

voters. The leaders of the “wrong Left,” meanwhile, need to be reminded of their countries’ commitments to democracy and human rights and of the imperative of continuing to build an “international legal order.” But Washington must “avoid the mistakes of the past,” even if that means allowing Chávez, for example, to acquire nuclear technology from Argentina, as long as international safeguards are in place. If it acts wisely, the United States could help the region “finally find its bearings.”

## FOREIGN POLICY &amp; DEFENSE

## The Northwest Passage at Last

**THE SOURCE:** “In the Dark and Out in the Cold” by Magda Hanna, in *Proceedings*, June 2006.

CAPTAIN HENRY HUDSON TRIGGERED a mutiny among his sailors nearly 400 years ago in the frigid bay bearing his name when he tried to get them to spend a second summer looking for a northern passage to the Orient. Now, scientists are saying that within decades this fabled Arctic sea route between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans may be open for routine use by commercial ships carrying oil and other products. Magda Hanna, a U.S. Navy lieutenant, warns that her service is unprepared and poorly equipped to navigate in such an environment.

Global warming appears to be melting the icecaps at the top of the globe with startling speed. Arctic ice has retreated northward by three percent a decade and thinned by 40 percent in the past 20 years, according to U.S. submarine surveys. The

Sailing through a thawed Northwest Passage could be as much as 40 percent faster than going by existing routes.

phenomenon appears likely to make two routes—the Northwest Passage and the Northern Sea Route, claimed as internal waters by, respectively, Canada and Russia—irresistible paths for shippers. Such shortcuts would be about 40 percent faster than existing routes, and save even more time for the huge tankers too big to fit through the Panama Canal.

The oil and gas reserves discovered under the Arctic have already made the area a leading economic development center for Russia, and multinational companies are continuing to explore in the Beaufort Sea off the coast of Alaska. As the world’s hunger for oil grows, the economic and transportation benefits of Arctic sea routes will surely increase. The Russians estimate that the volume of oil moving through the region will increase from one million to 100 million tons a year by 2015.

Meanwhile, the Navy has cut Arctic research funds and allowed its vessels to fall into such disrepair that it was forced to lease a Russian icebreaker to resupply a polar mission last year.

Writing in *Proceedings*, a publication of the nongovernmental U.S. Naval Institute, Hanna notes that regular northern sea runs are hardly likely to begin soon. While the passage can be navigated during one or more

months in the summer, unpredictable floating ice can make the transit perilous. According to the Arctic Climate Impact Assessment, years in the making, summer commercial shipping might be possible “within several decades.” Prohibitive insurance costs now rule out most uses of the routes.

Even so, the high probability of continued melting means that the region can no longer be ignored as a potential theater of military operations. The combination of disputed territorial claims, vast natural resources, and the ever-present requirements of homeland security could well create a need for an Arctic naval presence. Without planning, training, and ships, Hanna says, “the Navy’s lack of preparation could leave the United States in the dark and out in the cold.”

## FOREIGN POLICY &amp; DEFENSE

## The Crude Toll

**THE SOURCE:** “The First Law of Petropolitics” by Thomas L. Friedman, in *Foreign Policy*, May–June 2006.

THE HIGH PRICE OF OIL IS certainly not pleasant for the average driver, whose fill-up has doubled in price in less than four years. And it is clearly a burden for the American economy. But you might think that it would be a boon to oil-exporting nations as once-cheap oil bobs around the \$70-a-barrel mark.

However, you would be thinking completely backward under the First Law of Petropolitics, posited by author and *New York Times* columnist Thomas L. Friedman. His First Law holds that the price of oil and the pace of freedom always move

in opposite directions in oil-rich “petrolist” states. “The higher the average global crude oil price rises, the more free speech, free press, free and fair elections, an independent judiciary, the rule of law, and independent political parties are eroded,” he writes.

A petrolist state is a country whose economy rests on oil and has weak national institutions or an outright authoritarian government. Among the examples are Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Nigeria, Russia, Saudi Arabia, and Venezuela. Friedman tests his theory by comparing oil prices to citizen freedoms.

Take Venezuela. When oil was in the \$10-to-\$20-a-barrel range, the country’s oil industry was reopened to

foreign investment and a coup failed. But as the price rose to \$50, freedom shrank, according to an analysis by the research organization Freedom House.

Or Nigeria. When oil was hovering around \$23 a barrel, there was a boom in independent newspapers. As oil rose toward \$30, local elections were postponed indefinitely.

To explain the phenomenon, Friedman draws on work by UCLA political scientist Michael L. Ross. The oil bonanza relieves governments of the necessity of taxation that otherwise breeds popular demands for representation. It gives rulers plenty of cash for patronage, police, internal security, and other dangerous indulgences. It reduces pressure on citizens

to attain higher levels of education or to specialize in needed occupations—pursuits that can produce a more articulate, economically independent public that can keep the heat on an authoritarian government.

The tide of democracy and free markets that followed the collapse of the Berlin Wall is now running into a countercurrent of petro-authoritarianism, Friedman writes. This gives some of the worst regimes in the world extra cash with which to cause mischief.

And all of these negative impacts could poison global politics. Cutting oil consumption, he says, should not be the goal only of high-minded environmentalists. It is a national security imperative.

## POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

# What Kind of Nation?

**THE SOURCE:** “The Founding of Nations” by Wilfred M. McClay, in *First Things*, March 2006.

TODAY’S SWIRLING DEBATES OVER fundamental issues such as immigration, religion, and spreading democracy abroad have sparked a fresh crisis of identity in the United States. Forced “to think more deeply and clearly about who and what we are,” writes historian Wilfred McClay, Americans have looked instinctively to the past.

But what past will they find? For a century, historians and intellectuals have been busy hacking away at the “myths” of the Founding and at

the very notion that it exists as a unique historical moment. (For an example, see “Tom Paine’s Myth,” p. 80.) In this view, as McClay summarizes it, the Founding was the work of “flawed, unheroic, and self-interested white men [that] offers nothing to which we should grant any abiding authority.” It sees the Constitution as “a mere political deal meant to be superseded by other political deals.”

In attacking founding “myths,” historians are taking sides in the age-old tension between the respective roles of creed and culture in the making of American national identity. It’s a tension between “on the

one hand, the idea of the United States as a nation built on the foundation of self-evident, rational, and universally applicable propositions about human nature and human society; and, on the other hand, the idea of the United States as a very unusual, historically specific and contingent entity, underwritten by a long, intricately evolved, and very particular legacy of English law, language, and customs, Greco-Roman cultural antecedents, and Judeo-Christian sacred texts and theological and moral teachings.”

In attacking the legitimacy of the Founders, historians attempt to erase the cultural side of the equation, reducing American identity to all creed and no culture. That would leave nothing, according to McClay, but “abstract normative ideas about freedom and democracy and self-government that can flourish just as