

Despite their differences, these two men had much in common, Levin observes, including a belief in “open debate, freedom of expression and religion, the rule of law.” It’s not liberalism and anti-liberalism that shape our political life, but liberalism, divided by the little detail of what we should keep from the past.

POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

Fixing the Presidential Primaries

THE SOURCE: “A Modified National Primary: State Losers and Support for Changing the Presidential Nominating Process” by Caroline J. Tolbert, Amanda Keller, and Todd Donovan, in *Political Science Quarterly*, Fall 2010.

WHY IS THE PROCESS FOR selecting the candidates for the nation’s highest office such a mess? In the absence of constitutional directives, it has evolved haphazardly over 200 years, and the result is a system that is deeply unpopular: The tiny and very white states of Iowa and New Hampshire have disproportionate power,

very few people participate, and chaos erupts every four years, as states vie to schedule their contests earlier and earlier to gain greater sway over the final outcome and to boost their economies. Political scientists Caroline J. Tolbert, Amanda Keller, and Todd Donovan have a solution that combines the best features of earlier reform ideas.

Seven in 10 Americans favor switching to a national primary—one day when voters everywhere would head to the polls. Such an event would likely boost participation, since many people don’t vote under the current system because the winner is often decided long before it’s their turn to cast a ballot. In 2008, less than a quarter of the voting-age population voted in a presidential primary, and that was a good year. The problem with a national primary is that it would do away with one of the greatest strengths of the current system: Since the primaries begin in small states, candidates without huge war chests and who are not necessarily the darlings of the political establishment can win with old-fashioned door-to-door campaigning. A

national primary would require candidates to be able to campaign on a national scale from the get-go.

But Tolbert and her colleagues aren’t too keen on one of the leading alternatives, known as a “graduated random presidential primary system.” Under such an arrangement, smaller states would vote early in the primary season, but the exact order would change every four years. Larger states would be allowed to begin holding their primaries several weeks into the process. Some critics worry that such a system would be confusing for voters and unfair to large states.

The authors propose a hybrid approach: Begin with a dozen primaries or caucuses in small-population states to allow unknown candidates a chance to prove themselves, but let these contests decide only a “tiny” number of these states’ delegates to the nominating conventions. In essence, let these early contests be straw polls. Then, when that phase is completed, hold a national primary. This approach would preserve the relatively open playing field of the current system and at the same time allow more people’s votes to matter.

FOREIGN POLICY & DEFENSE

Decentering Kabul

THE SOURCE: “Defining Success in Afghanistan” by Stephen Biddle, Fotini Christia, and J. Alexander Thier, in *Foreign Affairs*, July–Aug. 2010.

SINCE 2001, THE GOVERNMENT of Afghanistan, led by Hamid Karzai and backed by the United

States, has struggled to build a centralized democracy. The 2004 constitution placed nearly all executive, legislative, and judicial authority in Kabul. But centralization does not sit well with local authorities in Afghanistan’s rugged countryside.

Past attempts at centralization have always failed, from Amanullah Khan’s doomed effort to become Afghanistan’s Kemal Atatürk in the 1920s to the Soviet-backed communist power grab in the late 1970s, which resulted in years of civil war.

“Put simply, the current model of Afghan governance is too radical a departure” from what has worked in Afghanistan historically and the “underlying social and political framework” that exists today, declare



Shuras, community councils like the one above, could be the key to building a more stable Afghanistan.

Stephen Biddle of the Council on Foreign Relations, Fotini Christia of MIT, and J. Alexander Thier, of the U.S. Institute of Peace. It's time to start looking at what is actually possible in Afghanistan and work toward the most acceptable options.

Biddle and his colleagues say there are only four outcomes with any real likelihood of emerging: decentralized democracy; a regulated mix of democratic and non-democratic territories; a parti-

tioned group of "ministates"; and anarchy. The latter two are not acceptable, but either of the first two could fulfill the United States' two main security interests: barring terrorists who hope to attack the United States and its allies and denying shelter to insurgent groups that could destabilize neighboring Pakistan.

Local councils, called *shuras*, are found in "virtually every community," and could become the foun-

ation of a decentralized system. Their traditional authority would provide much-needed stability. In a decentralized democratic model, local governments would need to hold elections and have some degree of transparency. Kabul would hand over its authority to dictate local budgets, design justice systems, and select local officials. Such a system would be difficult to achieve, requiring ongoing U.S. administrative assistance and a sustained counterinsurgency campaign against Taliban members who oppose democracy on principle.

Easier to achieve but less palatable would be a system of mixed sovereignty, in which local authorities would rule without elections or transparency. Kabul would have to enforce three strict "redlines" in order for this system to remain consistent with U.S. security interests: Don't host terrorists or insurgents. Don't mess with other local districts, by, for example, diverting their water. And don't participate in narcotics trafficking, large-scale theft, or the exploitation of state-

EXCERPT

The Age of the City

Look at a satellite image of the Earth at night: It will reveal the shimmering lights of cities flickering below, but also an ominous pattern. Cities are spreading like a cancer on the planet's body. Zoom in and you can see good cells and bad cells at war for control. In Caracas, gang murders and kidnappings are a fact of life, and Al

Qaeda terrorists hide in plain sight in Karachi. . . . Anyone who traveled to South Africa for the 2010 World Cup might have noticed how private security forces outnumbered official police two to one, and gated communities protected elites from the vast townships where crime is rampant. Cities—not so-called failed states like Afghanistan and Somalia—are the true daily test of whether we can build a better future or are heading toward a dystopian nightmare.

—**PARAG KHANNA**, a senior research fellow at the New America Foundation, in *Foreign Policy* (Sept.–Oct. 2010)

owned natural resources. If those lines can be toed, a system of mixed sovereignty could balance the realities of Afghanistan with U.S. policy aims.

The downside: “This would represent a retreat from nearly nine years of U.S. promises of democracy, the rule of law, and basic rights for women and minorities, with costs to innocent Afghans and the prestige of the United States.” But, sadly, those promises may be impossible to keep.

FOREIGN POLICY & DEFENSE

The Limits of Intelligence

THE SOURCE: “Why Intelligence and Policymakers Clash” by Robert Jervis, in *Political Science Quarterly*, Summer 2010.

IT IS CONVENTIONAL WISDOM that whether because of President George W. Bush’s aversion to complexity, Vice President Dick Cheney’s obsession with Saddam Hussein, or something else entirely, somehow Washington simply ignored the U.S. intelligence community’s doubts that Saddam was collaborating with Al Qaeda and that a stable Iraq could emerge after an invasion. But the Bush administration’s mistakes in Iraq are only the most recent illustration of the challenges policymakers and intelligence analysts face when attempting to communicate—challenges that presidents of every political stripe encounter as they struggle to lead with confidence in an ambiguous world, writes Robert Jervis, a professor of international politics at Columbia University.

Presidents don’t usually want to hear an intelligence analyst’s doubts, preferring confidence (even when unwarranted) in one policy option.

For both political and psychological reasons, presidents often expect the intelligence community to be able to provide them with clear answers. Politically, presidents need intelligence backing to sell their policies to the public. Psychologically, they need to sleep at night, and that requires seeing a world in which one policy is clearly preferable to another and its costs, often measured in lives, are less than those of any alternative. Even when the news is good, it may not be greeted favorably. This was the case when the Central Intelligence Agency told Lyndon B. Johnson that other countries would not fall to communism even if South Vietnam did. Since Johnson’s Vietnam policy was based on the domino theory, he did not welcome the information.

Presidents don’t usually want to hear an intelligence analyst’s doubts. Policymakers will try to convince both themselves and the public that one policy measure is better than an alternative on every dimension, even when, as Jervis writes, “there [is] no reason to expect the world to be arranged so neatly.” The confidence (even when unwarranted) that comes from believing one policy option is

clearly superior is not simply for a president’s personal benefit but also necessary to a successful policy. If a leader is plagued with doubts, the uncertainty can filter down to the rank and file and doom a policy before it is even launched.

When uncertainty exists, intelligence analysts can be susceptible to pressures from policymakers to change their conclusions. But the charge of “politicization” is too easily lobbed about, Jervis argues. How can you tell the difference between a politician making sure that due diligence has been done and one simply demanding a different answer? “In many of these cases, I suspect that one’s judgment will depend on which side of the substantive debate one is on,” he remarks.

The president’s need to have the backing of the intelligence community in order to sell his policies stems from the public’s faith in the quality of the intelligence community’s judgments. But when the president presses intelligence analysts to support his policies, the quality of the information is likely to suffer. And even in the absence of political pressure, reliable intelligence is difficult to come by. When the United States failed to anticipate the 1974 coup in Portugal, then secretary of state Henry Kissinger resented congressional complaints about intelligence failure: “Anytime there’s a coup you start with the assumption that the home government missed it. . . . Why the hell should we know better than the government that’s being overthrown?”