

standing his patented grin and down-home style, he was often cold and hard to know. The intensely focused, hard-working engineer and the deeply faithful born-again Christian coexisted, sometimes uneasily. Although devoted to doing right in the job of president, he lacked the warmth and ease in communicating that would have made him a successful leader. He was, writes Alter, an “all-business president who seemed sometimes to prefer humanity to human beings.”

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*First Friends: The Powerful, Unsung (and Unelected) People Who Shaped Our Presidents*

BY GARY GINSBERG. Twelve, 2021, 304 pp.

It is hard to believe that there is any aspect of the American presidency that hasn't been fully explored, from first ladies to first pets. Ginsberg noticed that there was one obvious, potentially powerful set of actors who had largely been ignored: presidents' closest friends. These are the men and women who can relieve the loneliness a president lives with, help him think through what to do about a major problem, and say things to him that no one else can. The resulting book is an entertaining, sometimes thought-provoking read. It opens with the well-known, highly political 50-year friendship between Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, during which they exchanged around 1,250 letters. There is Abraham Lincoln's friendship with Joshua Speed, who may have saved Lincoln's life from severe depression and probably did save his career. At another extreme are those friends whose main role was to listen: Daisy Suckley to Franklin Roosevelt and Bebe Rebozo to

Richard Nixon. The latter two ate, drank, and relaxed together, “rarely if ever talked politics, . . . and often spent large chunks of time in silence”—but Rebozo proved there was nothing he wouldn't do for Nixon. John F. Kennedy had already shared a close friendship with the British diplomat David Ormsby-Gore for 25 years when he momentarily called on Ormsby-Gore to help figure out what to do at the peak of the Cuban missile crisis.

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## Western Europe

*Andrew Moravcsik*

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*Not One Inch: America, Russia, and the Making of Post-Cold War Stalemate*

BY M. E. SAROTTE. Yale University Press, 2021, 568 pp.

A distinguished historian of transatlantic relations revisits Western relations with Russia during the 1990s. This critical decade set the tone for geopolitics in the post-Cold War period, above all through the expansion of NATO. Sarotte weaves together the most engaging and carefully documented account of this period in East-West diplomacy currently available. She deepens the conventional wisdom among most historians, namely that in the late 1980s and early 1990s, many Western leaders gave informal assurances that NATO would not expand—not just to the territory of the former East Germany but also across central and eastern Europe. Since Moscow failed to secure any formal guarantee, however, Western leaders later went ahead anyway, downplaying or denying

any contradiction. She argues more speculatively that this perceived betrayal was a major factor in the subsequent collapse of democracy in Russia and the further deterioration of relations between the West and Russia under President Vladimir Putin. But most of the book's evidence actually leans in the opposite direction and suggests that U.S. Presidents George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton and their top diplomats slowed NATO expansion to try to stabilize the government of Russian President Boris Yeltsin in the short term and held off as long as he still looked viable. It was only when Yeltsin's fall became imminent, and a hardening of East-West relations started to seem inevitable, that the United States moved to expand the alliance.

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*The Ambassadors: Thinking About Diplomacy From Machiavelli to Modern Times*

BY ROBERT COOPER. Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2021, 563 pp.

For many years, Cooper, a British diplomat, was the European Union's unofficial foreign policy guru, and from 2002 to 2010, he served as the union's director general for external and politico-military affairs. EU insiders see him as a tough and thoughtful analyst. This sweeping reflection on 500 years of transatlantic statecraft focuses on a small number of individuals who, in his view, combined sophisticated thinking with effective diplomatic action: Machiavelli, Talleyrand, Konrad Adenauer, Jean Monnet, Dean Acheson, George Kennan, and Henry Kissinger. Cooper draws three main conclusions. The first is that diplomatic success requires extreme inconsistency and immorality. To get important

things done, diplomats must often mislead or mistreat the public and, often, their political masters; many will surely find it troubling that he hails Talleyrand and Kissinger as models. At the same time, Cooper portrays most foreign-policy making as little more than a desperate, often futile effort to navigate in the face of deep uncertainty, "black swan" events, and unintended consequences. And he traces a centuries-long spread of liberal values, democratic institutions, multilateral cooperation, and the use of diplomacy instead of military force—preconditions for the peaceful and prosperous world one finds within the EU. These three conclusions remain in considerable, and perhaps irreconcilable, tension with one another.

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*European Language Matters: English in Its European Context*

BY PETER TRUDGILL. Cambridge University Press, 2021, 275 pp.

Because of the global reach of first the United Kingdom and later the United States, the world language today is imperfect English, spoken by well over a billion people. The majority learn it as a second language—and according to some (generally British) native speakers, other (generally American) native speakers do not speak it properly. Meanwhile, English has become the de facto European language, although among the EU member states, only two embrace it as one of their official languages: Ireland and Malta. One could not wish for a more qualified guide to the resulting chaos than Trudgill, a linguist who writes a popular column for *The New European*. He revels in English's massive and diverse vocabulary, with its finely shaded differentiations among near synonyms, a result of histori-

cal interactions with other languages and dialects. He delights in each tidbit of knowledge: the word “metaphor,” for example, has a figurative meaning in English but is found on delivery trucks in Athens that “transfer things from place to place.” Trudgill rues the way that many English words lose their power and precision when employed indiscriminately, as with the superlative “awesome.” For anyone, native speaker or not, this book offers a pleasurable and humorous voyage of discovery.

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*The Norwegian Exception? Norway's Liberal Democracy Since 1814*

BY MATHILDE FASTING AND OYSTEIN SORENSEN. Hurst, 2021, 280 pp.

Norwegians enjoy a well-functioning liberal democracy, a productive free-market economy, stable social relations, and—even more so than other Scandinavian countries—a generous and popular social welfare state. In global rankings of equality, gender balance, happiness, life expectancy, and the rule of law, Norway invariably appears near the top. In this book, two historians seek to explain why the country is so successful. They enthusiastically recount the country's history, yet they fail to answer the question. Much of Norway's edge seems to reflect dumb luck: the country benefits from abundant energy resources, peaceful neighbors, and a strong sense of national identity. Elsewhere, however, these things have led to conflict and collapse. The magic ingredient, the authors argue, is trust: Norwegians trust one another and trust their government, which can thus effectively promote the common good. Yet are they trusting simply

because their system has always worked, or does their system work because they are more trusting? If the latter, why? In the end, it is unclear what foreigners can learn from Norway's success.

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*The Greeks: A Global History*

BY RODERICK BEATON. Basic Books, 2021, 608 pp.

When people think of Greece, they generally think of the present-day nation-state, which they imagine as roughly conterminous with a narrowly bounded ancient society that had Athens and a few neighboring cities at its center. In this magisterial yet readable introduction to Greek history—one of the best of its kind, whether for academic or popular audiences—Beaton reveals the far more complicated reality. Greece has always been a broadly settled civilization; Greeks have long lived in parts of present-day Bulgaria, Cyprus, Italy, Russia, Turkey, and countries of the Middle East. In 1830, modern Greece gained its independence not via a popular ethnic revolution: most of its inhabitants spoke Albanian, and three times as many Greeks lived outside the country's borders as did inside. Instead, Greek independence resulted from the work of warlords, outside powers, and generic Orthodox Christian opposition to Ottoman rule. The new state had to impose a sanitized version of the Greek language and a sense of national identity within its territory. Many of contemporary Greece's problems with its neighbors are rooted in past wars waged by the Greeks to assert that identity; others spring from its status as a small country subject to many indignities, only one of which is its financial tutelage under the European Union.

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*Powers and Thrones: A New History of the Middle Ages*

BY DAN JONES. Viking, 2021, 656 pp.

Jones is best known for writing popular histories and producing television series such as *Secrets of Great British Castles* and *Britain's Bloodiest Dynasty*; perhaps unsurprisingly, his history of Europe between the fall of Rome and the Protestant Reformation is neither deep nor authoritative. But it certainly is entertaining. In an old-school manner, Jones weaves together brief biographical sketches of colorful people, from Attila the Hun to Martin Luther, with engaging yarns about the critical events in which they took part. He nods to historiographic fashion just long enough to inquire about the impact of climate change and to ask why European countries rose to global preeminence in this period. But in the end, his question-begging answer is simply that they had grown stronger and richer, and he tells that tale without much criticism of its more brutal aspects. Still, the resulting account of the Middle Ages is as engaging a read as any.

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Western Hemisphere

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*Richard Feinberg*

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*Amazônia*

BY SEBASTIÃO SALGADO. Taschen, 2021, 528 pp.

Salgado, a famed Paris-based Brazilian documentary photographer, takes his camera deep into the Amazon rainforest. To tackle this vast territory, larger than the European Union and inhabited, Salgado estimates, by some

370,00 indigenous people (compared with an estimated five million prior to European conquest in the sixteenth century) belonging to nearly 200 tribes, Salgado, accompanied by anthropologists and linguists, spent weeks on end with each of a dozen remote communities. The hospitable tribes, scattered in tiny communities, subsist in bucolic harmony with an abundant, generous natural world yet are dwarfed by the natural immensity of the rainforest. The voluminous book's brief texts add informative context, but Salgado mainly allows the captivating black-and-white photos to speak for themselves. The rainforest's startling beauty and majesty are overwhelming; amazing aerial photography captures breathtaking cloud formations that offer an ever-changing visual spectacle. But the greatest contribution of *Amazônia* is its intimate, sensitive portraits of everyday life among the indigenous tribes: their warm family ties, their hunting and fishing skills, their dazzling facial and body paintings, and their ritual dances. Salgado neither patronizes nor sensationalizes. He honors his subjects by capturing both their communal and their individual selves: avoiding a flaw found in some documentary work depicting indigenous people, he accompanies every photograph of a person with the subject's full name.

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*Civilizations: A Novel*

BY LAURENT BINET. TRANSLATED BY SAM TAYLOR. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2021, 320 pp.

Binet playfully imagines a counterfactual history in which the Aztecs and the Incas conquer western Europe. His entertaining style blends biting satire of