Book Reviews

Security First: For a Muscular, Moral Foreign Policy

Amitai Etzioni
New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007. 308 pages.

Couched in moral language and endeavoring to preempt possible shifts in foreign policy attitudes, this six-part book attempts to subtly and indirectly weave Israeli interests into American policy and upcoming decision-making processes. Essentially, it repackages Israel's "security for peace" formula with the language of security (read "order") and democracy (read "justice/law") and stresses the former's priority over the latter – security being Israel's paramount claim. In so doing, Etzioni seeks to limit references to Israel to give the reader the impression that he is dealing with issues over and beyond – a form of reorienting the reader's attention through focal deception while "playing the same tune – on a different instrument" (p. xii).

The book's main thesis is that there are "principled" and "pragmatic" reasons for Washington to transform its foreign policy approach from prioritizing the spread of democracy to security (p. xi), for democracy must follow the establishment of "basic security" (p. xi) as the supreme human good. Doing things differently simply reflects the "Multiple Realism Deficiency Disorder" from which American foreign policy suffers (p. xiv), namely, a psychological state that deals with matters as Americans would like them to be rather than as they are (p. xv).

Part 1 details the author's argument for replacing democratization with a "security first" policy. Etzioni links the latter with the "Primacy of Life," where people (most of the time) can go about their public life without fearing death or injury (pp. 1-2). While appearing to talk in general moral terms, one senses a policy implication that calls for condemning any militant resistance to Israel's usurpation of Palestine. When referring to "Israeli independence in 1948" (p. 22), he remains silent about the Palestinians' right to basic security from Israeli-generated fear, terror, and torture. In the process, Etzioni

calls the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan acts of "liberation," describing them by the neocons' phrase of "newly liberated nations" (p. 19). Moreover, he argues that Washington should not attempt regime change, but opt instead for a behavioral change that would lead Iran to forego nuclear ambitions (p. 4), a major Israeli concern. An additional policy implication is that Washington should not destabilize Mubarak-like autocratic regimes, which constitute an Israeli national security interest, by pushing too hard for demo-cratic reforms (pp. 44 and 51). In other words, the "second worst" decisions may have to be made so that many elements of an old regime would remain in place, but work slowly to convert them (p. 29).

In part 2, Etzioni draws lessons from the "grave limitations" of what he designates the "dubious art of social engineering," which he nevertheless applies while discussing "stages of development" (pp. xvii-xviii). Washing-ton should encourage, cajole, help, and pressure autocratic regimes to allow increased participation by "moderate" elements while "keeping Islamist groups at bay" (p. 52) and excluding extremists from the political process. Only at the final stage of such a course of action should elections be allowed. In the language of "staging theories," elections should be a "lagging not a leading element" (pp. 52-53).

In parts 3 and 4, the author argues that the most important global divide is between those who legitimate violence ("warriors") and those who renounce it ("preachers") (pp. xviii and 86). While he does touch upon dif-ferent cultures and religions, Islam is clearly the hidden target. Essentially, Etzioni calls for distinguishing "illiberal moderate" Muslims who disavow violence (p. 86) from those who actively resist occupation or foreign inva-sions. He argues that the former could, in fact, be potential allies of the West (Israel?) against the latter, provided they are not pushed too far or labeled as part of the whole Islamic edifice to be demolished.

What we have here is a divide-and-conquer logic that is to be consoli-dated by engineering a "moral culture" (part 4 and p. 153) capable of over-coming the "antisocial" behavior of different societies (e.g., Russia and China), particularly Muslim ones. This requires focusing on and manipulat-ing "moderate Islamic and secular" leaders and opinion makers as opposed to focusing on the masses (p. 166). Apparently, the logic is that once a few rulers, political leaders, intellectuals, or religious figures are controlled, the rest of the "sheep" do not matter much and will fall into place. Support for such "moderate" figures or organizations, however, should be invisible (p. 166). Thus, for instance, American or other funding (perhaps Israeli?) that contributes to "changing schooling" in Muslim countries (p. 173) must be

channeled through "other parties," such as a "pan-Islamic moderate council (yet to be formed)" (p. 166).

Finally, parts 5 and 6 lay out the grounds for (humanitarian) intervention and the requirement for a "New Global Architecture." In both parts, Etzioni seems to be trying to create panic and hysteria about "terrorist" groups or "rogue" states acquiring nuclear weapons. Creating such a frenzy is usually an ideal pretext for asserting control over a targeted object or subject. These considerations justify armed intervention in the internal affairs of what he calls "irresponsible nations." This should be done through the United Nations – not as it stands today – but as part of a "new global architecture" (p. 207) focusing on failed states or "short order" (p. 231) failing states (e.g., nuclear-armed Pakistan and Egypt). A deproliferation regime should be established to replace fissile material with other resources and move any materials that could be used in producing nuclear devices to "safe havens" (p. 235). Interestingly, Etzioni argues that North Korea should be treated differently from Iran: all nuclear powers should declare North Korea the "*last* new member" of the nuclear club while Iran must be "forcibly … deproliferated" after warning civilians to leave the areas to be bombed (p. 242).

This important book clarifies how some Israelis and Americans think about and plan the "future" of the Arab and Muslim worlds. Moral pretensions regarding "peace" must be exposed for what they are. It may help here to quote Charles Reynolds, who stated in his *The Politics of War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989) that "the successful state, like the successful criminal, wishes to enjoy [the] spoils in peace and this requires a measure of consent ... from the victims" (p. 5).

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