

opinion

Trifling U.S. foreign policy

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Paris

The unforeseen consequences of American Middle Eastern policy since the Second World War are now making themselves apparent. In the beginning, American policy was to control the principal oil-producing Muslim states.

Negotiations between Franklin D. Roosevelt and King Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud of Saudi Arabia aboard the American cruiser USS Quincy, following FDR's participation in the wartime Yalta conference, ended in an agreement by which the U.S. developed Saudi oil production and guaranteed Saudi Arabia's security.

A similar agreement between Britain and Iran was inherited by the United States after the CIA joined British intelligence in a coup d'etat that overthrew a democratically elected government, which had nationalized Iranian oil, and restored the young shah to the Iranian throne. He remained as absolute ruler until the Islamic fundamentalist revolution of 1979.

The defeat of the Ottoman Empire in 1918 had produced the abolition of the Ottoman Caliphate — and hence of religious government — succeeded by the secular Turkish republic established by Mustapha Kemal Ataturk (today seriously challenged by renascent Muslim religious forces). Formerly Ottoman Syria, Iraq, Palestine and Lebanon became French or British mandated (by the League of Nations) colonies or monarchies.

Egypt remained a monarchy effectively controlled by Britain, as did the Persian Gulf states, whose oil resources were then largely unknown, as were those of Iran and Iraq. The region thus was more firmly structured, politically, than it had been before 1918.

The rise of two new political forces, the secular Ba'ath Party in Iraq and Syria, and after the Second World War, the Egyptian Revolution and the Arab Socialism promoted by Col. Gamal Abdel Nasser, did not alter the state structure of the region. The United Nations did that by partitioning Palestine and creating Israel, followed by Israel's alliance with the U.S., and America's successful destruction of Iraq as an independent Arab power in 2003.

The old political order of the Muslim



Middle East is now destroyed, with political anarchy and religious war taking its place — the most important and consequential war having been that by the U.S., using shock and awe interventions and now errant drones, to attack traditional Islamic societies. But to what intelligible purpose? Islam will not surrender to the U.S.

The destruction of secular Iraq, secular monarchy in Iran and secular socialism in Egypt, along with the rise of fundamentalist Muslim movements, has now fundamentally changed the region. Now a radicalized and fundamentalist Sunni version of Islam is supported by Saudi Arabia, Qatar and several of the Gulf monarchies, in a religio-political struggle inside Syria, Tunisia and Egypt, opposing Shiite movements supported by Iran and by spontaneous populist forces elsewhere, notably Hezbollah in Lebanon and Syria.

This bears a superficial resemblance to the “war between civilizations” forecast by Samuel Huntington in 1993, but differs in one profound respect. While Huntington described the coming conflict as essentially cultural, he held the notion that the Arab Muslim world would find a new centralized structure of some kind that would allow it to wage a modern centralized war with weapons that (in his forecast) would be supplied by China.

The enemy would be some NATO-like alliance of the U.S., Israel and some or all of the European powers — “the West,” as he continued to see it. Instead, there is a plague of anarchy.

The issue of this new struggle is a conflict over whether Islamic believers should be governed by the strict application of the precepts found in the Quran and in

uncompromising Shariah religious law. The American dilemma is that it offers only its form of democracy in decline.

Its principal Arab allies, the Saudi monarchy, its neighboring Bahrain principality's rulers and the Qatar monarchy, are fundamentalist (or Integrist) believers, as are the democratically elected Muslim Brotherhood forces that governed Egypt for a year, until the military intervention two weeks ago.

They continue with difficulty to govern Tunisia and threaten the existing governments of Iraq and Afghanistan. They are politically active and dynamic throughout Mediterranean and Saharan Muslim communities, as well as among Muslim immigrants in France, Britain, the Netherlands, Italy and Germany.

Washington has no idea what to do. The U.S., basically indifferent to these wars among Muslims, has pursued the irrelevant course of intermittent military as well as political intervention for the purpose of controlling the outcome of successive discrete events, to little avail.

The U.S. clings to the undemocratic and untrue notion that the ideologically contested regions of the world seek Western political institutions, at whatever cost to their religious and moral convictions.

This is the driving conception of the Obama administration's foreign policy. Being untrue, it is of no practical value.

Visit William Pfaff's website for more on his latest book, “The Irony of Manifest Destiny: The Tragedy of America's Foreign Policy,” at www.willampfaff.com. © 2013 Tribune Content Agency

The new cultural counter-revolution in China

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THE GLOBALIST

In 1956, Chuck Berry, the rock star, first sang his smash hit: “Roll Over Beethoven.” The second verse goes as follows:

*You know, my temperature's risin'
The jukebox's blowin' a fuse.
My heart's beatin' rhythm
And my soul keeps a-singin' the blues.
Roll over Beethoven
And tell Tchaikovsky the news.*

The 1950s were the first decade after the Second World War had ended. The onset of the iconoclastic rock-and-roll music brought a music-cultural revolution against the schmaltzy melodies of earlier decades. (My sister and I were forbidden to play Elvis Presley records!)

Ten years after Chuck Berry first recorded “Roll Over Beethoven,” in 1966, another cultural revolution broke out, this time in the People's Republic of China. The episode lasted 10 years, until Mao Zedong's death, and was officially known as the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution.

The Cultural Revolution was directed principally at urbanites, elites, intellectuals and party cadres who were denounced for having abandoned the “mass line” and forsaken “the people.”

They were forced to engage in humiliating self-criticism and were then “sent down” (*xiaofang*) from urban areas to the countryside. There they would clean pigsties and participate in the backbreaking work of the peasants.

This was also a time when China's universities were in turmoil, run by the Red Guards. Students were enrolled not because they were expert in any particular discipline, but because they were “red.” Hence the slogan, “Better Red than Expert.” Being red was to be able to recite the greatest possible number of quotations from Mao's Little Red Book.

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was founded in Shanghai in 1921 and, under the guidance of Moscow, initially followed an orthodox ideological line. However, in April 1927 the CCP suffered a rout at the hands of the Kuomintang (KMT) under Chiang Kai-shek and consequently was forced to flee the cities for the countryside.

A month earlier, in March 1927, Mao had published his seminal work, “Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan.” The document set out the “importance of the peasant problem” and that henceforth the peasantry, not the proletariat, would be the “vanguards” of the Chinese communist revolution.

Another slogan that vociferously

emerged during the Cultural Revolution was the “three-anti campaigns.” The first campaign was anti-Lin Biao, Mao's erstwhile number two, who was accused of seeking to usurp power. Lin died in 1971 in a plane crash in Mongolia, while — according to the “official” version of events — trying to escape to Moscow, with which Beijing had been on bad terms ever since the Sino-Soviet split of 1960.

The second campaign was anti-Confucius. In fact, Confucius and his teachings had been under quite virulent attack by Chinese modernizers, notably in what was called the 1919 May Fourth Movement. It was argued that Confucianism was the cause of China's backwardness.

Confucianism seeks to achieve social harmony through a rigorous adhesion to the Five Basic Relationships, the first four of which (sovereign-subject, father-son, elder-brother-younger-brother, and husband-wife) are absolute vertical hierarchical relationships, with only the fifth (friend-friend) equal and horizontal. Respect for elders and especially filial piety feature as absolute cardinal principles.

A key endeavor of the anti-Confucius campaign during the Cultural Revolution was to have sons denounce, indeed often beat and torture, their fathers.

And the third campaign of the Cultural Revolution was anti-Beethoven!

Beethoven was seen as the symbol of decadent bourgeois Western culture, in contrast to the great Chinese proletarian revolutionary culture, the champion of which was Mao's wife, the former actress Jiang Qing. How about today?

China has been witnessing the greatest rural-urban migration not only that the world has ever witnessed, but could ever have imagined. Already, the urban population in China is greater than the rural population.

The current plan is that by 2025 there should be another 250 million urban migrants, which comes to an average of 21 million moving each year, equivalent to the total population of Australia!

This arises not solely, by any means, from economic forces. It is now also part of the CCP's ideology — or dream! Its vision is one of a China that is a modern, urban, industrialized country and not one of poor backward peasants!

As for Confucianism, its official revival has been going on for a few years. This can be seen, among other things, in the proliferation of “Confucius Institutes” around the world, through which Beijing hopes to spread its soft power.

There is no starker example of Confucianist fundamentalism than in the exhortations — backed up by law — that

children should look after and regularly visit their aging parents. Patricide is out, filial piety is back.

Filial piety, however, is easier when there are a lot of *filii* about — but when, as a result of the one-child policy and massive landflight, there is a single *filius*, things are more difficult. With the rapid aging of the Chinese population, a pension and health care crisis could be looming in the form of a major social disaster.

Younger generations do not necessarily see things the Confucianist way. In any case, with all the internal migrations in China over recent decades, visiting parents living in distant provinces is not that easy.

Thus, the CCP is now actively promoting urban and Confucianist values.

You Can Roll Back Beethoven and Do Tell Tchaikovsky the News!

As for Beethoven, well, he (along with Tchaikovsky) can now roll back. There is a deep love in China for Western classical music that is manifested in many ways.

There is the new opera house in Beijing designed by the French architect Paul Andreu, which was inaugurated in December 2007. There is the Beijing International Music Festival for youth from throughout the world, held annually in the last two weeks in August since 2004.

The Chinese violinist Lang Lang played at the special Bastille Day (July 14th) public concert in front of the Eiffel Tower this year.

While exact figures are hard to come by, estimates are that some 50 million Chinese children study the piano.

For adults, there is the annual Beijing Music Festival held in October, which some compare to Salzburg. The opening concert last year was Mahler's Symphony No. 8 in E Flat major (aka the “Symphony of a Thousand”), played by the China Philharmonic Orchestra under the baton of Swiss conductor Charles Dutoit.

And in Qingdao, there is a magnificent, indeed monumental, monument to Ludwig van Beethoven. Qingdao, famous for its production of beer, had been a German sphere of influence during the Western imperialist period.

This is just one more illustration of the fact that no country in the history of humanity has undergone in such a short period such profound topsy-turvy transformations.

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Catholicism, among the most tradition-bound religions, contains at its core a paradox that has become increasingly sharp. Despite Pope Francis' first overseas trip — to Brazil, the world's most populous Catholic country — it is difficult to tell where the church is headed.

The accession of Jorge Mario Bergoglio to the papacy adds to the puzzle. The chief Jesuit confessor at the papal court used to be called “the black pope,” owing to his simple black cassock (if not his sinister intent). Now, for the first time, a Jesuit has become pope — and has compounded the novelty by assuming the very un-Jesuit name of Francis.

As curious as such gestures are in an institution that thrives on imagery, they are symbolic frills. We already have plenty of pictures of Francis kissing babies; what he faces now around the world are strategic matters of genuine substance.

One such challenge, the Vatican Bank, is equivalent to cleaning up the Augean stables. It is enough to mention the words “Vatican” and “bank” in the same sentence to start a cascade of jokes about comic-opera ineptness and skullduggery.

To find a remedy, Francis has appointed a special papal financial commission. But the bank known as the Institute for Works of Religion, founded in 1942, does not have deep roots in Catholicism.

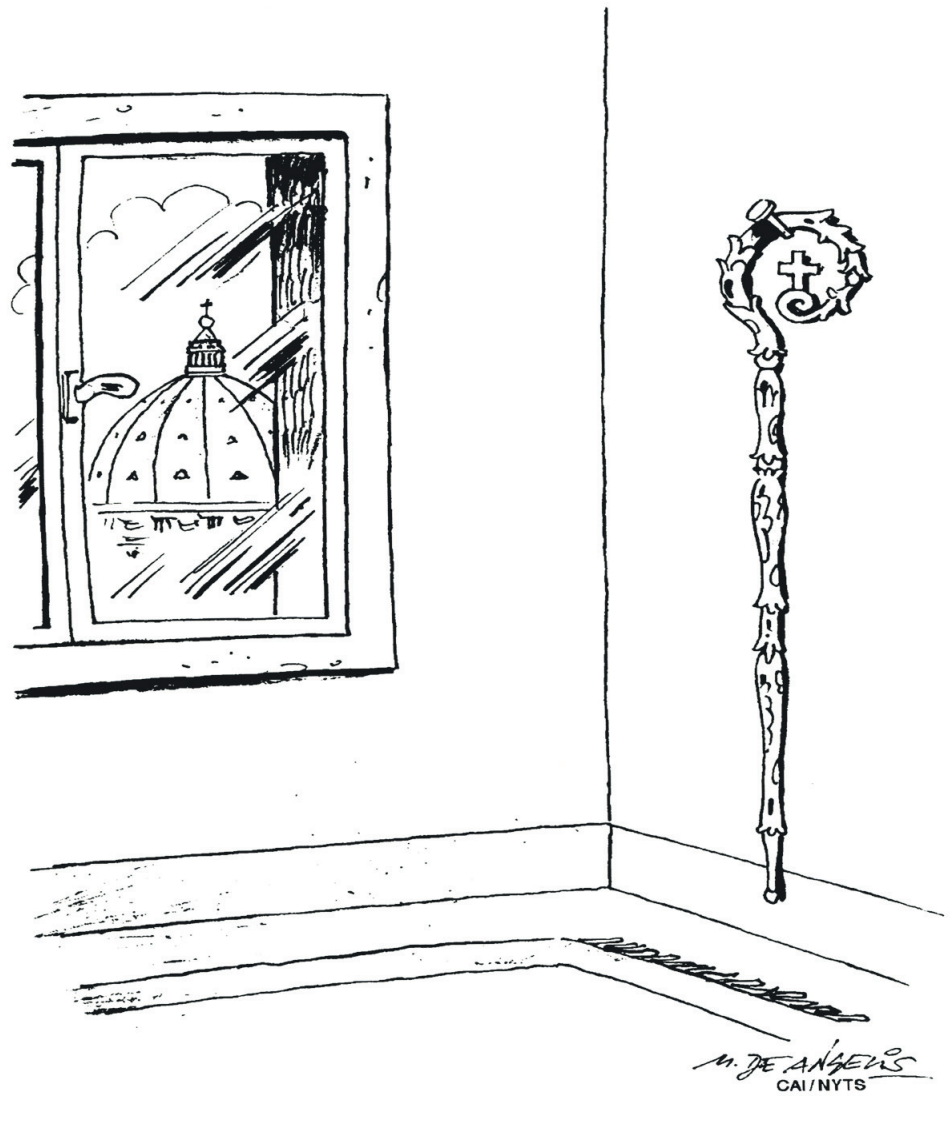
Though notoriously secretive, the operation is far removed from the church's more sensitive, doctrinal core. Besides, the commission's members have impeccable loyalist credentials, which is also true of the cardinals appointed by Francis to look into broader issues of reform.

At the same time, Francis has launched a series of initiatives aimed at pleasing just about everyone. He has expedited the canonization process for John XXIII, who inaugurated Vatican II almost a half-century ago, and John Paul II, the autocratic Pole who reined in many of Vatican II's liberating impulses. He has also announced plenary indulgences — time off from “the pains of purgatory” — for those who followed his visit to the Catholic youth festival in Rio de Janeiro on the Internet.

Such measures are difficult to get worked up about — both for Catholics who do not take them seriously and for “the simple faithful.” They have feel-good value, but little else. The heart of the matter is that Francis' actions have been in line with the “revolution from above” style of reform associated with Vatican II.

In particular, none of the changes promoted by Francis envision a reduction in papal power. The “primacy of the papacy” — a term Catholic theologians use when talking with their Protestant counterparts — remains sacrosanct.

The larger lesson is that this monarchical model of Catholicism, together with the hierarchy that attends it, has remained pretty much the same since the Counter-Reformation. What is new are the circumstances under which it is unfolding. Catholicism in its heyday combined a fairly



decentralized administration, under the sway of stand-alone bishops, with a uniform set of beliefs.

Church administration now has become increasingly subject to uniform civil codes. At the same time, since Vatican II — and in tandem with the decline of close-knit ethnic enclaves — churchgoers no longer feel obliged to hew to the letter of canon law. “Relativism,” “cafeteria Catholicism” and the like are ubiquitous.

Papal authority stands on shaky ground, especially in the comparatively secular West. Francis can attract attention by opining about social justice outside the church, but it is difficult for any pope to influence the habits and theological views of Catholics themselves, who think and act as they please. He can scold — a tack that Francis has so far tried to avoid — but he cannot convince.

If the church's first dilemma concerns the basis and effectiveness of papal authority, the second concerns sexuality.

The two are linked. Francis shies away from the retrograde rhetoric that his predecessors used in raising alarms about the role of women, and he has not gone out of his way to follow up on the Vatican's “visitation” (read “Inquisition”) of uppity American nuns. But he has kept that last episode on the books.

Catholicism — or, more accurately, the celibate male mythos at the heart of the

institutional church — rests on centuries of sexism. An antifeminist culture pervades the organization. Thoughtful theologians can distinguish among psycho-sexual issues; in practice, however, fear of a slippery slope to calamity prevails.

Pull one thread — the celibacy requirement for priests, for example — and the whole edifice comes crashing down. Consider what has happened to liberalizing Protestant denominations, which, for all their good intentions, have lost adherents.

One could argue that concessions on this front would simply acknowledge attitudinal and behavioral reality and allow the church to move on. One could also argue that the consequences of reform would not be as organizationally disastrous as feared — in the same way that cleaning up backwaters like the Vatican Bank would restore credibility to the church's spiritual message.

But this is a conversation that Francis has yet to initiate, and that the people around him show little sign of understanding.

Peter McDonough has written two books on the Jesuits and others on democratization in Brazil and Spain. His most recent book is “The Catholic Labyrinth: Power, Apathy, and a Passion for Reform in the American Church.” © 2013 Project Syndicate (www.project-syndicate.org)

Inside the mind of Deng's intellectual successor

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The biggest question about China at the moment is the buoyancy of its economy. Suddenly there are serious worries.

In China people might believe Americans wish for their economic collapse. This is not true. If only because of the intimate interdependence and indeed inter-reliance of our two great economies, those days of evil thinking are long gone.

Imagine this of China today: that its economy, directed by a Beijing control tower, holds 1.35 billion people in a giant jetliner that once required an eternity to take off but, once airborne (as it has been, remarkably, for two decades), must maintain a minimum speed to avoid stalling — or, worse.

Recent reports, including from official Chinese authorities, certify that the economy is slowing. But by how much? And, if by too much, might not this gigantic economy face a crash landing?

The question of maintaining a proper cruising speed for what is now the second-largest aggregate economy was always uppermost on the mind of a man named Zhu Rongji. Shanghai's former mayor and party chief became China's overall number two in 1998 under President Jiang Zemin, and almost by force of will — and intellect — ran the nation's economy until 2003, after China had joined the World Trade Organization and established itself as one of the greatest economic comeback stories in recorded history.

For all this, Zhu remains one of the lesser-known Chinese leaders, even though he is widely viewed as the direct intellectual successor to the late Deng Xiaoping, who launched the changes that opened China to the world and paved the way to the market-like policies of the regime of Jiang and Zhu.

No Westerner has talked to Zhu at any length, and hope for that frank conversation

fades with each year as this economic genius of China is well into his 80s.

But now, at least, we have a new book that properly puts Zhu into the pantheon of Chinese giants without foolishly canonizing him as some secular saint. The book is titled “Wealth and Power: China's Long March to the Twenty-First Century,” and it is written by the eminent Orville Schell, who is legendarily a most careful and balanced American China analyst, and by the younger John Delury, who looks to be well on his way to becoming an invaluable China scholar.

Fifteen chapters form the book's core, devoted to examining the views and impact of eleven indisputably major Chinese officials, writers, activists and leaders. Both Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping get two chapters each, of course, and while all the chapters are outstanding, the best (I think) is on Zhu, because more than any other, this discussion helps us best understand the Chinese economy today.

Like his intellectual forefather Deng Xiaoping, Zhu was a real-world economic pragmatist, but only up to a point. Gleefully, he stole the best economic ideas from the West (“bourgeois capitalist technique”) he could find, once famously admitting that he might not have been able to clean up China's deeply indebted state banks without the example of the successful U.S. solution to its 1980s saving and loan crisis.

In trying to grow the economy, he preferred moderation (once describing the 1992 growth figure of 12 percent as “crazy”); insisted on playing smart politics with China's provinces while centralizing as many powers in Beijing as quietly and as quickly as possible; and believed that without an authoritarian political system, decisive economic policy-making for China would have been impossible. Progressive reform, as someone put it, should evolve “like a capitalist bird in a socialist cage.”

And so the Communist Party political core was left intact as the best and brightest were brought in to micro-manage the zooming economy.

When tension with the U.S. would surface, Zhu would argue man to man with

President Jiang and anyone else who bothered to take him on that it was the economy that needed China's energies, and so fistfights with others, especially the United States, should be avoided at almost all costs.

When in 1999 the U.S. Air Force B-2 stealth bombers (allegedly mistakenly) fired missiles at the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade (U.S. later blaming old maps), the Beijing elite went ballistic, though not Zhu.

We have a bigger fish to fry, he argued, and that's to keep our economy moving forward without losing too much speed. For that, we need positive input from Washington, not diplomatic fireworks.

The authors of this groundbreaking study conclude this way: “While Zhu was a man of enormous energy who understood that China's successful development in the modern world depended on innovatively embracing major economic reforms, this did not preclude the protection of social organizations whose power base was independent of the party. He would not defend those who dared to question the core principles of the system.

In this sense, too, he was the loyal heir to Deng Xiaoping. But, thanks to Zhu's hard-driving management of the economy, Deng's blueprint for reform and opening up was given a second life after the disaster of 1989 [Tiananmen].

Zhu ensured that China would enter the 21st century poised to advance ever more rapidly toward the consummation of wealth, power and greatness to which it so devoutly aspired.”

For its chapter on Zhu, as well as on other historic figures, including contemporary dissidents, this is the best book on this important subject since Henry Kissinger's 2011 classic “On China.”

Tom Plate is the author of the “Giants of Asia” series and of “In the Middle of the Future,” which will be published by Marshall Cavendish in October. He is the Distinguished Scholar of Asian and Pacific Studies at Loyola Marymount University. © 2013 Pacific Perspectives Media Center