

about the "rocks in the road." He sees the possibility of a diminishing U.S. role so as "to reduce both American casualties and costs."

A healthy skepticism toward all expert opinion on Vietnam has always seemed to me the wisest attitude to adopt in the debate. So many people on all sides of the debate have been so wrong, it is better to pay attention to arguments and evidence than to credentials. Scrutiny of Thompson's views is particularly in order now that they have become, to some degree, "official." As he may have overrated the positive prospects of the Saigon regime, he may also be overly optimistic about the security situation in South Vietnam. Still, on independent evidence, Thompson's assessment of the military situation appears reasonable. By contrast, Hoopes' judgment that there remains no chance to develop a middle way between early withdrawal and undiminished

U.S. military involvement seems too categorical.

Appeals, like Hoopes', to "national interest" have a strange fascination for Americans. We would like to be able to say, "Look at all Vietnam is costing us; we've done enough," and then wash our hands of the whole bloody business. But our hearts are not in such talk. Sooner or later we are disturbed by questions posed, not only from our point of view, but from the point of view of the Vietnamese and Asians. Is a total and early withdrawal clearly best from their perspective? Will it in fact improve their conditions or worsen them? Are there no intermediate options between early withdrawal and maintaining the war at the present level? Have we in fact "done enough," or have we perhaps followed wrong, but corrigible, policies, and thereby incurred some continuing responsibility?

These are the difficult questions. If the literature under review does nothing else, it helps us recognize how difficult they really are.

DEVIL THEORIES OF U. S. FOREIGN POLICY

Ernest W. Lefever

Devil theories of history and politics are the offspring of curiosity and frustration. Sensitive participants and observers of the human drama want to know why events have turned out as they have, especially when they end in disaster. Why World War I? Why the "fall" of China? Why are we "bogged down" in Vietnam?

Every modern man pays lip service to the reality of multiple causation, but the very mystery and complexity of untoward events compel some people to search for the central flaw, the fatal error, the demonic force beneath the misfortune. In this quest modern man is not far removed from his primitive cousin.

Tracking down and identifying the devil behind the failures, alleged or real, of U. S. foreign policy is a popular pastime at home and abroad. The enormity

of American power, the ubiquity of the American presence, and the apparent absence of a rational scheme to explain the exercise of our power invite frustration and perplexity that cry out for a simple answer, a single key that will unlock the mystery of American foreign policy. When things go wrong in the far corners of the world, you can be sure that someone will blame the Americans and equally sure that someone else will have discovered the hidden force that explains why Washington acts as it does.

This secular search for the devil should not be confused with serious theological efforts that point to the moral ambiguity of man as the key to understanding the ambiguity and inconclusiveness of the historical drama. A recognition that original sin and original righteousness set the limits and possibilities of man's achievement does not provide us with a simple evil force—man, agency, or institution—responsible for error or evil. In contrast to this sober view of history, the popular devil theorists claim to have discovered a specific and definable demon that can exorcized.

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The nineteenth century rational idealists uncovered a number of plausible devils which, separately or in combination, were responsible for war, injustice, poverty, and most other afflictions of mankind. Each of these demons was fatally vulnerable to its rational and righteous counterpart. The prince of devils was capitalism, which could be slain by socialism. Private property could be eliminated by public ownership. The confusion of tongues which caused international conflict could be cured by Esperanto.

Shortly after World War I new demons moved to center stage. Nationalism had to be exorcized by internationalism and world government. Colonialism had to give way to "self-determination." Old world secret diplomacy had to be replaced by a new "open diplomacy." The military and the "merchants of death" had to be abolished—hence the Kellogg-Briand Pact of 1928.

With the complexities of the nuclear era, America's new power, the cold war, and mass communication, one hoped there would be a pause in the persistent pursuit of devils, particularly in the literate Western world, and perhaps there was for a few years after Hiroshima. In the Communist world, of course, the problem had been settled a century before, in 1848. There was and is only one devil—capitalism (alias private property, imperialism, colonialism, and human exploitation)—and only one savior—communism. The principal manifestation of the demonic powers of capitalism is the United States of America. The intense debate over the principal manifestation of *communism* is a major factor in the Sino-Soviet conflict.

In the pluralistic and more permissive West we have spawned a greater variety of devil-savior explanations of world politics. Perhaps the most popular one in America today is the military-industrial complex theory—a kind of pseudo-sophisticated updating of the old "merchants of death" thesis. According to one version of this theory, the Pentagon, supported by a war-oriented industry and research, is responsible for major U. S. foreign policy decisions, especially in Southeast Asia. More extravagant versions picture the President as the witting or unwitting tool of the military-industrial complex.

A few years ago it was fashionable to pin American reverses or alleged errors abroad on the C.I.A. At one point it was said the most popular book among fledgling African politicians and diplomats was *The Invisible Government* written by two American journalists, David Wise and Thomas B. Ross, and published by Random House in 1964. This widely read exposé of the C.I.A. gave many devil-seekers what they wanted—a simple explanation

of "who" it is that really runs U. S. foreign policy.

Some critics prefer a more personal devil. They like to stick pins into a figure resembling the President; our involvement in Vietnam is "Johnson's war" or "Nixon's war." Fortunately, tastes differ and we come up with a more balanced picture of devils personified. Many Americans, for example, see in Senator Fulbright a most attractive devil-figure.

A more sophisticated version of the devil theory is making the rounds in Washington these days. The culprit behind all our foreign policy goofs is not one man, or agency, or institution, but the government bureaucracy itself. One variation on this theme holds that foreign policy is not made by human volition, but that foreign policy happens—the unintended product of a vague and almost uncontrollable bureaucratic process characterized by inertia and conflicting interests and unenlightened by relevant data and imagination.

There is considerable truth in this theory of bureaucratic determinism. In fact, there is a grain of truth in most devil theories. But even a casual newspaper reader should know that foreign policy is the result of a complex process involving many static, dynamic, and conflicting factors—including the President, the National Security Council, the Departments of State and Defense, the C.I.A., the Congress, the media, and even the American people in all their splendid and irascible diversity.

The most recent devil theory to cross my desk has the superficial plausibility of a unifying element that claims to embrace all the key factors in the complex policy process. At least it was plausible enough to persuade Random House, which published the C.I.A. exposé, to put it out as a \$7.95 book, *The Higher Circles: The Governing Class in America* by G. William Domhoff.

Mr. Domhoff, an associate professor of psychology, author of *Who Rules America?*, and co-editor of *C. Wright Mills and the Power Elite*, sets out to prove that the U. S. Government and the whole country are "run by a group of very rich, cosmopolitan big businessmen with international business interests." He calls this elite "the governing class."

In attempting to prove his central thesis—a not unfamiliar version of economic determinism which goes back to Charles A. Beard's *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution of the United States* published in 1913—Domhoff discredits the pluralistic explanation of American society and U. S. decision-making advanced by virtually all respected writers on American politics.

Members of the rich governing class, he asserts, "sit in pivotal government offices, define most major

policy issues, shape the policy proposals . . . and mold the rules of government. Legally, the government is all of us, but members of the upper class have the predominant, all-pervasive influence." The "power elite," defined in previous exposés, is a larger class and acts as the tool or "operating arm of the upper class" to "maintain and manage a socioeconomic system" designed to yield "an amazing proportion of its wealth to a minuscule upper class of big businessmen and their descendants."

This pervasive control by the very wealthy few, says Domhoff, applies to both foreign and domestic policy. Foreign affairs are dominated by "a power elite which is rooted in the dividends and salaries of large corporations and financial institutions." The upper class has also shaped U. S. social legislation and held the middle and lower classes in subjection by appeasement and measures designed to perpetuate "destructive competition" and to prevent "public ownership."

What evidence does Domhoff give that the "governing class" is using "the power elite" to aggrandize the economic privileges of the former to the detriment of the vast majority of the American people? Virtually none. Instead, he heavy-handedly employs the old guilt-by-association approach. Combing through *Who's Who in America*, the *Social Register*, and other such prime sources, he identifies recurring names on important corporation boards, government commissions, and advisory bodies and concludes that the men and women who run high finance also run the U. S. Government. He sees a kind of interlocking directorate of common purpose—how to make the wealthy more wealthy—running through appointments, directorships, and consultantships. The prime identification for members of the "governing class" is economic. Example: "corporation lawyer Dean Acheson, Secretary of State."

In foreign policy he attributes great influence to the recurring names on the boards of the Council on Foreign Relations, RAND, the Committee for Economic Development, but fails to emphasize the diversity within these organizations, or even within the members of the "governing class." Consider, for example, the differences in view among George F. Kennan, Alfred M. Gruenther, and Philip E. Moseley, all on the board of *Foreign Affairs*.

Though strongly anti-military, the author surprisingly agrees with Professor Samuel P. Huntington that the Department of Defense has had little impact on the direction of foreign policy. He points out, however, that the "leading big business members of the power elite" were really the ones who effectively advanced and acted upon "a military

definition of reality." In short, these rich civilians were and are responsible for the militarization of U. S. foreign policy.

In a bizarre chapter, "The Power Elite, the CIA, and the Struggle for Minds," Domhoff makes no coherent case for anything except his consistent confusion. Noting some widely publicized C.I.A. activities, he suggests that a major purpose of the organization is to exert an "influence on the minds of men in political, scientific, and moral fields." He never acknowledges the necessity for intelligence gathering and assessment. He wholly condemns the agency as "dirty" and immoral, in part for providing past financial support for educational, labor, and other organizations in the international arena, a practice which may have been imprudent, but hardly evil. Apparently he assumes that most readers, like himself, already have concluded that the C.I.A. is both influential and pernicious.

Domhoff claims his book is "empirically based" and is not "conspiratorial and paranoid." He is wrong on both counts. The book is a propaganda broadside masquerading as a serious study of how decisions are made. The author condemns many persons, policies, and institutions of American life by applying his hidden premises. Internal evidence suggests he is an economic determinist, a kind of vague and confused Marxist. Why doesn't he tell the reader where he stands?

His failure to recognize the pluralistic character of American society and the complex decision-making process is his fatal error. He virtually ignores the American people, national elections, and the Congress in his "analysis." His devil theory overlooks the central fact that Middle America elects the President and the Congress. No one denies that well-connected men of affairs are influential, but they hardly have veto power over the President, the Congress, or the Supreme Court, to say nothing of the executive bureaucracy. He also overlooks the increasing role of various minority and special-interest groups in domestic and foreign policy decisions. He plays down the considerable diversity, reflecting conflicts of interest, within the "power elite" and the "governing class."

Domhoff and all other devil theorists suffer from the same sins. They are bewitched by the illusion of a simple answer to human misery and tragedy. They lack the courage to face the richness and complexity of the human drama because they fail to comprehend their own finitude and the ambiguity of history. They are moral cynics because they remove themselves from the arena of reality where the painful decisions of war and peace are made.