

two supposedly alarming trends are the veriest illusions.

Take the oft-reported decline in voter turnout since the 1960s, when more than 60 percent went to the polls in presidential election years. So low has the nation supposedly sunk in the intervening years that the 1996 election drew less than half of the American electorate to the voting booths.

But the widely reported “turnout rate” is not really the number of votes cast divided by the number of Americans eligible to vote, note political scientists McDonald, of the University of Illinois at Springfield, and Popkin, of the University of California, San Diego. The denominator researchers use instead (because it’s more readily available) is the Census Bureau’s calculation of the voting-age population. This figure includes noncitizens, felons, and others not eligible to vote, and excludes military personnel and other citizens overseas who are eligible.

Making use of government statistics on noncitizens and the other subgroups, McDonald and Popkin modify the voting-age population figures to produce a more accurate estimate of the electorate and its turnout. Their calculations show that turnout did indeed fall after 1960—from a 1960 level of 63.8 percent to 61.5 percent in 1968 and 56.2 percent in 1972. But since then, the number of ineligible noncitizens and felons has been increasing rapidly, and when that and other adjustments are made, the post-1972 numbers show no clear trend up or down.

The turnout for the 1996 election, by these new calculations, was *more* than half (52.6 percent) of the eligible electorate, and for the 2000 contest, 55.6 percent. In the 1992 election, 60.6 percent of the eligible electorate voted—a figure that should warm

the hearts of analysts who mourn a golden age they thought ended in 1960.

The alarmists still have the supposedly low level of trust in government to worry about (or at least they did before the September 11 terrorist attacks sent poll-measured trust in government surging to its highest level in decades). But Moore, senior editor of the Gallup Poll, says that even before the terrorist attacks there was no clear cause for concern.

There may have been a decline in “trust” over the years, he says, but it was unclear just what “trust” meant or how much of it there was. The level of trust varied widely with the wording of pollsters’ questions. The most often cited poll, conducted since 1958 by the University of Michigan’s National Election Studies, asked respondents if they could “trust the government in Washington to do what is right—just about always, most of the time, or only some of the time?” In 1997, only 32 percent gave one of the first two responses. Yet that same year, Gallup got a very different answer with a slightly different question: It found that 62 percent had “a great deal” or “a fair amount” of “trust and confidence . . . in the executive branch,” and 54 percent did “in the legislative branch.”

Even if the levels of trust in government fell as low as alarmists believed, observes Moore, American democracy did not seem impaired. Citing a 1998 Pew Research Center report, he notes that in surveys conducted between 1987 and 1997, about 90 percent of Americans consistently said they were “very patriotic.” Other polls confirmed that. “If people remain committed to their country, even though they believe the government does what is right ‘only some of the time,’ what’s the problem?” asks Moore.

FOREIGN POLICY & DEFENSE

The Winds of War

A Survey of Recent Articles

When an essay calling for the invasion of Iraq appears in the well modulated pages of *Foreign Affairs* (March–April

2002), the leading forum of America’s foreign policy establishment, it’s hard to see what’s left to debate. Especially when the essay is writ-

ten not by a Republican hawk but by the former director of gulf affairs on President Bill Clinton's National Security Council, Kenneth Pollack. Especially when the essay echoes in just about every important particular the prescription offered by Robert Kagan and William Kristol in the conservative *Weekly Standard* (Jan. 21, 2002). And especially when the same issue of *Foreign Affairs* opens with an essay by a *Washington Post* editorial writer calling upon the Bush administration to accept "the logic of neoimperialism."

On the assumption that the invasion of Iraq will not already have occurred when this survey appears, consider Pollack's account of the doves' position. They note the absence of conclusive evidence tying Iraq to the September 11 attacks. They oppose American unilateralism and favor a multilateral effort "to revive U.N. weapons inspections and re-energize containment."

Pollack essentially says that this argument is nonsense. Since the end of the Persian Gulf War, the United States has sought to contain Saddam Hussein—a "serial aggressor"—and prevent him from rebuilding Iraq's military power. It used "a combination of economic, military, and diplomatic constraints," and the strategy worked—for a time. But not only did Saddam long ago halt UN inspections of his weapons facilities, but now even some U.S. allies routinely violate the sanctions against Iraq. And China went so far as to build a fiber-optic communications network for Saddam (the target of U.S. air strikes in January 2001). France, Russia, and China have rejected the Bush administration's effort to implement "smart" sanctions, which would ease economic restrictions while tightening others. The doves' strategy simply will not work.

What about relying on deterrence to control Saddam? "Too risky" is Pollack's verdict. While the Clinton administration may have rejected the label "rogue nation," Iraq is quite rogue-like: The United States cannot assume Saddam will behave predictably.

It's not Iraq's sponsorship of terrorism that ought to compel U.S. action, as some hawks contend, but "the risk that a nuclear-armed Saddam might wreak havoc in his region and beyond," Pollack writes. He rejects the

notion of an Afghanistan-style campaign. The attack must be quick and overpowering, in part to prevent Saddam from using his two or three dozen Scud missiles, potentially armed with chemical or biological weapons. (Kagan and Kristol point out that the chief U.S. hope of preventing such an outcome is a hammer blow so powerful that Saddam's officers are persuaded that his regime is doomed and thus refuse to follow his orders.) Up to 300,000 U.S. troops would be needed. Such an attack would elicit loud protests from China, France, Russia, Saudi Arabia, and others, but they could do nothing, Pollack says. The United States would then need to commit itself to rebuilding Iraq, probably with the help of the United Nations or others. But Washington would need to retain ultimate authority.

The most important question yet to be decided may be not whether or how to topple Saddam Hussein but how to define the coming campaign. Is it simply a war against terrorism, as the Bush administration has so far—despite the president's denunciation of the "axis of evil"—chiefly suggested? Should it be part of a larger and more ambitious strategy of realpolitik in the Middle East, as Pollack and others argue? Or a step toward an American assumption of "the responsibilities of global leadership," as Kagan and Kristol urge? Or is it a phase in the larger "clash of civilizations" that Harvard political scientist Samuel Huntington predicted several years ago?

At the moment, realpolitik seems to be the dominant motif, though it's often difficult to keep the various strands separate. One of the most articulate advocates of this point of view is Bernard Lewis, the eminent historian of the Middle East. Writing in *National Review* (Dec. 17, 2001), he declares that virtually every regime in the Middle East, including America's putative friends, feels deeply threatened by the United States—not so much by its power as "by the sources of that power—America's freedom and plenty. . . . For America to seek friendship or even good relations with such regimes is a forlorn hope." Lewis concludes: "The range of American foreign policy options in the region is being reduced to two alternatives: Get tough or get out."

A more ambitious, even imperial, note is struck in the *Weekly Standard* (Jan. 18, 2002) by Reul Marc Gerecht, a fellow at the American Enterprise Institute. His target is Iran. He argues that the United States should attack “with enormous force” if it finds clear links between Tehran and Al Qaeda, using unspecified “military actions” against Lebanon and other parts of the “Iranian world” even if it does not. The goal: to topple the mullahs (along with Saddam) and “sow the seeds for a new, safer, more liberal order in the Middle East.”

Writing from the left in the *Nation* (Jan. 21, 2002), University of Maryland political scientist Benjamin R. Barber declares that the real enemy is global capitalism and “corrosive secular materialism. . . . The war on terrorism must be fought, but not as the war of McWorld against jihad. The only war worth winning is the struggle for democracy.”

“Yesterday’s utopia,” he declares, “is today’s realism.”

In the *New York Review of Books* (Jan. 17, 2002), writer Ian Buruma and Hebrew University philosopher Avisha Margalit argue that the war is not a “clash of civilizations” but a struggle with Islamist revolutionaries whose ideology is little different from that of Western totalitarians past. Like the fascists of Italy, Germany, and Japan and like communists since Karl Marx, Osama bin Laden and his allies loathe Western culture with its diversity, freedom, rationality, and unheroic bourgeois existence. Yet it is unheroic accountants and undercover agents rather than “special macho units blasting their way into the caves of Afghanistan,” the authors say, who are best suited to combating the new ideologues.

So the question remains: What kind of war?

Kids in Combat

“Caution: Children at War” by P. W. Singer, in *Parameters* (Winter 2001–02), 122 Forbes Ave., Carlisle, Pa. 17013–5238.

Armies and guerilla forces around the world have discovered a potent new weapon in the past few decades: children. The U.S. military will soon have to come to grips with the challenge.

According to Singer, an Olin fellow at the Brookings Institution, children under the age of 18 are fighting in more than 75 percent of the world’s armed conflicts. Africa is the epicenter. In Sierra Leone alone, up to 20,000 children currently bear arms; “roughly 80 percent of the rebel Revolutionary United Front (RUF) organization is aged seven to 14,” Singer reports. In Uganda, the antigovernment Lord’s Resistance Army is composed almost entirely of children, including some 12,000 who were abducted over a 10-year period (and at least one five-year-old). Child soldiers—abductees and volunteers alike—have also fought in Palestine, Sri Lanka, Chechnya,

Kosovo, Guatemala, Mexico, and many other places. In Colombia, kids comprise roughly 30 percent of some guerilla units. In Myanmar, 12-year-old twins Luther and Johnny Htoo led the antigovernment God’s Army until their recent surrender.



Johnny and Luther Htoo, 12-year-old twin brothers and leaders of the Myanmar-based “God’s Army” guerilla group, recently surrendered to Thai security forces.