Iraq and down the peninsula. "Our inability to change our energy policy puts us into a corner where there's only a military solution," he recently told me. Now he thinks that the United States should prepare to occupy the parts of Saudi Arabia that are vital to the West—namely, the oil fields and production facilities. In all, not an auspicious forecast for U.S. intelligence, for U.S. foreign policy, or for Saudi Arabia.

Reading the Past into American Foreign Policy by William Anthony Hay

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The Savage Wars of Peace: Small Wars and the Rise of American Power. By Max Boot (New York: Basic Books, 2002. 428 pp. $30)

Warfare and the Western World, 1882–1975. By Jeremy Black (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2002. Paper 243 pp. $19.95)

Historical analogy has long shaped the development of foreign and security policy. Whatever the dangers of arguing from precedent, people respond to challenges on the basis of experience. Beyond defining problems through analogies with the past, observers see the future as either foreshadowed by historical parallels or following as a consequence of prior events.[1] History rarely, if ever, provides exact parallels or clear lessons, but it can set problems in context. Knowledge of the past makes for fewer and less dramatic surprises, and thinking historically provides a critical framework that can be applied to current affairs.

Academic history developed in nineteenth-century Britain as a discipline to train future civil servants and politicians. That task guided both its evolution as a profession and the outlook of policy makers trained within it.[2] Similar patterns existed in the United States and continental Europe. The question is not, then, whether history informs decision-making, but how to use historians' knowledge to the best advantage. Getting the history right becomes a precondition for effective policy.

Common references to the lessons of Munich or Vietnam in American public discourse give credence to the cliché that leaders always fight the last war. Anthony Eden saw the Suez Crisis as a reprise of fascist challenges in the 1930s, with Nasser cast as Mussolini. During campaign speeches in October

[1] Ernest R. May, *"Lessons" of the Past: The Use and Misuse of History in American Foreign Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. ix.

[2] Reba Soffer, *Discipline and Power: The University, History, and the Making of an English Elite* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994).

2003, Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.) likened the postwar occupation of Iraq to America's experience in Vietnam. In March 2003, before the war, the *Guardian* asked a dozen noted historians to explore parallels with Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq, and five of them categorically rejected the search for clear parallels. Richard Overy of King's College called "the effort to grab historical examples off the shelf" irresponsible.[3]

Attempts to draw clear lessons from history blind observers to facts that do not readily fit the given analogy. Harvard professor Ernest May noted examples of cognitive dissonance in twentieth-century American history where policy makers and public alike ignored, rejected, or revised information to fit preconceived notions. Defining an issue or challenge in terms of a single case precludes consideration of others that might be more pertinent, and received opinion on history often imposes a narrow perspective on policy development.

Max Boot and Jeremy Black each draw attention to frequently overlooked aspects of military history. Boot's *Savage Wars of Peace* contrasts the story of American involvement in small wars with an older view of an American way of war focused on big battles and the massive use of firepower. Black's *Warfare and the Western World* addresses the many facets and contexts of military power in the modern world to offer an alternative to linear narratives that focus on technological development.

American Ways of War

Discussion of the history of military policy in the United States invariably turns to what Russell Weigley calls "the American way of war." Weigley introduced the phrase in his 1973 book on the application of strategy to war in American history.[4] Defined as the prolonged mobilization in wartime of large-scale armies designed to win absolute victory over comparable opponents by using advantages of resources and industrial capacity to destroy the enemy's forces, the phrase gives a short description of how the United States wages war.

An alternative narrative, focused on a different set of conflicts, creates a very different framework for policy options. Drawing his title from a line by Rudyard Kipling, who had urged Americans to take up the responsibilities of empire, Boot's *Savage Wars* argues that the United States has a long history of military intervention overseas to punish rogue states or enforce international law. Like the wars on crime or poverty, the war on terrorism involves a prolonged effort against disorder rather than mass mobilization for a clearly defined and total victory. A view of military history focused on Frederick the Great and Napoleon through Grant to Eisenhower and Patton offers little

[3] Matt Seaton, "Blast from the Past." *Guardian*, Feb. 19, 2003.

[4] Russell F. Weigley, *The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973).

guidance for what Boot calls a "long twilight struggle" against terrorism. He turns instead to another American way of war for a model, noting that U.S. Marines staged more than 180 landings overseas between 1800 and 1934, with the army and navy conducting additional operations of their own. These small wars played a key part in the United States' rise to world power, and Boot insists that they provide a more useful guide for America's global mission in the post–Cold War era than great conflicts of the twentieth century.

Boot tells the story of America's overseas interventions from the republic's founding through its years as a great power in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and then as a superpower after 1945. Early campaigns sought to protect trade and Americans traveling abroad. Many regions lacked effective government, and the United States joined other nations, particularly Great Britain, to suppress piracy and police the seas.

Policing the Seas

America's war against the Barbary Pirates marked its first venture into projecting power overseas, and it belies the charge that the United States adopted an isolationist stance even in its early history. Boot describes the conflict as exemplifying America's policy as a commercial republic. Piracy in the Mediterranean, a legacy of the long conflict between Christian Europe and Islam, had become a highly profitable end in itself. Although under titular allegiance to the Ottoman Sultan in Istanbul, the Barbary States of North Africa largely governed themselves, and Europeans bribed local rulers to secure free passage for their ships. American ships sailed under British protection until 1776, when independence curtailed a lucrative trade as those ships were seized and their crews enslaved.

Officials in Washington debated whether to protect American rights at sea by force or by paying ransom. They did both by combining ransom negotiations with a modest naval building program, but successive humiliations made conflict inevitable even before Tripoli declared war in 1801. While Americans proved effective fighting at sea and blockading enemy ports, they could not secure a decisive confrontation to end the war. Commodore Edward Preble brought an aggressive style as commander of the American squadron, and his cadre of officers used audacity as an impressive force multiplier. Preble first secured his flank by forcing the king of Morocco, who had threatened to join the war, to accept a treaty with the United States. After borrowing from the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies gunboats and bomb ketches that provided more effective firepower against fortifications than his frigates, Preble attacked Tripoli itself. Despite inflicting severe damage, Preble failed to strike a decisive blow from the sea. The Dey only accepted American terms after a force of marines and local mercenaries led by William Eaton approached Tripoli by land with a rival candidate to the throne.

Political intrigue backed by the threat of landings to project power ashore concluded the war, and Boot emphasizes how resolve backed by force made an acceptable treaty possible.

Peace in 1805 did not end the story. After a declaration of war by Congress, Commodore Stephen Decatur led a subsequent expedition that forced the Algerians to end their attacks on American ships and demands for tribute, and his final treaty in June 1815 stipulated the payment of compensation for earlier depredations. But piracy only ended when the French occupied Algeria in 1830 with 40,000 men and gradually extended their control beyond the coast. Ottoman or European pressure brought other rogue states under control, and the Declaration of Paris that ended privateering in 1856 effectively nationalized warfare and prohibited the ventures the Barbary States had found so profitable.

Decolonization removed those constraints in the 1960s. Areas that had sheltered the Barbary Pirates provided havens for terrorist groups and hijackers through the 1980s. Punitive attacks and sanctions on Libya and aggressive security measures elsewhere contained the renewed threat. While terrorist groups at present focus their energies on overthrowing Algeria's government and destabilizing regimes elsewhere, reports of plots in 1991 and early 1992 by Al Qaeda cells indicate that the possibility of attacks on shipping in the Mediterranean sea lanes cannot be ignored.[5] The failure of European navies to halt smuggling and illegal immigration from the North African coast highlights the potential threat from terrorism.

Liberal Empire

Imperialism might seem to offer a solution to the problem of unstable regions that provide havens for banditry or terrorism, but occupying powers must weigh costs against benefits. While governments may intervene in response to a perceived threat or immediate problem, sustained occupation depends on the availability of resources and a willingness to expend them. Lord Salisbury, who disdained acquiring territory without clear benefit or justification, defined the value of empire as victories divided by taxation.[6] Nineteenth-century imperialism rarely paid its way, and other factors drove the scramble for colonies. States that failed to control their own territory invited foreign intervention, and the perceived need for a defensive perimeter lay behind many annexations. American involvement in the Philippines and later efforts to police Central America and the Caribbean drew the United States into a series of colonial wars that marked its rise to great power status. As campaigns

[5] Isambard Wilkenson, "New Pirates of the Barbary Coast," *Daily Telegraph*, June 12, 2002 and "Putting Naval Security to the Powerboat Test," *Daily Telegraph*, June 13, 2002.

[6] Niall Ferguson, *Empire: The Rise and Demise of the British World Order and the Lessons for Global Power* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), p. 239.

to secure control of territories rather than punitive measures to enforce international law or American rights abroad, these wars differed from earlier cases of overseas power projection. Boot describes America's colonial wars as exercises in "nation-building" and offers nineteenth-century liberal imperialism as a model for twenty-first-century humanitarian intervention.

The Philippine War from 1899 to 1902 set the pattern for American imperialism, when Spain's defeat created a power vacuum in the Philippines that an independent government could not fill without inviting foreign occupation. Instead of fighting the Spanish, the United States became drawn into conflict with the Filipino independence movement led by Emilio Aguinaldo. American troops quickly defeated Aguinaldo's forces, but then faced an extended guerrilla campaign made worse by local conditions and disease. Harsh measures against the *insurrectos* drew censure from critics in the United States, although Filipino guerrillas had committed atrocities of their own to provoke reprisals. American success came through a combination of counterinsurgency tactics, efforts to win support from Filipinos through health care and infrastructure projects, and overtures to the local elite, through which Washington later governed. Garrisoning troops in the countryside and concentrating populations within controlled areas denied guerrillas the popular assistance they needed to fight. American forces then brought the war to the guerrillas, and one daring expedition captured Aguinaldo in his own camp. The Filipino leader called on his supporters to abandon the conflict in April 1901, and after a final campaign Roosevelt declared the Philippines pacified in July 1902.

Policing the Caribbean involved different challenges, particularly in cases like Haiti, where the United States sought to avoid direct control or annexation. The 1904 Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine accepted both a right and an obligation for the United States to maintain order in the Western Hemisphere. Haiti, where instability and political violence prevented effective self-government, presented a long-standing problem. American Marines had periodically landed since 1857 to quell rioting and protect foreign property, and the possibility that Haiti would default on its foreign debt raised concerns about German intervention. After unrest in 1915 Admiral William Caperton landed marines and imposed a new president, beginning an extended occupation designed to cure anarchy and disorder. A treaty then authorized the United States to supervise government finances, customs collection, and law enforcement and intervene at any time. The main problems involved policing the countryside and managing Haitian politics. Marines organized a constabulary that mounted campaigns against the *caco* rebels, and U.S. Marine Gen. Smedley Butler noted that seizing the initiative brought the bandits to heel. American soldiers and diplomats adopted a similar style in dictating policy to the Haitian elite, which had disrupted the country by conducting factional struggles with the aid of bandit armies. The United States also mounted an extensive program to build roads and improve sanitation and

public health. American policy combined assistance with coercion in a paternalistic effort that set the pattern for direct intervention elsewhere in America's near abroad through the 1930s.

Despite the differences between small and great wars, many skills apply to both. Lessons learned by the Marines in small wars in Central America during the 1920s served them well in the campaigns of World War II, but leaders whose outlook had been defined by experience in World War II and Korea later misread the situation in Vietnam. They turned away from small-war tactics despite dissenting voices among experts and some success where the approach was tried, and Boot makes a solid case for recovering a part of American military history that illuminates the spectrum of capabilities necessary for today's contingencies.

However, Boot's argument for a revival of liberal imperialism in the guise of American-led nation-building casts thoughtful analysis aside. He draws the wrong lessons by ignoring context and grasps instead for easy analogies that never quite fit. The recommendations that follow from his approach fail to calculate the costs and benefits of intervention, and Boot thereby overestimates the likelihood of public support. Narrowly focused efforts with clear objectives and limited costs often succeeded, even when they involved extended commitments (as in China), but attempts to reconstruct societies never work as planned. Despite a few partial exceptions such as Cuba, which had Latin America's second highest per capita income during the 1930s, intervention and direct rule did not solve deep-seated political or cultural problems. Intervention occasionally worked as a tactic for handling the symptoms of state failure, but such crisis management never provided a viable strategy to resolve the problem itself. Infrastructure such as roads built by Marines in Haiti outlasted the cultural or political impact of America's presence, and the failure to maintain those projects highlights the transient nature of outside rule.

A study of American involvement in nation-building led by a diplomat who supervised initiatives in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Afghanistan describes the effort devoted to achieving "democratic transformation" as the primary determinant of success. Where Japan and Germany both drew high levels of investment and had an extended American occupation, Haiti and Somalia never received comparable time or resources.[7] Will the United States make such long-term commitments to transforming other countries in this way? Experience suggests that public interest soon fades and policy makers quickly shift their attention to the next crisis.[8] Sustained engagement in Japan and

[7] James Dobbins, et al., *America's Role in Nation-Building: From Germany to Iraq* (Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 2003), p. 161.

[8] Nation building must compete for funds with domestic spending programs and, Britain's withdrawal from the Persian Gulf in the early 1970s followed a severe balance of payments crisis in 1968. Niall Ferguson and Lawrence J. Kotlikoff address prospects for the United States in "Going Critical: American Power and the Consequences of Fiscal Overstretch" *National Interest*, Fall 2003, pp. 24–32.

Germany during the Cold War provide exceptions that illustrate the general rule about American nation-building efforts.

The liberal imperialism that Boot suggests as a model extended nineteenth-century progressive reform overseas and echoed the social gospel movement that had replaced personal religion with social uplift.[9] Whether at home or abroad, the project sought to transform other individuals or societies to fit the reformers' own model of improvement regardless of context or the preferences of those to be reformed. Woodrow Wilson defined his Mexican policy as "teach[ing] the South American republics to elect good men." Walter Hines Page, America's ambassador to London, told Sir Edward Grey that the Mexican intervention sought to make Mexicans vote and live by their decisions, and that the United States would use punitive force, if it took 200 years before they learned to govern themselves. An idealist himself, Grey found this view remarkably naïve. American public opinion and the governing elite also came to reject such intervention, and other diplomatic priorities after 1915 shifted the direction of policy away from adventures in nation-building.

A variant of liberal imperialism that Walter McDougall describes as global meliorism emerged under Wilson and reached its peak after World War II with efforts to transform other societies along an American model.[10] Changes imposed by occupation governments in Germany and Japan seemed to provide a guide to reconstruction efforts elsewhere that gained favor in Washington as competition developed with the Soviet Union in the third world. While erroneously applying large-war tactics to an insurgency conflict in Vietnam, American policy makers also sought to extend Lyndon Johnson's Great Society project to Southeast Asia in an attempt to win hearts and minds. McDougall argues that the military effort became a holding operation to buy time while social programs brought victory.[11] The approach employed in Vietnam fit neither the context nor the objectives, and the strategy of fighting the Cold War through meliorist reform could not prevail against military intervention from North Vietnam. Whatever broader success the war had in blocking communist expansion in Asia, its immediate outcome disillusioned Americans. Resentment among military officers for bearing the responsibility of an unpopular war fought according to policies set by civilian appointees brought reforms designed to impede the extended deployment of forces on overseas missions without public support. The army integrated Reserves and National Guard into deployment planning and shifted key specialties to reserve units so that major campaigns could not be conducted by the regular army alone. Army doctrine emphasized conventional, large-scale mechanized

[9] Walter A. McDougall, *Promised Land, Crusader State: The American Encounter with the World Since 1776* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), p. 121; James Kurth, "The Protestant Deformation and American Foreign Policy," *Orbis*, Spring 1998, pp. 229–31.

[10] McDougall, *Promised Land*, pp. 174–5.

[11] Ibid., p. 189.

warfare against Soviet forces in Central Europe that fit the older American way of war. Small wars became synonymous with quagmires that distanced the military from society, and the officer corps emphasized the need for exit strategies and assured public support to avoid another such crisis.[12]

Vietnam thus laid the foundations for the Weinberger-Powell Doctrine of intervening only where circumstances and the means employed assured clear success. Although this doctrine, which Boot deplores as an impediment to nation-building, introduced a welcome degree of prudence to the debate on interventionism, present challenges require a more flexible approach. Neither the competition between states that defined international politics under the Westphalian system nor threats from centralized, authoritarian regimes like the Soviet Union offers a model for the near future. The real danger lies in instability, whether created by rogue states or the failure of governments to control their own territories effectively. Globalization make overseas threats harder to ignore than in the past by projecting disorder along the periphery into the heart of the developed world. Liberal imperialism may appear to offer a means of imposing order on regions that harbor terrorists, but the policy has never had enough support to sustain such efforts in the face of setbacks or competing priorities. Results so far have failed to match the resources and attention that global meliorism demands.

An economy of force that leverages relationships for the maximum effect provides a more realistic approach than direct intervention. Given that success lies in imposing one's will on the enemy at a reasonable cost rather than in victory in battle, American activity in Latin America during the Cold War is a better guide than the cases Boot cites. Limited resources and priorities focused elsewhere forced American officials in the region to use indirect means to secure key interests, and the officials molded political circumstances without being drawn into an awkward or controversial direct commitment. Diplomatic skill offers an alternative to conducting foreign policy as a form of social work. Managing problems before they become major crises also helps contain them because once an issue reaches the UN Security Council or similar venues, it often becomes a symbolic question where rational argument has no chance.[13] The Iraq war shows how emotional commitments and extraneous disputes interfere with resolving the immediate question. Many of the conflicts Boot discusses, particularly Nicaragua and Vietnam, also became symbolic of confrontations in which the passions aroused interfered with the effective pursuit of American interests. They became tests of commitment for the United States and allowed people

[12] Andrew J. Bacevich, "Neglected Trinity: Kosovo and the Crisis in U.S. Civil-Military Relations" in Bacevich and Eliot A. Cohen, eds., *War Over Kosovo: Politics and Strategy in a Global Age* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), p. 169.

[13] Robert Kaplan, "Supremacy by Stealth," *Atlantic Monthly*, July–Aug. 2003. Kaplan also addressed the problem of handling states unable to control their territory effectively in "A Tale of Two Colonies," *Atlantic Monthly*, April 2003.

on all sides to define themselves as partisans of one party or other. Myth overtook crisis management with predictable consequences, and lingering resentments against American intervention or mistaken lessons applied elsewhere cast a long shadow.

War in the Twentieth Century

Small wars fit within a broader spectrum of military capabilities, and Jeremy Black's *Warfare in the Western World, 1882–1975* examines the contexts in which governments applied force during the twentieth century. Where Boot writes with a policy agenda to promote, Black, a specialist in military history and eighteenth-century Europe, engages the academic debate on military history and historical scholarship in general.[14] He is part of an important school of British historians who reject the teleological framework imposed by Marxism and the older Whig interpretation. They oppose the determinist view that history involves an inevitable progress toward democracy or some other end dictated by contemporary preoccupations, and their critique emphasizes methodology over politics. Black, like fellow revisionists, draws upon careful archival research to understand the past from the perspective of those who lived in it. They reject postmodern theory and the categories of positivist social science as impediments to understanding history because they either define the essential qualities of a phenomenon in terms of its assumed outcome or project later concepts on to the past regardless of whether they carry the same meaning. Such fallacies distort history by reading the past backwards.[15] Black insists that "the past, and therefore the present, can never be understood if the options facing individuals in the past are ignored," and he therefore stresses contingency and choice as factors shaping events.

Black generally views history as a way of thinking about the past that can be applied to understanding the present or future. His emphasis on research over interpretative methodology fits well with developing operational policy recommendations, and such an empirical approach indicates how history can bridge the gap between current academic scholarship on international politics and the needs of practitioners.[16] He specifically questions the technology-driven concept of revolutions in military affairs, a

[14] Geoffrey Parker, "Military Revolutions, Past and Present," *Historically Speaking*, April 2003.

[15] Matthew D'Ancona, "History Men Battle Over Britain's Future," *London Times*, May 5, 1994; Peter Millar, "The Battle to be Taken Seriously," *Sunday Times*, Aug. 7, 1991; Richard Brent, "Butterfield's Tories: High Politics and the Writing of Modern British Political History." *Historical Journal* 30.4 (1987), p. 944.

[16] The problem of reconciling perspectives of scholars and practitioners is outlined in Alexander L. George, *Bridging the Gap: Theory and Practice in Foreign Policy* (Washington: United States Institute of Peace, 1993) and Kurth "Inside the Cave: The Banality of IR Studies," *National Interest*, Fall 1998, pp. 29–40.

theory that downplays the diversity of military culture within the West and simplifies the non-Western experience. Technological superiority does not automatically bring victory any more than advantages in resources and manpower because leadership and contingent factors determine its application. Moreover Western supremacy cannot be read back into earlier periods where non-Western powers emphasized local rivalries over lesser challenges from the West. Comparative analysis over time provides the best structure for interpreting war, and civil or internal conflicts merit attention alongside international relations. Black challenges linear narratives of military history—based on a clear dichotomy of change and continuity in which backwardness explains defeat—with a more complex perspective for understanding twentieth-century warfare.

Black's book begins with the late-nineteenth-century scramble for Africa and goes through decolonization in the 1970s, particularly Portugal's withdrawal from Mozambique and Angola. Imperialism reflected Western expansion prior to the great twentieth century wars within the West, and it highlights the different contexts for exercising military power. The concept of "challenge and response" lies at the heart of his analysis. Force—backed by technology, self-confidence, and demographic weight—brought conquest, but prestige sustained control with a minimal ongoing commitment. Rather than expanding into a vacuum, Western powers became the dominant element in a dynamic non-European world and succeeded by adapting to local conditions. Conditions often limited the application of technology; tanks and heavy artillery had little use in mountainous terrain or jungles where other tactics proved more effective. Black emphasizes the importance of communications and medical advances along with flexible tactics in securing Western supremacy. The initiative remained firmly with the West until after 1945, when Western states no longer had the material resources or political confidence to enforce their will on overseas territories.

A similar cycle of challenge and response occurred among Western powers. During the First World War, advances in firepower created tactical and logistical problems by enhancing the effect of defensive tactics and increasing the role of artillery, which required better roads and more munitions than before. Conditions shaped the direction of change, and the eastern front differed greatly from the western front, where large concentrations of forces in a relatively small area prevented a strategic breakthrough. Technology alone had a limited impact unless applied by integrated combat arms with operational doctrines that permitted achieving realistic political goals. The difficulty of drawing these factors together can be seen throughout the twentieth century. Vietnam indicated that firepower alone could not guarantee victory. Tactics later dismissed, such as the Polish reliance on horse cavalry (supported by motorized infantry and armored cars), worked well in certain contexts, and their failure in 1939 cannot be read backwards to the different circumstances of the Russo-Polish war in 1919–21.

Missions define force structure, and demographics and political culture shape the nature of warfare. Large populations and bureaucratic infrastructure permitted the mass conscript armies seen in Continental Europe, and leaders of Wilhelmine Germany saw military service as a means to produce a docile and disciplined workforce. Manpower concerns and the experience between 1914 and 1918 led French strategists to rely on the Maginot line and other defensive measures for territorial defense. Before World War II, the United States maintained a small professional army in peacetime that contrasted with its much larger navy. Strategic considerations made sea power more important for America than a large standing army. Black emphasizes the military's domestic role as the ultimate arm of state authority, a function rarely exercised in the United States. Internal policing was an important military task in Latin America, where political engagement among the officer corps created a situation not seen in democratic or many totalitarian societies. Context plays a vital role, and forces structured for one set of missions may not be suited to others. European armies designed for territorial defense in the Cold War cannot today sustain large expeditionary forces overseas, while many third-world military forces are ill-suited for missions beyond imposing domestic order. Understanding the context that defines missions and force structure highlights the difficulty in recasting forces for different tasks.

Perhaps the most important development Black explores is the declining bellicosity of Western societies. Attitudes toward war have changed remarkably over the past century. Developed countries became less willing to inflict or sustain casualties after seeing images of slaughter on the western front in World War I and the prolonged guerrilla wars in Algeria and Vietnam. War literature, which had previously expressed an heroic ethos, gradually acquired an antiwar tone that resonated all the more as fewer men had military experience from the 1970s on. A growing abstraction of suffering and death after 1945 provides another factor behind the decline in bellicosity. The consequences of this shift emerged with decolonization and the declining ability of Western powers to impose their will on other regions at an acceptable cost. The self-confidence that earlier had sustained Western prestige faded, removing a key pillar of imperial regimes. Military superiority and victory in battle no longer brought a sustainable political settlement, and governments sought other means of securing their interests beyond direct control. By the 1990s, this trend brought efforts to avoid casualties by using technology to project force from a distance, as in the Kosovo war in 1999. Attitudes may change in the face of a direct threat, but Black's analysis leads to the conclusions that Western societies lack public support for large-scale deployments to fight extended wars in the third world. Efforts to contain disorder and secure national interests beyond national borders are inevitable, but neither policy makers nor the public appear willing to sustain the burdens of liberal imperialism. So different means are now required to meet the goal of maintaining order along an unstable periphery.

Finding a Usable Past?

What role can history serve in developing effective policies, and how can officials turn the specialist training of historians to the best advantage? Sir Herbert Butterfield, whose work influenced revisionists like Black, noted that history inculcates a humane skepticism by showing that events and their consequences cannot be predicted easily. By highlighting the complezity of human experience and illuminating ambiguity, historical study challenges determinist theories that contort reality to fit their interpretative schemes. History suggests that the only discernable law guiding human events is the law of unintended consequences. That important lesson highlights the need for prudence and attention to contingencies in developing policies that can adapt to accommodate rapid change or new information.

While history can help policy makers, using it requires them to think historically. Unfortunately, many Americans today unconsciously echo Henry Ford's view of history as "more or less bunk" and believe themselves emancipated from the constraints of the past. Francis Fukayama's thesis on the end of history points to generally held assumptions that radically foreshorten historical perspective.[17] An educational system that downplays history within the framework of "social studies" reinforces the tendency to see the past as a foreign and distant country. Public officials generally have an event horizon limited to their own experience or that of their parents. Consequently, Americans typically reach for historical analogies rather than the more sophisticated task of thinking about problems historically.

What can be done to avoid these pitfalls? Ernest May's suggestions of a quarter century ago merit renewed attention. Historians can broaden discussion by offering interpretations of the past beyond those current at the time and perspectives on events in other countries. They can place American foreign policy in context and provide more detachment than political appointees or the bureaucracy itself. Historians can offer sophisticated analysis of likely parallels and analogies while drawing on a wider range of comparisons than non-specialists have available. More broadly, the thought patterns historians develop from "predicting backwards" offer a useful approach to thinking about future contingencies.[18] Each of these steps draw officials beyond immediate preconceptions that narrow options. Used properly then, history can aid the policy process by providing a framework for developing practical responses to challenges. No lesson could be more helpful than that.

[17] Jonathan Clark, *Our Shadowed Present: Modernism, Postmodernism, and History* (London: Atlantic Books, 2003), n 262, pp. 9–10.

[18] May, pp. 172, 174–54, 178–9.