

Gary Rosen, ed., **The Right War? The Conservative Debate on Iraq**. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005. 254 pp. ISBN 0-521-67318-6

In the aftermath of the September 2001 terrorist attacks on New York and Washington American foreign policy underwent a dramatic shift. Led by a committed president enjoying significant popular support, the United States launched war on terror, characterized by invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq and ensuing swift military victories. However, successes on the battlefield were followed by a protracted counterinsurgency effort that has hitherto not been won in either of the countries.

Whereas the invasion of Afghanistan was generally perceived as an understandable response to the barbaric acts of 9/11, the decision to start combat operations against the regime of Saddam Hussein was controversial in nature. It reflected sweeping changes in American national security policy, which henceforth reserved for the United States the right to act preemptively against any possible threats to its people or territory. Moreover, it established the ideological link between terrorist groups and the so-called “rogue regimes,” making no difference between terrorists themselves and those harboring them and supporting their activities. Thus, taking also into consideration the danger of WMD proliferation, America could no longer afford to wait for a concrete threat to materialize.

Needless to say, the argumentation in the run-up to the war in Iraq was met with ardent opposition, not only abroad, but also domestically. In addition to its liberal critics, the war found resistance even within the conservative wing of American politics, where various schools of thoughts argued about its viability, necessity and appropriateness. Ultimately, this Republican intra-party debate between traditionalists, neoconservatives, realists and other factions was won by neoconservatives who advocated robust military action along with an emphasis on democracy promotion.

“The Right War,” edited by Gary Rosen, offers an examination of the next stage of the conservative debate on Iraq. It is a collection of twenty-two articles, essays and op-eds, published in leading periodicals such as *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal* or *Weekly Standard* and written by prominent American conservative thinkers and opinion-makers in 2004 and 2005, i. e. in a period after the termination of major military operations and during a growing insurgency following the fall of Saddam Hussein. They are indicative of the political atmosphere in Washington, D.C., when the jubilant mood following the impressive military victory against Iraqi regular army had slowly dissipated and questions about the future of “post-war” American efforts in Iraq, turning out to be more lethal than the actual combat phase, had begun to arise. It was in this moment when it became painfully clear that the project of pacifying, let alone democratizing Iraq and possibly the entire Middle East, will be much less of a “cakewalk” than the previous military campaign. As a result, American conservatives had to react to new realities on the ground, reflect on their own past contemplations and, most importantly, provide a suggestion for a future course of action.

Rosen’s book does a good job demonstrating that the conservative movement is not a unitary monolith as it selects works by authors of various ideological backgrounds. From the neoconservative perspective, it offers ardent support for America’s war effort and advo-

cacy of staying the course. Robert Kagan and William Kristol explain in their own terms the reasons why the United States is involved in fighting in the Middle East. Norman Podhoretz expansively argues that war on terror represents a new paradigm in international relations comparable to World War II or the Cold War. Charles Krauthammer builds on his earlier works about unipolar moment and defends the world view he calls democratic realism. Other authors challenge the neoconservative agenda and assumptions. Fouad Ajami writes about the likely failure of the democracy-building project in Mesopotamia while Francis Fukuyama suggests his own alternative of a mix of American interests and values. Realists have their say in the words of Henry Kissinger, who questions the feasibility and desirability as a foreign policy goal of nation-building efforts in the Middle East. Columnist George Will calls on the Bush administration to return to the true principles of conservatism. The paleoconservative point of view is presented by Patrick Buchanan, who poses uncomfortable questions about the goals of the ongoing war.

Strictly speaking, "The Right War" does not bring any new information about or analysis of the intellectual debate on the Iraq War in America as it, in fact, consists of reprints that could eventually be obtained elsewhere. Neither does it address the impact these writings had on the decision-making processes in Washington, D.C., as the Bush administration contemplated further course of action in the Middle East. However, its foremost contribution lies in the fact that it offers an overview of the main ideological groups within the conservative movement along with concrete examples of their products in a concise and well-organized form. Rosen, Harvard-educated managing director of the Commentary magazine, managed to compile a truly resourceful book for any student of modern American foreign and national security policy.

Jiří Skoupy

Simon Schama, **The American Future: A History from the Founding Fathers to Barack Obama**. London: Vintage, 2009. 416 pp. ISBN 978-0099520399

Simon Schama is a renowned British historian who lives in the United States since the beginning of the 1980s. In 2008, he produced a documentary series for the BBC, which analyzed American history in the light of the then upcoming elections. His research for the TV series became the starting point for his book *The American Future*.

The author explores the idea that Americans, when making decisions concerning the future of their country, are often influenced by their interpretations of history. The biggest asset of the book is its focus on micro-historical episodes, which Schama introduces in the context of their own age as well as in their origin and effect on the current dilemmas. This is not a book that would try to forecast the future. It is a highly selective and in many cases strongly simplified interpretation of history, which doesn't strive for objectivity, but provides arguments. His main argument is that it is impossible to cut history out of the context of current discourse. History according to Schama is a living organism, not an objective reality.