Mission Failure: America and the World in the Post–Cold War Era

Mandelbaum’s latest book offers a biting sketch of U.S. foreign policy during the Clinton, George W. Bush, and Obama administrations, skewering all three for their various mistakes. He argues that, bequeathed a rare gift of peace, prosperity, and relative international calm, the post–Cold War presidencies often wandered off into undisciplined adventures in humanititarian and quixotic nation building, most of which turned out badly. Instead of squandering blood, treasure, and reputation on “foreign policy as social work” (as Mandelbaum put it in these pages two decades ago), Washington should have focused on other countries’ external behavior, not their internal politics. Mandelbaum’s blows hit their targets, as does his theoretical contention that the most important factor driving these policies was unprecedented relative power—the strong doing what they can once again, this time in a well-intentioned but clueless American mode. But since the author favors continuing “the American role as the chief custodian of the benign international order that . . . emerged from the end of the Cold War,” it is not clear why the new era is truly distinctive, and the book would have benefited from less narration of familiar events and more discussion of the author’s preferred courses of action.

GIDEON ROSE

Western Europe

Andrew Moravcsik

Scotland Now: A Warning to the World

The recent rise of Scottish nationalism has exposed the ideological contradictions of British conservatism. Among British Conservatives are Burkean nationalists who reject Scottish nationalism, Thatcherites who warn Scots not to trim their public sector, extremists who criticize the pro-independence Scottish National Party (for being extremist, naturally), and believers in “one nation” conservatism in theory who are dividing the United Kingdom in practice by striking a cozy electoral bargain with Scottish nationalists. In politics, when partisans contemplate such contradictions, they tend to fulminate, and Gallagher is no exception: his book is twice as long as it need be, not least because it is bloated with sarcastic asides, accusations of cynical motives, and the persistent use of quotation marks to indicate irony. Gallagher manages to see everything except the one thing he cannot: the central role the Conservative Party has played in leading so many modern Scots to despise being part of the United Kingdom. Yet he adds something to the conventional view of the Scottish issue as merely an unfortunate disagreement between two well-meaning groups, idealistic nationalists and sensible unionists. He highlights that even

without the independence movement, Scotland is becoming a populist one-party state. Governments in such places, he rightly warns, tend to be insular, intolerant, interventionist, and corrupt.

Government Favoritism in Europe

Public infrastructure projects and other types of government procurement almost everywhere in the world suffer from favoritism and corruption, if not outright criminality. The spoils always go to the people with the right connections, wealth, or the willingness to use or threaten violence. This is among the most difficult aspects of governance for scholars to study: those who talk don’t know, and those who know don’t talk. This slim volume summarizes detailed studies of favoritism in Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Italy, Romania, Turkey, and Ukraine. A final chapter shows how criminal organizations in many countries—including Mafia-like groups in Bulgaria and Italy—infiltrate national and sub-national public spending projects. Each chapter is packed with a remarkably rich set of charts, graphs, and statistical analyses that capture how much corruption exists and how it works. These succinct and eye-opening quantitative estimates of what really goes on beneath the surface of government make for indispensable reading and should straighten out anyone who doubts that the powerful always find ways to reinforce their influence and wealth, even on the “cleanest” of continents.

COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

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Recent Books

Export Empire: German Soft Power in Southeastern Europe, 1890–1945

From the British Empire a century ago to China today, powerful countries have often employed economic and cultural influence to bind smaller states in dependent relationships. Gross shows how German businessmen and academics in the Weimar and Nazi periods used development projects, trade fairs, scholarly research, and educational exchanges to help entrench Germany’s role as the primary trade partner for many of its neighbors, establish itself as a development model, and fix its position atop central Europe’s hierarchy of states. Gross stretches the terms “informal imperialism” and “soft power” to encompass this type of behavior, which immediately evokes images of Nazi imperialism. Yet his most telling conclusion is that Germany’s informal influence during the interwar period had more in common with today’s relations among the United States, European countries, and smaller states than with Adolf Hitler’s military grasp for Lebensraum (living space) and a formal empire. In many ways, Hitler’s counterproductive military expansion and ethnic cleansing reversed the interwar policy of mutually beneficial inducement and persuasion. This book offers an interesting historical perspective on the active trade and investment policies of great powers today.

Shadows of Revolution: Reflections on France, Past and Present

Bell (who, like me, teaches at Princeton University) has emerged as a leading U.S.-based observer of France, the United States’ oldest ally. This book contains more than 40 of his essays published over the past 25 years, covering everything from the French Revolution, Napoleon, and the Vichy government to contemporary politics and culture. Most of these essays are book reviews that engage authors in critical dialogues and that originally appeared in The New Republic, the London Review of Books, and other periodicals. But Bell is not a typical academic turned high-end journalist: he does not simply summarize books or briefly mention them as a springboard for a bit of reportage or op-ed writing. Instead, he seeks to stimulate serious debate about the past. For him, the test of a good argument is its fidelity to contextual details as historical actors actually perceived them. Although Bell writes well, his reviews do not always make for easy reading, given the complexity of his approach. Still, the book offers unusually rewarding insights into the past and the many ways it continues to influence contemporary France.

Western Hemisphere

Richard Feinberg

Routledge Handbook of Latin America in the World

The foreign policies of Latin American states have been woefully understudied. This comprehensive collection of essays by senior international relations scholars is a magnificent corrective to that shameful lacuna. The contributors place their analyses within familiar theoretical frameworks, dive deeply into empirical evidence, and keep their essays—30 in all—succinct. The collection covers foreign policies of every major Latin American country; regional multilateralism and economic integration schemes; and issues such as human rights, narcotics, global environmental governance, and migration. Oddly, there is one brief (although solid) essay on foreign policy even though many contributions contemplate Latin America’s efforts to restrain U.S. power. The pace of change in the region is that the enthusiasm some of the contributors demonstrate for assertive left-leaning governments that seek autonomy from a U.S. influence is already a bit belied by the Argentinian turning toward pragmatism, Cuba’s Raúl Castro’s rapprochement with the U.S., and the floundering of Venezuela’s Sandinista revolution. Nevertheless, an authoritative handbook should be received by anyone seeking high-quality material on Latin America’s role in the contemporary world.

A Fragmented Continent: Latin America and the Global Politics of Climate

American Crossings: Border Politics in the Western Hemisphere

Taken together, these two books reveal a paradox of Latin America: although its governments disaggreg