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The American Way of Strategy: U.S. Foreign Policy and the American Way of Life

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BOOK REVIEWS

AN AMERICAN WAY FORWARD?

Lind, Michael. *The American Way of Strategy: U.S. Foreign Policy and the American Way of Life*. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2006. 259pp. \$24

This is a finely composed and extremely timely exposition on American grand strategy. Michael Lind, former editor of *The National Interest* and now a fellow at the New America Foundation, lays out an interesting thesis about a distinctly American strategic foundation. Where the late Russell Weigley described the “American way of war” (*The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy*, Indiana Univ. Press, 1977) as direct, offensive, and absolute, Lind argues that its strategic counterpart always strives to retain a more delicate internal balance. Operationally, the U.S. military seeks annihilation; strategically, U.S. foreign policy avoids absolutism in order to preserve a distinctly American and limited conception of government.

The real purpose of American strategy, according to this thesis, is the preservation of the American way of life by ensuring that the rise of a foreign hegemon does not inadvertently corrupt or sacrifice our own liberties at home. Lind argues that this American way of life is founded upon a constitutional order of checks and balances, a free-market economy not

unduly constrained by government’s reach or interference, and a sacrosanct focus on individual freedoms. The author’s worst nightmare is the rise of a foreign opponent that would trigger an internal reordering of American government that undercut essential liberties and its carefully constructed institutions.

Such an idea would not have been foreign to the founding fathers. Benjamin Franklin once noted that those who would sacrifice a bit of liberty for more security deserved neither. This anti-statist perspective may also be seen in Princeton professor Aaron Friedberg’s well regarded book *In the Shadow of the Garrison State* (2000). Friedberg demonstrates that U.S. Cold War success was achieved by tapping into the creativity of the American people and the vitality of the American economy without creating a state that arrogated too much authority or control. This anti-statist preference guided a series of U.S. administrations, even as the Soviet Union’s power continued to grow. Instead of becoming a garrison state, the United States ultimately outpaced its overly centralized and statist rival.

Lind contrasts his definition of the American creed—"republican liberalism"—against a set of alternative futures. These involve the rise of "Caesarism," the establishment of a garrison state, subjugation to a tributary status, and the emergence of a "castle society." A Caesarian tyranny would usurp individual freedoms, while the surrender of American sovereignty would result from either national defeat or intimidation. The garrison state would ultimately absorb the freedoms and economic energy of the population; a castle society, characterized as a country internally wracked by anarchy and massive insecurity, would also extinguish personal freedom.

In applying this American creed to contemporary challenges, Lind castigates the neoconservative thrust of the past few years, especially its focus on amassing military power and the extension of U.S. hegemony. Rather than perpetual military dominance, the author advocates a more prudent grand strategy consistent with preserving the American way of life. Lind argues that the United States should employ a "concert of power" that would prevent any hostile state from dominating the three key regions of the globe, "without requiring the United States to seek to perpetually control these areas alone." Additionally, instead of an "irrational" post-Cold War strategy of isolation, the United States should seek "a special relationship" with Russia. However, Lind never addresses how such concerts and relationships might appear to China and Russia, powers that have not fully accepted the existing international system; nor does his approach offer much in terms of transnational threats.

Overall, Lind finds much of value in classical realism and state-based power balances. This approach, eschewing as it does crusades for democracy, may lack a moral compass, but it has a growing appeal, given the imbroglio we know as the Middle East. Lind is aware that a classical balancing approach does not apply to every region of the world—for example, in the Gulf region—but he encourages the United States to keep a lower profile, as an offshore balancer of last resort—"the least bad of several bad options." Lind forcefully argues against what he perceives as the goal of global primacy that dominates current U.S. strategy. Such an approach is at odds with what Lind believes to be time-tested American traditions: "When American leaders have followed the American way of strategy, they have led the American republic from success to success, and when they have deviated from it the results have been disastrous."

It is impossible not to find this book relevant to the ongoing debates over America's strategy against global terror and the domestic implications of that strategy. Many have cautioned that we now live in the shadow of a security state. The advent of the Patriot Act, extraordinary renditions, aggressive surveillance protocols unchecked by judicial review, extended detentions without recourse to representation or due process, and military tribunals all suggest that concerns about a security state are well founded.

While its policy prescriptions are less than satisfying, this is a relevant and thoughtful book to be read and discussed by almost anyone involved in international relations and the American national security establishment. It could serve as a useful primer on

American foreign policy, as well as a cautionary tale on the dangers of trying to achieve preeminence overseas at the cost of undermining security at home. *The American Way of Strategy* could also inform today's emerging maritime strategy, for which its characterization of the benefits of various grand strategies has value.

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Kagan, Frederick. *Finding the Target: The Transformation of American Military Policy*. New York: Encounter Books, 2006. 432pp. \$29.95

How has American military strategic thought evolved since the fall of Saigon? How did each service reinvent itself, shake off old ghosts, and restore morale and purpose? How did each decide upon a different doctrine to guide its training, procurement, and deployment? How much influence do civilian defense officials wield over strategy and doctrine? Is the country well served by the process that produces strategy and doctrine inside the services? Military historian Fred Kagan provides here a tremendous primer on these issues. He has written a clear, definitive, and opinionated history of the development of strategy and doctrine in the American military since 1975. His clarity of prose and the evenhandedness of his presentation enable the reader to separate the history from Kagan's interpretation. That is the mark of a fine scholar.

Kagan is well known among military historians. A serious researcher and author of a major work on the Napoleonic wars, his greatest strength is his down-

to-earth, friendly, inquisitive style. As the resident military scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, Kagan has the venue and cachet to draw ambassadors and four-star generals routinely to his conferences, where they join captains and majors fresh from the battlefield. Building upon his years as a professor at West Point, Kagan has developed a broad network of military contacts that makes this book a blend of scholarship and insider knowledge. Though he is plugged into the daily skirmishes of Washington's political arena, as a historian Kagan's chief interest lies not in the immediate issues but in focusing upon the underlying trends.

The author blends brief synopses of such past campaigns as Bosnia, DESERT STORM, and IRAQI FREEDOM with portraits of strategic iconoclasts like John Boyd, John Warden, Douglas MacGregor, and Arthur Cebrowski, emphasizing how doctrine changed and with what results related to budgets and force structure. Kagan does not believe that force structure evolves slowly over the decades. Instead, he illustrates how the few influence the many, and how strategic leadership affects the direction of each service for good or ill.

On the positive side, Kagan recounts how in 1978 the Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Thomas Hayward, came to believe that the downward spiral in the naval budget was the result of an intuitive strategy held by Secretary of Defense Harold Brown and his senior staff. These civilian defense leaders were concerned that the Soviet Union was increasing its geopolitical pressure across Europe, gaining both economic and political advantage in the shadow of its presumed superiority in land forces. Accordingly, the Office of the