the failure of political Islam. After all, similar arguments could be made for the “failure” of free-market economics, given that no country has created an entirely free market embodying the ideals of “perfect competition,” or of democracy in its broad sense of rule “of the people, by the people, for the people,” rather than its narrow sense of elected government.

That said, Roy provides an interesting assessment of the shortcomings of Western political ideologies as well as Islamist viewpoints. He probes the strategic functions of political ideologies, illustrating the ways in which the internal coherence of sets of beliefs can be limited by the desire to adhere to a predetermined way of thinking or to gain distance from a rival ideology. He examines the way that right- and left-wing political thinkers responded to the Iraq War, a conflict that muddied some of the traditional distinctions between left and right (being opposed by both anti-imperialists and traditional conservatives). He also analyses the strategic functions of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's aggressively anti-Israel rhetoric, which he sets in the context of a broader power play — Iran's attempt to gain regional influence by delegitimizing the Gulf Arab monarchies, which have largely made *de facto* peace with Israel. To this end, Iran also needs to defuse the Shia-Sunni tensions that can otherwise be exploited by counterefforts to delegitimize Iran. To this end, there is a logical motive for adopting the classic Arab cause of opposing Israel, a position that the Arab world united behind while Iran was still an Israeli ally. For similar reasons, Roy argues that it is in Iran's interest to avoid all-out sectarian warfare in Iraq, which could unify Arab nationalists, Gulf monarchies and Sunni militants against an Iran isolated in a “Shia ghetto.”

Roy touches on an array of other related issues in this book, which is structured rather like a collection of interconnected essays. It addresses a range of conflicts and controversies that Roy argues are falsely conflated and includes many brief discussions of specialized areas such as the divisions that Western sponsorship creates in Egyptian academia, or the problems with the view that America invaded Iraq for oil. These discussions are wide-ranging and interesting but some are frustratingly brief, with little time spent delving into the complex issues being invoked (for instance, the functioning of the oil market); others

seem to be based on more extensive experience of which just a glimpse is being given here, such as the discussion of France's efforts to develop policies towards its own Muslim immigrants by working with North African governments (not necessarily recognized as legitimate by the immigrants themselves).

From a policy point of view, one of Roy's key conclusions is that the war on terror has failed because the enemy is ill-defined, especially because the pre-existing desire to attack Iraq was shoehorned into it. This is hardly a new argument, but it is rendered more compelling by the fact that Roy quotes a personal discussion with Paul Wolfowitz in November 2001, in which Wolfowitz apparently said he feared Afghanistan could distract the United States from its true objective of Iraq. He argues that negotiating with some of the actors opposed to U.S. interests in the Middle East, including Hamas and Hezbollah, is not only desirable, but inevitable. Roy adds that, if Western governments refuse to do this, there is a good chance that the intelligence services will instead make undercover deals — citing hostage negotiations as an example. He also argues that, although U.S. efforts at democratization in the region may have been badly thought out, they were neither wholly ineffectual nor entirely unwelcome. However, he argues, there can be no democracy without political legitimacy, and “for the time being there is no democratic alternative to the moderate Islamists.” This highlights once again that the apparent failures of political Islam that Roy has spent more than a decade dissecting have not prevented Islamist movements from gaining influence in the Middle East.

**Global Rebellion: Religious Challenges to the Secular State, from Christian Militias to al Qaeda**, by Mark Juergensmeyer. University of California Press, 2007. 384 pages. \$27.50, hardcover.

*Lawrence Rubin, lecturer, Crown Center for Middle East Studies, Brandeis University*

Mark Juergensmeyer, professor of sociology at the University of California, Santa Barbara, has written another important work usefully integrating his previous conceptual contributions and insights on religion and political violence with some new empirical evidence. His detached analysis of vast amounts of ethnographic data across diverse geographic and cultural landscapes is a welcome change from the proliferation of “terrorologist” literature published after 9/11.

In *Global Rebellion*, Juergensmeyer seeks to explain why violent religious conflict has afflicted the world so profoundly in recent years. Comparing groups across religion and geographic regions, including Hindu Nationalists, militant Zionists, and Muslim extremists, he argues that the collapse of secular national identities and the loss of faith in the moral basis of the secular state have provoked religious activism around the world. He contends that globalization and the upsurge of religious political movements are contributing factors to the global rebellion, the violent manifestations of religious imperatives to establish a political order.

For Juergensmeyer, the fundamental political tension between secular and religious ideology has its roots in the history of modern nationalism. He sees religion and secular nationalism as rival “ideologies of order,” frameworks for understanding and justifying the social and political order. At their core, these ideologies look to different sources for what constitutes legitimate political authority. For a religious-activist ideal type, the ultimate source of legitimate authority is divine, possibly from a revealed text and/or its accepted interpretations. For a secular-nationalist ideal-type, the legitimate source of political authority and social order may be based on some combination of natural law, national-historical myth of peoplehood or popular will. Accordingly, these divergent sources may produce different boundaries of the political community.

The rejection of secular nationalism as the legitimate order is the driving force of religious nationalist rebellions since the end of the Cold War. As Juergensmeyer tells us in his first and highly influential book, *The New Cold War: Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State* (1993), “religious nationalism” is the synthesis of religion and the idea of the nation-state. The readers of this journal will be particularly interested in how and why he locates the Middle East on the front line of religious rebellion. He suggests that the Middle East is somewhat exceptional in that the goals of these rebellions are both “national and transnational,” directed toward “both the local needs and a supranational ideal. . . . The longing for a global state of religious harmony is an old Islamic dream” (p. 40). Groups such as al-Gamaa al-Islamiyya in Egypt, Hamas in Palestine, and the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) in Algeria may have the local political goal to establish an Islamic state within the borders of their homeland as part of a broader, somewhat utopian goal of reuniting the Muslim community (*umma*). Adding another layer of nuance, Juergensmeyer points out that groups such as al-Qaeda envisage a transnational ideological state. Yet this categorization appears to test the limits of Juergensmeyer’s own working definition of nationalism. Al-Qaeda members and others with a similar ideology share a collective identity based on a religious community that transcends state borders. In contrast, he defines nationalism as “the expressions of identity based on shared assumptions regarding why a community constitutes a nation and why the state that rules it is legitimate” (p. 6).

If the Middle East is the front line of religious rebellion, the legacy of the Iranian revolution must be its heart. Juergensmeyer calls the Iranian revolution the paradigmatic religious nationalist rebellion because religious activists were able to realize their aim of establishing a religious state and society while appealing to a transnational or supranational community. The revolution inspired and impressed religious activists and figures across sectarian, religious, ethnic, ideological and geographic divisions. Attesting to the similarities among religious activist ideologies where one would not expect them, Rabbi Meir Kahane, the founder of Kach, the most militant Zionist organization, related that he felt closer to Ayatollah Khomeini’s thinking than to that of many secular Jews because of the relevance of religion for everyday life (p. 5).

Ultimately, two underlying questions motivate Juergensmeyer’s research agenda: Why have people turned toward religion, and what makes religion and politics such a deadly combination? He explains that religion provides a solution to the malaise associated with

the failure of secular nationalism to protect one's community's moral, economic and social foundations (p. 254). Religion has become the ideology of empowerment and protest while serving as the vehicle through which violence is expressed (p. 254). At the individual level, Juergensmeyer asserts that religion enables one to overcome society's normative constraints against killing by legitimating and justifying political violence. Religion can be used to demonize one's opponent, and it can offer personal rewards through redemption, religious merit and heavenly luxuries. To explain the spiritual motivations for killing, Juergensmeyer reintroduces his well-known concept of "cosmic war" (*Terror in the Mind*; University of California Press, 2000). The idea is that the individual views religious violence as a ritual that enables him/her to symbolically participate in a cosmic war, a metaphysical struggle of good versus evil. Through a violent reenactment of an ancient myth or ritual, the individual is empowered to create some sense of order in this world by transcending.

At the end of the book, Juergensmeyer offers policy recommendations and thoughts about the future. He believes the future of religious rebellions will be determined by how they develop and how the United States and Europe respond to them: "If the rebels could perceive the West as changing its attitude — respecting at least some aspects of their positions — perhaps their stance would be less vindictive" (p. 260). The war on terror is framed as a battle of good versus evil, and many Muslims perceive it as a war against Islam.

Recognizing that many states facing violent rebellions lack sufficient political legitimacy, Juergensmeyer concedes that religion may be necessary to confer political legitimacy on challenged regimes in some parts of the world. Thus, he concludes that the revival of tolerant forms of religion may be the panacea for the excesses of religious extremism.

Juergensmeyer is correct to remind us that all is not lost if religious activists acquire more political power. First, most of them, even if they share a religious tradition, rarely cooperate. Second, there is ample empirical evidence that religious activists may actually become more moderate when they attain power (p. 263). Yet this guarded optimism should be countered by the fear that there will be "one man, one vote, one election." No one knows what would have happened if the FIS had been allowed to take power in Algeria. Additionally, although Hassan al-Turabi's "Islamic model" in Sudan ultimately failed, the state became more radical, fought a brutal war in the south causing thousands of casualties, and became a safe haven for international terrorists such as Osama bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri and many others.

Resolving religious conflicts is, of course, another subject readers would like to know about. Juergensmeyer suggests that if the conflict over Northern Ireland could be solved, so could Kashmir and possibly the more complex Israeli-Palestinian conflict. "It would not take a huge stretch of the imagination to think that they [violent situations] could, especially when the issue is largely over contested land." This reviewer, however, holds a much more pessimistic view. In essence, Kashmir, and to a greater extent the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, are battles over "sacred space," a place with religious significance. Although the conflict in Northern Ireland has had a religious component, it was a national conflict over territory and not a religious conflict. In fact, Theobald Wolf Tone, the father of Irish nationalism, who led the bloody Irish Rebellion of 1798, was a Protestant.

The difficulty in resolving violent religious conflict over sacred space is that one group, whose membership is likely transnational, claims indivisible ownership based on a divine mandate. The epicenter of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, a recent ethno-national struggle, is over Jerusalem. The sacred Old City contains the holiest site in Judaism, the Temple Mount, revered in Judaism, the location of the first and second temples. For Muslims, Jerusalem holds al-Haram al-Sharif, the location of the Prophet Mohammed's journey to Jerusalem from Mecca and his subsequent ascent to heaven. But this holy place is also a painful reminder that it is occupied by Jews, not Muslims. While Kashmir is spotted with religious shrines for Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists, the most important aspect of this conflict is that the land has become sacred space for Muslim extremists who believe they must obey a divine imperative to defend the umma and dar al-Islam through jihad. In contrast, the Irish conflict attracted mostly financial and some military support from the Irish diaspora, but it was not an international Catholic issue. Thus, the extent of involvement of a group's diaspora is one indicator of the mobilization potential of a religious conflict over sacred space and a window into how battles over sacred space are easily framed as a cosmic war. These are significant challenges to resolving religious conflicts that cannot be disregarded.

An interesting question, perhaps beyond the scope of the book, is how the idea of cosmic war can become less attractive. When do religious militants become less violent? Presumably, when the needs that attracted them in the first place are satisfied. Juergensmeyer does not offer a complementary explanation for the conditions under which a religious group becomes less violent. For example, he briefly mentions the groups al-Gamaa al-Islamiyya and al-Jihad in the context of religious (national) rebellion in Egypt. He does not, however, tell us much about the violent insurgency from 1992-97 or why these groups renounced violence. While it is difficult to determine the extent to which brutal repression by the Egyptian state and harsh prison conditions affected the groups' decisions, it is clear that a counter-ideological campaign played a significant role. Is there hope for reversing the appeal of religious political violence and cosmic war? How local governments respond, not just the United States and Europe, will also have a major effect on the trajectory of global rebellions.

This book is an important resolve for policy makers and academics. Juergensmeyer demonstrates that ideas, culture and perceptions are important currencies for political behavior and why religion, as a political ideology, must be taken seriously.

**The New Turkish Republic: Turkey as a Pivotal State in the Muslim World**, by Graham E. Fuller. United States Institute of Peace, 2008. 197 pages. \$12.00, paperback

*Kamal Beyoghlow, professor of strategy, Middle East and North Africa, and Islamic studies, National War College (His views are entirely his own.)*

*The New Turkish Republic*, written by seasoned Middle East affairs specialist Graham Fuller, is a compilation of essays on the evolution of Turkish politics since the demise of the Ottoman Empire. The central theme of the book is that Turkey is struggling

to return to its natural Middle Eastern and, more accurately, Ottoman and Islamic roots and traditions after years of trials and tribulations as a “Western” state. The book is organized thematically and is rich in historical analysis of events and personalities that have come to characterize Turkey after World War I, a clearly ambitious undertaking. The author asserts that World War I was a defining event for the evolution of the Turkish Republic from a universally Islamic entity to a modern secular state based on the ideology of its founder, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk.

The book is organized into three parts and contains 18 chapters plus an introduction and postscript. The first part focuses on domestic politics. The second focuses on Turkey’s relations with its neighbors and its troubled relations with Europe (including NATO), the United States and Central Asia. The last part focuses on Turkey’s future. The book relies on several primary Turkish sources and quotes many Turkish scholars, lending the central argument more credibility. The chapters are a blend of Turkey’s evolving history and political dynamics. The author uses historical events to explain and predict Turkey’s growing role in regional and international politics. His approach is both cognitive and pedagogical, with primary emphasis on teaching. On page 10, for example, he states that he “will identify the key political, cultural and psychological events that have influenced the tumultuous ride Turkey has experienced over the last hundred and fifty years.”

The strength lies in Fuller’s ability to flesh out conflicting political forces within Turkey, particularly the rise and fall of the Islamist Welfare Party under former Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan and the current governing Justice and Development party (AKP) under Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. The reader cannot escape the conclusion that Turkey’s political and social dynamics are related directly to structural problems connected with prevailing tensions between secularism and religion, state and society, and modernity and tradition. Kemalism is partly to blame for this political malaise, but there are many other factors at play. According to the author, Turkey is far too complicated to be explained on the basis of any single factor. Its rich culture, language, and heritage form the basis of the nation-state today. The author is fully aware of how historical events have come to shape the Turkish character and personality, if not the nation-state itself. He clearly understands the extent to which the Ottoman Empire, and before it the Mongol Dynasty, are internalized and etched to the contemporary Turkish psyche. One of the most impressive characteristics of this book is its “factoids.” At times, the work reads like a “mini” reference encyclopedia — excellent reading for undergraduate students.

A bigger question that emerges from this book is whether Turkey’s Islamic democratic experiment is a good governance model for restless Muslims elsewhere. Here the book presents an important theme — democratic secularism, a favorite term of the current ruling AKP — in which Islam, including political Islam, is seen as co-existing with the secular state. However, such co-existence remains problematic even for Turkey, as seen in the July 30, 2008, Constitutional Court decision that fell short of dismantling the AKP but deprived it of a sizeable portion of its funding entitlements (there is no tradition of independent political fundraising in Turkey). Political parties rely on state funding for operational purposes, but they must conform to the Kemalist secular tenet of the constitution, particularly the provision that prohibits injecting religion — Islam — into the political

process. The significance of the Constitutional Court's decision is that Islamist political parties in Turkey and elsewhere will be constrained by secular forces if they are seen as threatening the *status quo* or entrenched political forces. Another theme that this book evokes is interfaith dialogue between Muslims and non-Muslims. The Fetthulla Gulen Movement (pp. 56-66) points to efforts on the part of the AKP to blend moderate Islam with Western education and tolerance. The latter movement remains suspect in Turkey, however, because hard-core Kemalists and their military supporters view it as a backdoor effort to change the political consciousness of Turkish society.

The recent court decision is likely to constrain political and social reform as long as Kemalists and their powerful military allies continue to use Turkey's constitution as a barrier to political change. Important proposed AKP amendments to the constitution have come up against a stone wall and, as a result of the July 2008 court ruling, the political future of Turkey is murkier than ever. On the other hand, suppressing moderate Islamists at will and without cause may no longer be an option for the predominantly secular military. This is because Islamists have managed to develop a successful economic and social strategy. Their popularity is connected directly with their ability to address and solve many social problems, including past regime corruption, political abuse and excess. They are indeed a populist movement, ironically one of the key tenets of Kemalism. Moreover, the current power struggle between Kemalists and AKP supporters means that Turkey's ability to address and resolve big issues such as the integration of the Kurds and other minorities, amendment of the "Kemalist" constitution to meet the demands of a changing Turkish society, the reunification of Cyprus and Turkey's membership in the EU will all be set aside for now. The AKP suffered a stinging setback early in 2008 when the Constitutional Court overturned an AKP-sponsored law lifting the ban on wearing the veil at public universities. However, on Iraq and the People's Workers party (PKK) terrorist activities in the Southeast, the AKP and the Kemalists appear to be in agreement. Both want to show resolve in the face of terrorist threats. The AKP is bending over backward to show that it also espouses nationalist tendencies, albeit more moderate ones than most Kemalists. For now, however, the AKP will simply muddle through and hope that the economic boom, an important source of its legitimacy and popularity, continues. Given Turkey's growing regional importance, national reconciliation between AKP and the Kemalist-backed military is critical at this juncture, lest Turkey lose an opportunity to advance its regional interests on many levels: political, economic, diplomatic, and even military.

The author's final contribution centers on the nature and character of the historical relationship between Turkey and the United States. Fuller implies that this relationship is structurally sound but that Turkey and its people do not necessarily see eye to eye with the United States on every policy issue, nor should they do so. Indeed, these policy differences are healthy. In the long run, they help test the depth and durability of the strategic partnership that both sides desire and at the same time reduce future misunderstandings. The policy recommendations to Washington in chapter 18 provide a basis for future deliberations based on trust and good will, an appropriate point.

Overall, this is a solid book, a must-read for those interested in the contemporary Middle East, and an especially good reference on the evolution of modern Turkey.

**The Kurds Ascending: The Evolving Solution to the Kurdish Problem in Iraq and Turkey**, by Michael M. Gunter. Palgrave Macmillan, 2008. xiv + 178 pages.

*David Romano, assistant professor of international studies, Rhodes College; author of The Kurdish Nationalist Movement (2006).*

*The Kurds Ascending* draws on much of Professor Gunter's most recent work to provide a very up-to-date, riveting account of the monumental changes occurring vis-à-vis the Kurdish issue in Iraq and Turkey today. Written in clear, accessible language, the work does a fine job of focusing on the issues most central to understanding why the Kurds in Iraq are ascending and why a peaceful solution to "the Kurdish issue" may finally be emerging in both Iraq and Turkey. The book works particularly well for readers who want more information, analysis and facts than journalistic treatments of the topic generally provide, but who do not want the overly dense jargon of many academic publications. At 178 pages, Gunter's book reads quickly and easily, while managing to remain extremely informative and interesting.

Although Iran and Syria include some 7.5 million Kurds between them, *The Kurds Ascending* focuses on the 12-15 million Kurds of Turkey and the 4-4.5 million Kurds of Iraq (p. 2). Gunter does this mainly because the situation of Kurds in Iran and Syria has seen much less in the way of recent socio-political changes. The chapter on "The Other Kurds of Iran and Syria" (Chapter 7) thus offers the reader a brief eight pages. The Kurds of Iraq, however, have enjoyed gains that can be described as nothing short of revolutionary, with constitutionally recognized autonomy and a major role in the top political offices of the Iraqi central state in Baghdad. Although the Kurds of Turkey have yet to witness such seismic political changes, Ankara's continued attempts to fulfill European Union accession criteria (particularly the Copenhagen Criteria, p. 89) have also led to a number of hopeful but still tentative openings in the Turkish state's approach to the Kurds.

The first chapter ("Historical Overview") provides a concise introduction for those unfamiliar with the Kurds, their history, their demographic distribution, and the sequence of twentieth century events that led to their present situation in Iraq and Turkey. The second chapter ("The Iraqi Kurds' Federalism Imperative") offers an extremely valuable discussion of the pros and cons of the various types of federalism that the emerging Iraqi state may adopt. Majoritarian ("also known as mono-national, non-ethnic, territorial or administrative") federations such as the United States tend to place more power in the hands of the central government, and "regional boundaries are purposely drawn to deny self-government to national or ethnic minorities" (p. 22). After examining this kind of federal model, Gunter argues against its appropriateness for Iraq: "Non-ethnic territorial federalism...would not be able to prevent ethnic or sectarian majorities from dominating regional units unless absurdly crescent-shaped units running from north to south were artificially created....Partitioning the Kurdistan region in the name of non-ethnic federalism would be a sure recipe for renewed conflict" (p.23). Ethnic binational federalism, however, risks pitting the Iraqi Kurdistan region against a much larger Arab Iraq in a kind of zero-sum politics that "would present few opportunities for shifting alliances among different ethnic and sectarian groups" (p. 24).

Instead of either type of federalism, Gunter explains the advantages of a kind of “asymmetrical federalism” that combines elements of ethnic federalism (the Iraqi Kurdistan region) with territorial federalism, encompassing several different Arab Iraqi administrative regions. To illustrate how such a system works, Gunter discusses the example of Canadian federalism. In this case, on most political issues at least some of Canada’s nine English provinces can find common political cause with Quebec, which enjoys a number of special autonomous rights and powers justified by its francophone ethnic particularity. As someone born and raised in Quebec, this reader was very pleased to see Gunter’s solid familiarity with Canadian federalism and adept application of the example to a discussion of possible Iraqi political solutions. Although Iraq does not resemble Canada in many ways, a federal political structure that can both reassure a threatened ethnic minority and encourage cross-sectarian political alliances has much to commend it. Gunter makes clear how such a system may in fact offer a resolution to Kurdish disaffection within Iraq and avert civil war.

The third chapter (“The Changing Dynamics in the Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraq”) discusses the internal politics of Iraqi Kurdistan, including the up-and-coming new generation of Iraqi Kurdish leaders and efforts to unite the two main fiefdoms of the area. Gunter also discusses problems of corruption and patron-client politics of the Kurdistan region, which led to riots in the town of Halabja recently.

The fourth chapter examines the changing situation of Kurds in Turkey following the 1999 capture of PKK (Kurdistan Workers’ Party) leader Abdullah Ocalan. This chapter actually transitions well into Chapter 5, which focuses on Turkey’s reform efforts aimed at gaining accession to the European Union. Gunter shows how Turkish reforms on paper sometimes led to genuine changes but more often failed to lead to any practical implementation on the ground or new approach to that state’s Kurdish minority. I would quibble, however, with his assertion that “there is no bargaining” regarding the Copenhagen Criteria required for EU membership: stability of democratic institutions, rule of law, human rights, minority rights (p. 93). If the EU states all genuinely came to feel that Turkish accession was in their interests rather than an unpopular threat, Turkey would probably enjoy a good deal of leeway in how vigorously it applied all the Copenhagen Criteria. As things stand, one must question whether or not even extensive, genuine and sincere implementation of Turkish reforms would suffice for EU accession.

Along with the chapter on Iraqi federalism, Chapter 6 (“Taming Turkey’s Deep State”) stands out as one of the strongest contributions of *The Kurds Ascending*. Gunter discusses how “an arcane or Deep State (Derin Devlet) developed alongside or parallel to the official state to enforce the ultimate principles of the Kemalist Republic....The colorful but enigmatic phrase Deep State referred to how this secret ‘other’ state had penetrated deeply into the political, security, and economic structures of the official state” (p. 105).

The Deep State comprises “elements from the military, security and judicial establishments wedded to a fiercely nationalist, statist ideology” (p. 108) who use any means, including all manner of violence, subterfuge and illegal activities, to defend the Turkish state, nation and establishment doctrine. Turks and Kurds talk about this shadow state incessantly, and all manner of conspiracy theories relate to it. As such, this very important

topic needs serious scrutiny but is not an easy one to address academically. In Gunter's words, "Although it usually would be judicious to avoid accepting conspiracy theories, one must also remember that even paranoids have enemies" (p. 108). Somehow, Gunter manages to combine reasoned speculation with what documented and unclassified sources exist on Turkey's Deep State and deliver a convincing account that reads like a spy novel. In English or French language sources, I know of no better discussion of the topic.

The Deep State's relevance to the Kurdish issue, of course, should appear obvious: thousands of Kurdish activists and Turkish and Kurdish leftists, including a great many peaceful civil society leaders, have been murdered or disappeared over the years, and the perpetrators are never identified. Turkish liberalization and democratization, which would include a rethinking of minority rights, overly broad anti-terror laws and limits to free speech, may not survive an enduring Deep State.

All of the chapters in *The Kurds Ascending* are based in whole or in part on recent articles Professor Gunter has published and now updated. This has the advantage of allowing readers to read only some chapters of particular interest, should they wish, since each chapter stands alone fairly well. The disadvantage lies in the fact that the book does not read fluidly from cover to cover, with the possible exception of chapters 4-5. No overarching theory or narrative device unites the contents. Gunter makes no pretension to offering any grand theories, however. Instead, he offers readers finely reasoned analysis and explanation, in clear and effective prose, of the most recent and interesting trends affecting Kurds in Iraq and Turkey.

If there were one thing that might improve Gunter's book, it would be a longer, more in-depth and predictive conclusion. At a length of two pages, the current conclusion misses an opportunity to discuss a great number of issues derived from the preceding chapters. What would some of the worst-case scenarios look like in Turkey or Iraq, if accommodation of minimal Kurdish demands does not occur or fails? Will the pro-Islam ruling Justice and Development party (AKP) in Turkey remain democratic if it comes to feel more secure vis-à-vis the military and the Deep State? What might this mean for the Kurds of Turkey? What if Iraqi Kurdish leaders start to lose their grip on power and revert to pan-Kurdish dreams in an attempt to deflect popular attention from their shortcomings (if it was good enough for the Arab world in the 1960s, why not the Kurds in the twenty-first century?). These and other issues could have been discussed in a stronger conclusion. Even without such a chapter, however, *The Kurds Ascending* provides both specialists and laymen alike with an outstanding and clearly argued analysis of the evolving Kurdish problem.

**Torture Team: Rumsfeld's Memo and the Betrayal of American Values**, by Philippe Sands. Palgrave MacMillan, 2008. 249 pages, index to 254. \$26.95, hardcover.

*Mohammed Akacem, Metropolitan State College of Denver*

*Torture Team* is a fascinating book that ably and clearly navigates through legal memos and traces the origins of the decision to use torture on those captured and impris-

oned in Guantanamo. The author, an international lawyer with extensive experience in torture cases in other parts of the world, wonders how highly trained lawyers from the finest universities in the United States could have aided and abetted the use of torture, particularly when it violated what the author refers to as the “military interrogator’s bible”: the U.S. Army Field Manual. Even worse, the legal advice advanced by these experts was, according to the author, “inconsistent” with Article 3 of the Geneva Convention.

Sands’ story of how torture came to be used, and rules changed to accommodate those engaged in it, centers on detainee number 063, Mohammed Al-Qahtani. The author painstakingly recounts what detainee 063 endured in the effort to extract “valuable” information from him. Despite the fact that the world has ample evidence that torture does not produce worthwhile actionable intelligence, great efforts were made by different actors in this book to rewrite the rules and make a case for torture. It is not clear why such previous evidence was not convincing enough to those who insisted on rewriting the rules. Earlier this year, President Bush vetoed legislation that would have put a stop to harsh interrogation techniques, saying, “This is no time for Congress to abandon practices that have a proven track record of keeping America safe.”

The experience of other countries indicates otherwise. For example, during the bloody seven-year Algerian war of independence, France employed all kinds of torture techniques, as highlighted in *The Battle of Algiers*, yet acts of defiance against the French occupation continued. The French colonial authorities firmly believed that torture would provide information to prevent more terrorist acts, despite evidence to the contrary. Later, in the 1990s, it was Algeria’s turn to struggle with just how to deal with opponents of the regime who started a violent campaign against it. There was a split between what one would call the “no mercy” group and those who favored a dialogue. Throughout the 1970s, the British government struggled with how to deal with IRA detainees. When it was learned that “aggressive techniques of interrogation” were used, it turned a number of people off — even people who generally may have supported the policies of the British government.

Not only did the treatment of prisoners at Guantanamo and later Abu Ghraib turn people off in the United States and elsewhere in the world; it also did a lot to rally opposition to the war in Iraq and made it difficult for the friends of the United States to openly support its actions. It did much to discredit the United States as the beacon of democracy and moral values, particularly when the Bush administration was making so much of the need to introduce democracy in the Arab world.

The descent into the use of torture went straight from Guantanamo to Abu Ghraib. While still at Guantanamo, General Geoffrey Miller first received an oral version of the memo from Jim Haynes, legal counsel to Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, that outlined what was “now” allowed in terms of new interrogation techniques. This is the same memo that produced the memorable lines that Rumsfeld added at the bottom of the memo: “I stand for eight to ten hours a day. Why is standing limited to four hours?” We may never learn why it was limited to only four hours, but we later learned about the horrors of Abu Ghraib, where General Miller was transferred, and about his role in this. The ultimate goal of interrogation is to produce useful information. Those who know a

thing or two about torture, among them Senator John McCain, insist that it does not. McCain was tortured while a prisoner in Vietnam. Yet during the primaries, he made an eloquent case against waterboarding — one of the techniques used against the detainees at Guantanamo. He even chastised his then-opponent Governor Mitt Romney during the Republican debates.

What was at work was no less than an attempt, as the author puts it, at “decoupling Geneva and Guantanamo,” not to mention decoupling the U.S. Army Field Manual and Guantanamo. The author states that “Doug Feith [undersecretary of defense for policy], himself a lawyer, could not have been clearer when he told me that the intention was to remove constraints on interrogation. The policy should have been drawn up around the law; instead, the legal advice was fitted around the policy.”

The tragedy of September 11 clearly produced a sense of imminent threat and may have made it easier to bypass well-established rules against torture. The lawyers involved made it easier. It still did not change the fact that torture does not and did not provide much in terms of worthy intelligence, not to mention the cost to U.S. standing in the Middle East. Detainee 063 is a case in point. The “abuse” of this detainee started a year after he had been in captivity. What possible worthy information could he have imparted? Apparently not much.

The author concludes by stating that “September 11 gave rise to a conscious decision to set aside international rules constraining interrogations. That decision was motivated by a combination of factors, including fear and ideology and an almost visceral disdain for international obligations.” All of this was facilitated by some of the best legal minds that the best U.S. universities ever produced.

**The Dark Side: The Inside Story of How the War on Terror Turned into a War on American Ideals**, by Jane Mayer. Doubleday, 2008. 392 pages. \$27.50, hardcover.

*Milton Viorst, author of seven books on the Middle East, most recently Storm from the East: The Struggle between the Arab World and the Christian West*

When Jane Mayer’s *The Dark Side* was published a few months ago, it stunned reviewers with its revelations of torture and other abuses that government officials have committed since 9/11 in the name of the “War on Terror.” These ugly acts, painful to read about, were far more painful to the victims, but they were only part of the narrative. I do not recall reviewers telling me that the Bush administration inflicted these horrors in the context of a deliberate effort to shift the powers shared by the three branches of government into the hands of an absolutist president. The real hub of this book is the coup d’état attempted by George Bush’s minions, led by Vice President Dick Cheney, that nearly succeeded in transforming our constitutional system into a full-fledged tyranny.

Mayer, with great authority, makes the case that Cheney, a lifelong right-winger, entered the administration with a chip on his shoulder. He had concluded when he was a White House official in the Nixon administration, that the impeachment process had wiped

away the inherent power of the presidential office. Cheney was convinced it was in the national interest to get them back. A few years later, as a Republican congressman from Wyoming, he engaged in studies and dry runs with other conservatives on how presidential powers could be enhanced to equal the challenge of nuclear war. Fortunately, the country has not had to endure a nuclear catastrophe. But when 9/11 took place less than a year after Cheney assumed the vice-presidency, he had only to dust off his earlier plans and begin implementing them.

We know now that Cheney, in his first days, had been granted the national-security portfolio by a president who had no confidence in his own mastery of global affairs. Had Cheney been more attentive to the intelligence crossing his desk, and a little lucky, he might have headed off the 9/11 attack; Bin Laden's operatives had left plenty of crumbs along the path to the airport. But having failed to do so, he turned his attention, with Bush's enthusiastic backing, to making sure such an attack did not happen again. The Constitution was to be no obstacle. The White House shifted the country immediately to a war footing, consulting neither Bush's own cabinet nor Congress. Bush certainly gave no sustained thought to the plan's long-term ramifications. With Cheney in the lead, he ordered full-speed ahead, whatever the consequences.

More than a few of Mayer's sources told her that Cheney reacted out of an obsessive sense of danger, not just to the country but also to himself. Many found the personal measures embarrassing. Noisy construction equipment on the site of his official residence started rumors — given his passion for secrecy, they were never confirmed — that he was building an underground bomb shelter. In commuting to the White House, he was driven with sirens blaring in a motorcade surrounded by armed guards who varied the route daily to thwart assassins. Near him was a bag containing a gas mask and a biochemical survival suit. With a history of coronary problems dating back to 1978, Cheney rarely traveled, even to the office, without a personal physician.

Mayer also points out an anomaly in the Bush administration that I had not seen cited before. Though a government's chief duty is to enforce the law of the land, none of its top officials were lawyers — not the president, the vice president, the secretary of state, the secretary of defense or the national security adviser. Though lawyers, for whatever reason, may not be the most highly esteemed professionals in our society, it is fair to say that as a body they have been instilled during their education with veneration for the Constitution. Some of the lawyers who wound up at the administration's top echelon resigned out of disapproval of the course chosen by Cheney and Bush. But Cheney had no trouble finding others who were willing to follow his orders in devising legal justifications for his designs, no matter how abusive they were of the Constitution.

Chief among these lawyers was David Addington, who had been at his side since 1989, when the first President Bush appointed Cheney secretary of defense. An austere, dedicated, private man, Addington, now Cheney's legal counsel, yielded to no one in his unwavering authoritarian positions. Even before the smoke of 9/11 had cleared, he was ready to lay out an uncompromising agenda to combat terrorism. Oddly, under the constitution, neither Cheney nor Addington had line responsibilities, nor were there statutes that set out their powers. Yet they dominated the heads of the CIA, the FBI, the NSA

and the National Security Council by claiming to speak for a president who was more than content to support them. As his back-up, Addington found a Justice Department lawyer named John Yoo, who furnished opinions on the law that startled legal circles in effectively ruling out all presidential constraints. With Cheney at the core, Addington wielding the hatchet, and Yoo as the creative muse, Bush asked few questions but clearly reveled in being commander-in-chief of the war on terror.

This was the group that nullified American observance of international law, particularly the Geneva Convention governing the treatment of prisoners, arguing that the country was involved in a new kind of war. Cheney and Addington gave the United States torture, which they chose to call “enhanced interrogation,” as a matter of national policy; Yoo’s legal memos insisted torture was legal simply because the president said it was. The group also introduced terms like “waterboarding” and “rendition” into the national vocabulary, and places like Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo into our geographic consciousness. It set up a program of domestic spying that engaged in the unauthorized wire-tapping of American citizens. No one questions that Cheney’s program, details of which have leaked out as the months have passed, has shamed the United States in the eyes of the world, weakening our stature among both friends and foes.

But has this agenda at least brought the country closer to victory? In his State of the Union address in January 2003, Bush asserted that 3,000 suspected terrorists had been arrested, and, he added ominously, “Many others have met a different fate.” Even if the facts are true, has this course made America safer? On the issue of torture, or even protracted imprisonment in the black holes that America established, there is no data whatever that they have advanced the American cause. In 2003, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, one of Cheney’s inner circle, acknowledged that the United States had no way to measure whether it was winning the war on terror. Even today, Osama bin Laden remains at large, and a recent National Intelligence Estimate states that jihadists are still increasing in numbers and geographic distribution. If anything, the evidence suggests that Cheney’s agenda has done the country more harm than good.

Jane Mayer’s book is only one of many written since 2001 — and especially since the catastrophe that began in Iraq in 2003 — which suggest that, as horrible as the attack of 9/11 was, our ill-considered, all-out venomous response to it has only made matters worse. Mayer shines a light on how bad our culture, when it is careless, can be. Would that a new and wiser president will embark on repairing the damage, but undoing it will be a long and arduous task, at best.