

Book Notes

The Prince of the Marshes. By Rory Stewart. New York: Harcourt, Inc., 2006. Pp. 397. \$24.99, cloth.

The Prince of the Marshes is Rory Stewart's account of his year, beginning in September 2003, as an administrator in the Coalition Provisional Authority ("CPA") in Iraq. Unlike many recent polemics that trace political deception in Washington before the invasion and policy mistakes after the attack, Stewart's memoir focuses on ground level interactions between Coalition diplomats and Iraqis as both sides struggle to establish law and respectively implement two strikingly different visions of social order.

The memoir begins with Stewart's first weeks in Maysan Province, a former marshland on the Iranian border once famous for its population of Marsh Arab tribes before Saddam Hussein ordered it drained in response to a Shia uprising. In his role as acting and then deputy governorate coordinator of the province, he is tasked with overseeing the region's reconstruction, economic development, and, most importantly, transitioning political control of Maysan to local Iraqi leaders.

Part One of *The Prince of the Marshes* reads more like the memoir of a Chicago political boss than a British diplomat. In Maysan alone, there were "fifty-four political parties, twenty substantial tribes, and a dozen leading religious figures" competing to fill the vacuum left by the vanquished Baathist bureaucracy. Stewart's detailed portraits of provincial leaders like the Prince of the Marshes, a tribal militia commander turned legislator, demonstrate the complexity of the Iraqi political landscape. Although no Sunni insurgency exists in Maysan—indeed, many Iraqis with whom Stewart works were victims of torture by Saddam's secret police—violence between Muqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi Army, Marsh Arab tribes, and Iranian-backed militias is a constant threat. The only political certainty Stewart encounters is the divide between the CPA's goal of a moderate, secular democracy and the extreme political and religious perspectives of many of Maysan's new powerbrokers.

Stewart, who has extensive experience in post-conflict Indonesia, Bosnia, and Afghanistan, recognizes that he "could help with development projects and political reforms, but all our policies depended on the rule of law." In Part Two, much of Stewart's hope for establishing law and providing security is placed on Abu Rashid, a former commander in the Prince's militia and the province's new chief of police. After the fall of Baghdad and the disbanding of the Iraqi army, the American and British militaries deputized militias from various tribes and political factions as "emergency brigades" to guard government institutions and establish some level of security. In a maneuver strongly supported by the CPA, Abu Rashid

planned to integrate the brigades from his own Albu Muhammad tribe, the Badr faction, and the Movement of the Party of God into one cohesive Maysan police force. A week after informing Stewart of his plan, an assassin shot Abu Rashid twice in the chest, killing him instantly on the steps of a mosque and ensuring that the police brigades would remain politically divided. The second half of *The Prince of the Marshes* traces the slow spiral into lawlessness which began, at least symbolically, by the murder of Abu Rashid.

Part Three, a collection of vignettes of rural villagers, extremist clerics, moderate intellectuals, and aspiring artists, is interspaced with allusions to the British Mandate in Mesopotamia, during which the United Kingdom took colonial control over Iraq following World War I. The references to British imperialism—often made by Iraqis whose fathers personally knew the administrators in Stewart’s job in 1919—recall that the British Army, led by officers who spent their entire careers in the Middle East, spoke Arabic fluently, and were willing to employ Machiavellian techniques, did not peacefully stabilize Iraq. These allusions not only reinforce the incredible difficulty of nation building, but also powerfully reveal what every Iraqi knows—that the decisions of conquering Westerners are, once again, determining their region’s future.

Parts Four and Five follow Stewart to his new assignment in Nasiriyah, the capital city of Dhi Qar Province, and fully develop his intersecting themes of law, politics, and collapsing social order. In Maysan, he followed the Coalition’s mandate and appointed the first local council of Iraqis directly, resulting in perpetual criticism of the council. In Nasiriyah, the CPA administrator disobeyed Baghdad and held local elections, adding transparency to the selection process and legitimacy to the council. But despite this fleeting appearance of optimism in Nasiriyah, law and security had no more momentum there than in Maysan. Instead, soon after his arrival, news broke of the prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib. While Stewart considers resigning in protest, “The Iraqis hardly commented on it and I saw for the first time that they had always assumed we were doing these things and had never believed my statements about human rights and the rule of law.”

Part Five, the last section of *The Prince of the Marshes*, documents the siege of the Coalition’s headquarters in Nasiriyah. For three days, Sadrist militiamen fired hundreds of mortar shells and rocket-propelled grenades into the CPA compound while Stewart and his colleagues waited for a reaction force from the Italian Army to arrive. The attack was eventually repulsed and, despite taking heavy fire, no Coalition personnel were killed or seriously injured. But this result is no victory or even a symbolic second chance for the spread of law and order in Iraq. Instead, this battle, and perhaps each battle throughout the invasion, exudes the ominous suggestion that it will become another historical factor deepening Iraqi animosity toward the

West and impairing any international relationships that could still stem the ubiquitous violence and the nation's continued slide into chaos.

The Prince of the Marshes, while not focusing on specific abuses, makes an important contribution to human rights scholarship and, even more so, the structural implementation of those rights. Often lost in theoretical tracts, Stewart's work illustrates the importance of local relationships between outsiders and indigenous people in securing the peace in postwar zones. Each time the CPA mediates a tribal conflict, earns the loyalty of an important cleric, or successfully implements an economic reform, Stewart and his colleagues rely more on the trust and cooperation earned from Iraqi leaders than guidance from Baghdad, Washington, or theoretical frameworks of development. Stewart's experience suggests that these relationships do not exist in a vacuum and are not simple products of personality. Instead, each relationship—and even each encounter—between a CPA officer and an Iraqi citizen is shaped and limited by historical influences and cultural differences. Each development project, political overture, and long-term objective was handicapped by suspicion and anger resulting from Iraq's colonial past and wider cultural disagreements about the role of law, the place of religion in society, and the attractiveness of the democratic model.

—Pat McNally

Burning Books and Leveling Libraries: Extremist Violence and Cultural Destruction. By Rebecca Knuth. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2006. Pp. 248. \$39.95, hardcover.

Rebecca Knuth's *Burning Books and Leveling Libraries* is an excellent contribution to the field of genocide/ethnocide studies, analyzing the concept of targeting a human group through the destruction of their knowledge and heritage. Its central message is timely: In an era in which competing ideologies fuel internal and international conflict, the destruction of libraries and other items of cultural significance is neither random nor irrelevant. Preserving the world's repositories of knowledge is crucial to ensuring that the darkest moments of history do not endlessly repeat themselves.

Knuth introduces several new terms in the book. Libricide, the subject of an earlier book by Knuth, refers to the regime-sponsored destruction of books and libraries. Biblioclasm denotes purposeful actions, rooted in moral judgments, that are aimed at destroying books and libraries, but are not necessarily driven by state actors.

The book is subdivided into three parts analyzing cultural destruction by extremist movements in different contexts. Part I examines peripheral extremist groups: those who perceive themselves as marginalized and seek ways to influence their society's value system. Knuth first discusses the destruction of Amsterdam's South African Institute in 1984 by frustrated and

increasingly desperate anti-apartheid protestors. Next, she examines three cases of “ethnic biblioclasm” resulting from conflict between competing ethnic groups in India, Kashmir, and Sri Lanka.

Part II investigates instances in which once-peripheral extremist groups succeed in taking power and then seek to implement their values through totalitarian measures aimed at “purifying” society. The three case studies in this section of the book—Germany under National Socialism, Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge, and Afghanistan under the Taliban—depict regimes which assess their country’s institutional structure and methodically destroy every cultural institution that protects or represents ideas that do not comport with their vision of a utopian society.

In Part III, Knuth explores the relationship between twentieth-century warfare, in which conflict is most often driven by rival ideologies, and the destruction of libraries. Knuth depicts World War II as the result of centuries of re-thinking and expanding the methods of war, culminating in the “total warfare” of 1939 to 1945. Military tactics were aimed at both human and cultural destruction, and cultural institutions were seen as targets in themselves; their elimination was a way to denigrate and demoralize the enemy population. Part III also includes a chapter on anarchy, using examples from Nigeria, the fall of the Soviet Union, and Iraq to demonstrate that in the vacuum created by war or the collapse of an authoritarian state, soldiers and civilians alike will take advantage of the chaos to vandalize symbols of a hated regime and to loot libraries and museums for objects that can be sold.

Arguably, the book’s most important contribution is its final chapter, in which Knuth applies her carefully elaborated framework for analyzing the destruction of objects of cultural value to the looting of Iraq’s museums and libraries after the U.S. invasion in 2003. She compiles the information known about this largely forgotten time period, including the extent of the looting, the responses of Iraqis, and the U.S. government’s reaction to the looting and to criticism for failing to stop it. Through this examination she reveals a scene disturbingly resonant with other sections of the book: As Iraqis watched thieves plunder their cultural heritage, and the world’s historians, archivists, and librarians pleaded with the Bush Administration to put a stop to the looting, the U.S. government responded with indifference bordering on contempt for Iraqi culture. Knuth offers two equally chilling explanations for the U.S. failure to react to the looting. She posits that either U.S. officials did not view Iraq’s culture as significant enough to merit protection, or they chose to sacrifice cultural institutions to angry mobs, hoping the critical international community would interpret these violent crimes as repudiation of Hussein’s regime and, therefore, endorsement of the U.S. invasion.

Knuth’s failure to keep her personal outrage at U.S. conduct in Iraq from coming through in her discussion of the 2003 looting at times clouds her

otherwise excellent analysis. Nevertheless, by applying previous chapters' exploration of extremist ideologies to the situation in Iraq, she provides a new lens through which to see both the war and the United States. Throughout the book, Knuth's message is clear and powerful: if we disregard the destruction of cultural institutions, in particular libraries, it is at our own peril.

—Katherine Glenn

The Psychology of Nuclear Proliferation. By Jacques E. C. Hymans. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006. Pp. 286. £45, hardcover.

The primary thesis of Hymans's book is that the decision whether or not to "go nuclear" reflects the psychology of the leaders who make that decision. This initially seems to be an obvious point, yet the traditional wisdom surrounding the nuclear decision has thus far failed to account for this factor in its calculations.

Hymans notes that only nine states currently have a nuclear weapon, in spite of dire predictions in the 1960s that as many as twenty-five states would be nuclear by now. Even today, contemporary thinkers from various schools of thought warn of a "second nuclear age" brought on by developing states acquiring once out-of-reach technologies. Hymans attributes the incongruity between prediction and reality on the mistaken notion that the number of nuclear states in the world reflects the spread of nuclear technology. In fact, he notes, there are probably about forty-eight states in the world that currently have nuclear capabilities, compared to nine that we know to have a nuclear bomb in their possession. Why, then, have so few made the final step to acquire nuclear weapons?

The conventional answer to this question is that the hard work of the non-proliferation regime over the last thirty years has influenced states that otherwise would have gone nuclear not to do so. But Hymans questions whether the non-proliferation regime has really been as effective as modern scholars argue. Instead, argues Hymans, there must be another explanation for why so many states have chosen to stay nuclear-free in spite of the "tempting" technology available to them.

The simple explanation may be that going nuclear is really not as tempting as it seems. The decision to go nuclear has potentially massive and unpredictable consequences for a state. The world of nuclear power and nuclear deterrence is a dangerous and relatively unknown place. Perhaps the question that we should be asking is why any state would want to go nuclear in the first place.

Theories abound as to what motivates states to go nuclear—security, prestige, the need to match power with neighbors, and the reinforcement of national self-esteem, among others. But Hymans finds this standard fare

inadequate to explain the decision in light of the many and powerful arguments a state would find against going nuclear. Instead, he argues, it is time to build a new theoretical model for explaining why states go nuclear, one that appropriately focuses on the motivations behind individual state leaders.

A country's decision to go nuclear rests with its leader's *national identity conception* ("NIC"), a term Hymans employs to refer to a leader's understanding of both what his or her nation stands for and its status in the world. Hymans identifies two dimensions along which this NIC can be defined. The first—solidarity—is a product of the leader's sense of comparison to other states. Whether the leader takes an "us against them" stance toward the rest of the world, or whether he finds some solidarity with other nations within a larger identity conception, will typify the leader as either "oppositional" or "sportsmanlike." Oddly enough, Hymans argues, the *oppositional* NIC is rather rare in the world since most nations are able to find themselves within a larger identity grouping. The second dimension of an NIC is that of status. This dimension is determined by whether the leader feels that the nation is equal to, if not superior to, others or whether the leader believes it to be below the other nations that constitute natural comparisons. This will typify the leader as having either a *nationalist* NIC or a *subaltern* NIC. By reviewing leaders along both dimensions, we can predict both cognitive and emotional behavior, argues Hymans. It is only when we find the oppositional nationalist—the leader who views the world in black-and-white, "us against them" terms and who believes his country has the potential to take on other nations—will we also find the leader pressing for nuclear armament.

The rest of Hymans' book is composed of case studies of four nations confronted with the choice of whether to go nuclear. Two of them, France and India, decided to go nuclear. The other two, Australia and Argentina, did not. In his close and careful analysis of these four countries and their respective histories, he finds that both France and India had leaders with oppositional nationalist NIC's, while the other two did not. He also shows why traditional approaches to the nuclear decision failed to accurately predict what happened. In the conclusion of the book, Hymans debunks a number of popular theories propounded by modern scholars to explain why countries go nuclear—the oversimplified "domino effect," the "deterrent" theory, and others—and instead promotes his NIC model as the path from identity to emotions to policy choice.

In all, Hymans's book is a novel and compelling approach to the nuclear decision. After all, it is uncommon to find a choice or decision in life that remains completely guarded from the effects of human psychology and emotion. How could we attribute rational and calculated decision making to a decision that is so new and rare, a decision that is such a "stab in the

dark” for many leaders? Yet traditional theories may still have a place, even if a little diminished, in the calculation.

While Hymans’s case studies are persuasive, they represent a relatively small sample size and may have been selected because they support his thesis. Conventional theories may have been able to predict the same outcomes. Perhaps India’s decision to go nuclear was in part a response to China’s holding nuclear weapons. Perhaps France’s decision to go nuclear in the 1950s was related to the fact that the non-proliferation regime had not yet developed. Given the multi-faceted nature of this issue, Hymans may be correct that the conventional wisdom alone cannot account for the nuclear reality today, but, similarly, his model may be inadequate on its own. Complex decisions require inter-disciplinary approaches; all the models of thought—realist, economic, bureaucratic, military, domestic political, and now psychological—may, in conjunction, be able to provide a better prediction of which states will go nuclear than can any one theory alone. However, definitive predictions may never be possible about a decision so strange and novel and fraught with emotions like pride and fear. Perhaps each major theory that attempts to explain the decision to go nuclear clings to its own certainty, wanting to believe that there is a way to accurately predict when leaders will engage in this dangerous activity. Perhaps the better answer is that the decision will never be predictable, and all we can do is hope that international peace efforts, the non-proliferation regime, and basic human goodness, will find a way into the decision-making process.

—Amy L. Lawrence