
Rejecting the 'Vision Thing'

"The Oakeshottian President: George Bush and the Politics of the Present" by Dean C. Hammer, in *Presidential Studies Quarterly* (Spring 1995), 208 East 75th St., New York, N.Y. 10021.

The presidency of George Bush remains a puzzle. *Time* magazine summed it up in January 1991, when it named the 41st president "Men of the Year": a double image of him was splashed on the cover as if to say, "George Bush, bold leader of the crusade against Saddam Hussein, meet George Bush, curiously inert domestic political leader." The political scientists are already inventing labels for Bush: "guardian president," "hierarchical," and so on. Hammer, one of their brethren at Franklin and Marshall College, has a new one. Bush, he believes, was an "Oakeshottian" president.

Michael Oakeshott (1901-90) was a conservative British political philosopher who offered his diagnosis of the modern political disease in the title of his most famous book: *Rationalism in Politics* (1962). "For Oakeshott," Hammer explains, "Rationalism is born of a post-Renaissance belief in the authority of reason and a confidence in the attainability through political engineering of the perfectibility of human conduct and condition."

Against this vision, Oakeshott counterposed

a now-famous metaphor of politics as "men sail[ing] a boundless and bottomless sea: there is neither harbor for shelter nor floor for anchorage, neither starting-place nor appointed destination. The enterprise is to keep afloat on an even keel; the sea is both friend and enemy; and the seamanship consists in using the resources of a traditional manner of behavior in order to make a friend of every hostile occasion."

A better description of Bush's approach to politics would be hard to find, Hammer suggests. It meant eschewing what Bush called "the vision thing" in favor of incremental change, traditional practices, and the acceptance of life's inevitable untidiness. Describing his school-reform agenda in 1991, for example, Bush presented no master plan but stressed its "voluntary," "open-end[ed]," and "local" character. Even his boldest moves fit the Oakeshottian mold. His call for a "new world order" may have sounded like a Wilsonian trumpet blast, but in fact, Hammer believes, all Bush had in mind was a restoration of order, plain and simple. Operation Desert Storm sprang from a similar motive.

So total was Bush's immersion in the Oakeshottian way that he was unable even to mimic a "vision thing" during the 1992 presidential campaign. Trust me to keep the ship afloat, he said to the voters. The voters, however, preferred tales of safe harbors in distant lands.

FOREIGN POLICY & DEFENSE

A Tale of Two Confucianisms

"Confucianism and Democracy" by Francis Fukuyama, in *Journal of Democracy* (Apr. 1995), 1101 15th St. N.W., Ste. 802, Washington, D.C. 20005.

Singapore's former prime minister Lee Kuan Yew and others argue that Western-style liberal democracy is incompatible with traditional Confucianism. Many in the West, such as Harvard political scientist Samuel P. Hun-

tington, agree. "Classic Chinese Confucianism and its derivatives in Korea, Vietnam, Singapore, Taiwan, and (in diluted fashion) Japan," he has written, "emphasized the group over the individual, authority over liberty, and responsibilities over rights."

Fukuyama, a senior researcher at the RAND Corporation in Washington, sees things somewhat differently. Although traditional Chinese Confucianism, which took shape long after Confucius (551-479 B.C.) and held sway in China for 2,000 years, justified a

hierarchical political system culminating in the emperor, its essential feature was its stress on the family as the basic building block of society. The moral obligations of family life took precedence over all others, including obligations to the emperor. This was not true in Japan, notes Fukuyama, where Chinese Confucianism was modified after being imported in the 17th century so that one's duties to the emperor were deemed superior. Huntington's general characterization of Confucianism holds much more true for Japanese than Chinese Confucianism, Fukuyama says. "Yet it is Japan, rather than China, that has been democratic for the past 45 years."

Paradoxically, he argues, the weaker Chinese deference to authority created a greater need for an authoritarian political system: "Precisely because state authority is less respected in China, the danger of social chaos emerging in the absence of an overt, repressive state structure is greater there than in Japan." The stress on political authoritarianism in Singapore and other Southeast Asian states may also be less a reflection of their "self-discipline—as they would have outsiders believe—than of their rather low level of spontaneous citizenship and corresponding fear of coming apart."

The most important difference between Confucian culture and the West's Christian and democratic culture, Fukuyama says, has to do with the latter's regard for the individual, for human rights, and for the individual conscience as the ultimate source of authority. "This, it is safe to say, does not have a counterpart in any Confucian society."

Nevertheless, Fukuyama says, the thesis that economic development gives rise to political liberalization has been bolstered in recent decades—and nowhere more so than in Asia. Confucian societies such as Japan and South Korea "have been able to accommodate a greater degree of political participation and individual liberty than Singapore without compromising their own fundamental cultural values, and Taiwan is moving rapidly in the same direction. I see no reason why Singapore should not be able to follow this path."

An Ounce of Prevention?

"Alchemy for a New World Order" by Stephen John Stedman, in *Foreign Affairs* (May-June 1995), 58 East 68th St., New York, N.Y. 10021.

"Preventive diplomacy" and "conflict prevention" are the latest enthusiasms among the foreign policy cognoscenti, and numerous weighty studies are promised. It seems that whatever the disaster, whether anarchy in Somalia, civil war in the former Yugoslavia, or genocide in Rwanda, some analysts believe that early diplomatic intervention could have prevented it at little cost. Thus, in the Balkans, U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher has asserted, "the West has missed repeated opportunities to engage in early and effective ways that might have prevented the conflict from deepening." All the prevention chatter is largely wishful thinking, contends Stedman, a professor of African studies and comparative politics at Johns Hopkins' School of Advanced International Studies.

Heading off bloodshed in Somalia, Bosnia, or Rwanda, he says, "would have involved substantial risk and great cost. The cheapness of intervention depends on what actions will be necessary to deter the parties in a conflict from using violence (or more violence) to resolve it." Somali warlord Mohamed Farah Aidid, Serbian president Slobodan Milosevic, Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic, Angolan rebel leader Jonas Savimbi, and genocidal factions such as the presidential guard in Rwanda "decided on civil war," Stedman points out, "because they thought they could prevail militarily and that the international community was powerless to stop them. If they had faced an early international willingness to use massive force, then their calculations might have been different." If the threat worked, the cost would have been slight. But if it did not, "then only the use of force with the risk of prolonged involvement in a civil war" could work.

Stedman is equally critical of the theory of "conflict prevention," which suggests that foreign aid can be used to eradicate the putative roots of strife, including poverty, environmental degradation, and overpopulation. Between 1992 and '94, the United States gave aid to Rwanda to improve governance, strengthen