

Expert Adjustments

"Theory-Driven Reasoning about Plausible Pasts and Probable Futures in World Politics: Are We Prisoners of Our Preconceptions?" by Philip E. Tetlock, in *American Journal of Political Science* (Apr. 1999), Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 2537 Daniels St., Madison, Wis. 53718.

"When the facts change, I change my mind," British economist John Maynard Keynes once said. "What do you do, Sir?"

The honest answer that many specialists in political, economic, and military affairs would have to give would be: "I change the facts." At least that's what Tetlock's studies of "experts" in a variety of fields seem to suggest.

In one study, the Ohio State University psychologist asked 75 specialists on the former Soviet Union to suppose that researchers unearthed new evidence in the Kremlin archives. The fresh evidence showed that history could have been different at three junctures: that Stalinism could have been averted in the 1920s, that the Cold War could have been ended in the mid-1950s, and that President Ronald Reagan's hardline anti-communist policies in the early 1980s almost provoked a dangerous confrontation with the Soviets. Besides that "liberal" scenario, Tetlock also presented a "conservative" one, asking the specialists to suppose that new evidence showed that history could *not* have taken a different turn at those three junctures: that Stalinism could not have been averted in the 1920s, etc.

Tetlock found that the liberal specialists rated the imagined "liberal" evidence highly credible and the imagined "conservative" evidence relatively incredible. The conservative specialists took precisely the opposite view. In one version of Tetlock's test, some specialists did change their minds. But in general, he says, the experts "switched on

the high-intensity search light of skepticism" only for the results that ran counter to their ideological inclination.

If experts seem less than open-minded when considering the past, they also do not come off too well when dealing with the future. In the late 1980s and early '90s, Tetlock asked 199 professors, policy wonks, intelligence analysts, journalists, and other experts for predictions on various subjects, from the 1992 presidential race to the fate of South Africa. The experts, he says, "were only slightly more accurate" than the toss of a coin would have been. For instance, "almost as many experts as not thought [in 1988] that the Soviet Communist Party would remain firmly in the saddle of power in 1993." Most of the experts "thought they knew more than they did." Those with 80 percent or higher confidence in their predictions proved correct only 45 percent of the time.

The experts were not eager to admit their errors. The predicted outcome "almost occurred," many said. Or it still would occur eventually. Or "other things" (as in "other things being equal") were not equal.

Are even experts, being human, naturally inclined to resist learning from events that run counter to their expectations? Perhaps, says Tetlock. But it is also possible that they have simply adapted to "a professional culture in which one's reputation hinges on appearing approximately right most of the time and on never appearing clearly wrong."

FOREIGN POLICY & DEFENSE

Two Utopias

"A World Imagined" by Charles Krauthammer, in *The New Republic* (Mar. 15, 1999), 1220 19th St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036; "History Repeating Itself: Liberalism and Foreign Policy" by Robert Kagan, in *The New Criterion* (Apr. 1999), 850 Seventh Ave., New York, N.Y. 10019.

The foreign policy favored by liberalism and pursued by the Clinton administration, columnist Krauthammer argues, reflects a

coherent vision of the world—"coherent, consistent, and dangerously at odds with the realities of the international system."

This misguided foreign policy, he asserts, rests on three shaky pillars: (1) internationalism (i.e. "the belief in the moral, legal, and strategic primacy of international institutions over mere national interests"); (2) legalism (i.e. "the belief that safety and security are achieved through treaties"—international agreements on such matters as chemical weapons, nuclear nonproliferation, and anti-ballistic missiles); and (3) humanitarianism (i.e. "the belief that the primary world role of the United States is, to quote [Secretary of State] Madeleine Albright . . . 'to terminate the abominable injustices and conditions that still plague civilization.'")

In reality, Krauthammer maintains, the "international community" is nothing more than a fiction. "The international arena is a state of nature with no enforcer and no universally recognized norms. Anarchy is kept in check, today as always, not by some hollow bureaucracy on the East River, but by the will and power of the Great Powers, and today, in particular, of the one great superpower."

The administration's "penchant for treaties," Krauthammer says, is driven by the desire to transcend power politics and recreate domestic society on the world stage—a "hopelessly utopian" project. The Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty no more kept Iraq from clandestinely trying to develop nuclear weapons than the 1928 Kellogg-Briand Pact held its signatories (including Germany and Japan) to their renunciation of war.

As for the third pillar, humanitarianism, it

stems from "an abiding liberal antipathy to any notion of national interest," says Krauthammer. "Indeed, in the new liberal orthodoxy, it is only disinterested intervention . . . that is pristine enough to justify the use of force. Violence undertaken for the purpose of securing interests is not." Hence, "the amazing transmutation of Cold War and Gulf war doves into Haiti and Bosnia and Kosovo hawks."

Concludes Krauthammer: "The greatest power in the world—the most dominant power relative to its rivals that the world has seen since the Roman empire—is led by people who seek to diminish that dominance and level the international arena. It is a vision, all right, an amazing vision of self-denial in the service of self-delusion."

Yet foreign policy "realism" like Krauthammer's does not hold the answer to the Clinton administration's "new Wilsonianism," contends Kagan, a senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. The realists, he says, "are in their own way both as utopian and as anti-nationalistic as the Wilsonians they abhor." They fail to grasp "that the American national interest, its *raison d'état*, [cannot] be divorced from American liberalism," an outlook that is "as much a fact of life as the enduring reality of power and the immutable character of human nature," Kagan says. "It is the messy and inevitably imperfect attempt to reconcile these conflicting realities that provides the great challenge for American statesmanship, now as in the past."

Casualties of Peacekeeping

"Public Support for Peacekeeping in Lebanon and Somalia: Assessing the Casualties Hypothesis"
by James Burk, in *Political Science Quarterly* (Spring 1999), 475 Riverside Dr.,
Ste. 1274, New York, N.Y. 10115-1274.

The notion that the public will not support U.S. peacekeeping operations abroad if they entail loss of American lives has become widespread in recent years. But it is ill-founded, contends Burk, a sociologist at Texas A&M University.

He examines two oft-cited cases, a decade apart, in which the United States withdrew its forces after incurring casualties: Somalia, where 18 soldiers were killed in a battle in

the streets of Mogadishu in October 1993, and Lebanon, where 241 marines died when a terrorist truck bomb destroyed their barracks at the Beirut airport in October 1983.

"While public opinion was not insensitive to the deaths of American soldiers," Burk says, "public approval or disapproval of both missions was, in fact, largely determined before casualties occurred."

Public opinion about the U.S. role in