

why, given the choice between a white and a black candidate, “the vast majority of white Americans will vote for a white candidate, even if it means switching parties.” Voter surveys indicate that whites assume that the black candidate, once elected, would shift resources to black constituents. Yet studies show that black “leadership does not greatly improve the economic well-being of African Americans at the city, regional, or state level.” Since the white voters’ fears are rarely borne out, do their attitudes toward black candidates change once they experience a black incumbent?

To some extent, yes. Looking at mayoral contests between 1984 and 1992, some involving first-time black candidates, others pitting black incumbents against both white and black challengers, Hajnal examined both voting patterns and attitudes on a number of issues, such as school integration, affirmative action, and government assistance to blacks. He found that “on average, white support for the same black candidate increased by 25 percent when s/he became an incumbent.” Even in white-majority cities, black incumbents running against white challengers were reelected 74 percent of the time. Having a black mayor also seemed to change white attitudes on racial issues over time. Most change occurred among white Democrats, some among white moderates, and little or none among white Republicans. “Black leadership means even greater divisions between Democrats and Republicans,” concludes Hajnal.

What effect does black leadership have

on black voters? Gay, a political scientist at Stanford University, studied voter participation in 10 congressional districts represented by African Americans during the early 1990s. Most of the districts had a majority of black and other minority voters. Voting rights advocates who pushed for the creation of such districts believed that “black congressional representation [would] lead not only to more progressive legislation but also to greater appreciation by African Americans of the instrumental value of political participation.” But Gay found that “only occasionally” did black voter turnout rates rise in black-represented districts. And turnout among whites was significantly lower (by five to 18 percentage points) when compared with turnout among white voters in other districts.

The seemingly conflicting findings of these two studies may have a logical explanation. Hajnal focuses on races for local offices, which can have a more direct effect on the daily lives of voters. As Gay observes, members of Congress do not have comparable impact. Their influence stems more from the “symbolic politics” of images and issues. She theorizes that black representatives who vigorously support policies favoring their minority constituents may actually encourage *disengagement* of those constituents from politics once they achieve election. She points to the example of Maryland’s Albert Wynn, who attracted more black voters in 1994 after he began eschewing “expressions of militancy for pronouncements on national issues.”

## FOREIGN POLICY & DEFENSE

### *What Kind of War?*

“A Strange War” by Eliot A. Cohen, in *The National Interest* (Thanksgiving 2001), P.O. Box 622, Shrub Oak, N.Y. 10588-0622.

The attack of September 11 was a battle in a war Americans didn’t quite know they were fighting, declares Cohen, a professor of strategic studies at the Nitze School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins University. Not for him any talk of the attack as a crime to be remedied by bringing the culprits

to justice. It was a political act.

The war may be or may become a “clash of civilizations,” in Samuel Huntington’s famous phrase, but at the very least it is a “strange” war. “Strange” because it doesn’t fit the neat categories of military doctrine, with its “end states and exit strategies.” Cohen says that the

Crusades are an instructive, if politically incorrect, example. “They involved armies as the recognizable forces of states along with a welter of entrepreneurs, religious orders, and bandits. They saw strange and shifting alliances in which religious fanaticism could give way to cynical calculations of individual and state interest.”

The foe in this war, in Cohen’s view, is not just Osama bin Laden but “larger movements in the Arab and Islamic worlds” that tap deep rivers of “hatred and resentment.”

The war’s causes are as old as the Muslim resentment of the ascendant West that began when the Turks were driven back from Vienna in 1683, and as new as the appearance of bin Laden, a historically “decisive personality.” But Cohen draws special attention to two intermediate causes.

One is the failure to destroy Saddam Hussein’s Iraqi regime during the Gulf War, which “encouraged others [including Yugoslavia’s Slobodan Milosevic] to see if they could find ways of outlasting or hurting the Americans enough to keep them out of their way.” The other cause is the U.S. failure in

recent decades to promote “the development of clean and reasonably free political institutions” as vigorously in the Middle East as it did in Europe and Asia. “A combination of clientilism, realpolitik, and cultural condescension meant that there was no interest in (to take just one example) the courage of a Naguib Mahfouz [the Egyptian novelist] as a spokesman for values that Americans share.” Washington’s willingness to “deal with a Palestinian Authority dominated by a corrupt and brutal clique” while ignoring other Palestinians is a symptom of this cynicism, Cohen thinks.

“To the extent that American leaders close their eyes to the realities of the sick and thwarted societies of the Arab and, in parts, of the larger Muslim world, they will fail to understand the essential nature of the war in which they find themselves engaged,” Cohen warns. At the same time, Americans must “rediscover the civilizational values that make this country what it is. . . . It is at least as important to know what we are fighting for as to know what we are fighting against.”

EXCERPT

### *Allies in the Shadows*

*In the best of worlds, Pax Americana is doomed to a measure of solitude in the Middle East. This time around, the American predicament is particularly acute. Deep down, the Arab regimes feel that the threat of political Islam to their own turfs has been checked, and that no good can come out of an explicit public alliance with an American campaign in their midst. . . .*

*Ride with the foreigners at your own risk, the region’s history has taught. Syria’s dictator, Hafiz al-Assad, died a natural death at a ripe old age, and his life could be seen as a kind of success. He never set foot on American soil and had stayed within his world. In contrast, the flamboyant Sadat courted foreign countries and came to a solitary, cruel end; his land barely grieved for him. A foreign power that stands sentry in that world cannot spare its local allies the retribution of those who brand them “collaborators” and betrayers of the faith. A coalition is in the offing, America has come calling, urging the region’s rulers to “choose sides.” What these rulers truly dread has come to pass: they might have to make fateful choices under the gaze of populations in the throes of a malignant anti-Americanism. The ways of the world being what they are, the United States will get more cooperation from the ministers of interior and the secret services than it will from the foreign ministers and the diplomatic interlocutors. There will be allies in the shadows, but in broad daylight the rulers will mostly keep their distance.*

—Fouad Ajami, a professor of Middle Eastern studies at the Nitze School for Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University, in *Foreign Affairs* (Nov.–Dec. 2001)