Dominic Green, *Three Empires on the Nile: The Victorian Jihad, 1869–1899*. New York: Free Press, 2007. Pp.352. $27, HB. ISBN 0-743-28071-7.

This book tracks events in Egypt and Sudan during the last decades of the nineteenth century and is one of many recent works examining the historical relationship between Islam and the West. The story of Britain’s imperial ambitions in Egypt and Sudan is well-trodden ground, but by seeking to draw parallels with current relations between the West and the Islamic world, publishers clearly hope to appeal to a wider market. Irrespective of the virtues of seeking modern day resonances, there is much to commend in recent accounts, such as this one, that seek a more balanced approach to the story. The historiography has too frequently focused on the British perspective and has veered toward operational accounts at the cost of examining the cultural and social context. This traditional approach is further evident in the emphasis on European technological superiority, particularly firepower. Where the military dimension in not the focus, the emphasis leans towards a consideration of Sudan as either an adjunct to Egyptian history or as part of the story of British imperial expansion in Africa.

Green’s interpretation seeks to bring together the story of the declining Ottoman power in Egypt and the short-lived Mahdist state, as well as the British experience. His account begins with the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. Although developed by the French, the Suez Canal was of huge strategic importance to Britain from the outset as it provided a fast route to India, which by the middle of the nineteenth century had become Britain’s most valued imperial interest. It was this strategic concern that led to renewed British involvement in Egypt and by extension, Sudan. The Egyptians had established control of Sudan in the 1820s but their grip, never particularly strong, had weakened by the 1870s and declined rapidly after the emergence of Mohammed Ahmed, the self-proclaimed Mahdi (meaning descendant of the Prophet tasked with restoring true Islam) (1844–85) who from 1881 successfully formed a resistance movement to Egyptian rule that briefly transcended the tribal and religious divisions endemic to Sudan.

While the British were reluctant to get embroiled in Sudanese affairs, politicians in London were not averse to the idea of retaining control of
the central region around the Blue and White Niles. This led to the dispatch of a British-led 8,000-strong Egyptian expeditionary force that was annihilated by the Mahdia at Sheikan in 1883. Thereafter, perceiving Sudan to have no real strategic or economic value, the British instructed Major-General Charles Gordon to oversee Egypt’s withdrawal with catastrophic results as Gordon and thousands of others were killed following the siege and fall of Khartoum in 1884–85.

Britain did not actively re-engage with Sudan until 1896 when strategic concerns, in particular French exploration on the upper White Nile, meant that it became expedient to ‘avenge’ Gordon’s death. At this point, Major-General Sir Herbert Kitchener was dispatched to Sudan, and his victory at Omdurman against the Mahdia secured Britain’s control until Sudanese independence in 1956.

Use of the word ‘jihad’ in the title is clearly an attempt to signal to readers the contemporary relevance of this story (the book is retitled, and this word omitted, in the UK edition). The message is emphasised further on the dust jacket, which hails Green’s book as essential reading for those seeking to understand ‘the modern clash of civilisations’. There is certainly a degree of continuity in Sudan’s history. For example, the Mahdi’s descendants remain a powerful political force in Sudan today, and Omar al-Bashir, Sudan’s President, has referred to Sudan’s history and, in particular, its efforts to withstand the forces of Western imperialism in his rhetoric.

However, Green’s book is of limited value in understanding the implications of nineteenth-century activities on modern-day Egypt and Sudan, let alone the entirety of the ‘modern relationship between the West and the Islamic world’ as the writer asserts. While mention is made at the beginning and end to the current situation in Sudan, the book is a narrative account of the period, and the reader is left to reach his or her own conclusions regarding its relevance.

It would have been helpful to draw attention to the differences between nineteenth-century events and current events in the Middle East as well as commonalities. For example, for the Mahdi, ‘jihad’ meant a crusade against other Muslims who had diminished and distorted the Islamic faith, and he remained largely uninterested in other religions. In any event, the Mahdi’s followers were not all religious disciples but included sections of society dissatisfied with the rule of the ‘Turks’ (as the Egyptian administration was commonly known) for other reasons such as the administration’s opposition to the slave trade.

In adopting a straightforward narrative approach, the writer takes a familiar route, and so it is disappointing that his use of source material also lacks originality. For example, the florid account of Father Joseph Ohrwalder – an Austrian missionary held prisoner by the Mahdia for
several years – is frequently cited and certainly adds to the narrative verve with which Green writes, yet the author does not explore the background to Ohrwalder’s 1892 book. It was heavily edited by Reginald Wingate, the British Director of Intelligence in the Sudan, with an eye to war propaganda, became a bestseller and was instrumental in galvanising public support for the ‘reconquest’ of Sudan in the 1890s.

Scope remains for a more scholarly account of the period from the British perspective. For an excellent recent work on the Mahdi, readers should consider Fergus Nicoll’s 2004 biography, which, among other attributes, offers fresh insights into the Mahdi’s intelligent use of religious and tribal alliances to create a unified resistance movement.

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Steven Morewood, The British Defence of Egypt, 1935–1940. London and New York: Frank Cass, 2005. Pp.xvii + 274. £80, HB. ISBN 0-714-64943-0.

This wide-ranging account of how Britain sought to preserve her position in Egypt and safeguard the Suez Canal places strategy in the context of international relations and Egyptian domestic politics. Morewood shows that British commanders in the Mediterranean were confident that they could deal with any Italian challenge, beginning with Mussolini’s attack on Abyssinia in 1935, but the Chiefs of Staff had to take account of the wider strategic picture. The transfer of aircraft and anti-aircraft guns to Egypt weakened the United Kingdom’s defences against the rapidly expanding Luftpaffe, and a war with Italy would reduce the Royal Navy’s ability to match the Japanese in the Far East. Nevertheless, Morewood concludes that it would have been better to confront Mussolini sooner rather than later, and he believes that the Chiefs of Staff bear a heavy responsibility for appeasement through their consistent advice against military options. In his view, failure to act against Italy seriously damaged Britain’s reputation, particularly in the Middle East, and encouraged Mussolini and Hitler to be bolder in their demands.

The obvious comparator for Morewood’s work is Lawrence Pratt’s pioneering East of Malta, West of Suez: Britain’s Mediterranean Crisis, 1936–1939 (Cambridge University Press 1975). There are differences between the two books: Pratt was concerned to examine the consequences of the Italo-Abyssinian crisis of 1935–36, whereas
Morewood includes the crisis, and Britain’s immediate reactions to it, in his analysis. He shows, for example, that Neville Chamberlain, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, was prepared in the summer of 1935 to support measures to close the Suez Canal to Italian military supplies – but only if the French joined Britain in facing down Mussolini. The French, of course, were more concerned to have Italy as an ally against Germany than they were with the fate of Abyssinia.

Morewood is able to draw on a wider range of sources than Pratt could, particularly those relating to military intelligence. Morewood is more critical of decision-makers and comes to a different conclusion from Donald Cameron Watt, who wrote in a preface to Pratt’s book that appeasement paid off because Italy remained neutral in September 1939. Morewood is prepared to concede that Britain was ‘perhaps wise’ to humour Mussolini’s non-belligerence early in the Phoney War, but believes that a tougher line should have been taken, for example by keeping Italy short of coal, once it was plain that he was simply waiting for his moment to strike. Appeasement is a subject on which honest scholars can disagree, partly because judgement depends upon what would have happened as a result of hypothetical actions.

Morewood has a good grasp of military detail. For example, he is aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the Regia Aeronautica, noting that, while the Savoia Marchetti SM-81 bomber had the range to attack the Royal Navy in its Mediterranean bases, the performance of Italian squadrons in the Spanish Civil War hardly suggested that they would have inflicted major losses on ships. The deficiencies of the Italian Army’s tanks were well known to the British, as was its shortage of trucks with which to transport large numbers of infantry and their supplies across the desert.

The author shows that, far from British military strength being diverted from Europe to imperial defence, Egypt was protected by very limited forces which, until a late date, were largely lacking in modern armaments. However, whereas the Italians had no clear idea of how to go about invading Egypt, British planning for war was sound. The Phoney War gave time in which to build up and train imperial forces in the Middle East, and it was only the fall of France that placed the British position there in peril.

Morewood has made a valuable contribution to the continuing debate about appeasement, while also writing sound military history. He shows that the defence of British interests in Egypt was a constant theme in both foreign and defence policy. He is fair in his judgements on other historians, and his own views are based on impressive research in British sources. That leaves the question of whether research in Italian sources would support his conclusions. Fortunately, we now have John Gooch’s Mussolini and his Generals: The Italian Armed
Forces and Fascist Foreign Policy, 1922–1940 (Cambridge University Press 2007), which confirms that British assessments of the Italian forces were accurate. In particular, the Regia Aeronautica was not trained or equipped to attack shipping in 1935, so that Morewood is right to discount the air threat to the Royal Navy in that year.

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Malcolm Llewellyn-Jones, The Royal Navy and Anti-Submarine Warfare, 1917–1949. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2006. Pp.xv + 223. £65, HB. ISBN 0-415-38532-6.

This monograph approaches its apparently well-known subject from an unconventional, revisionist direction. The core focus begins in 1944, the year when most general accounts of the 1939–45 war tend to turn away from anti-submarine warfare (ASW). The study closes in 1949 when studies of the Cold War period tend to begin in earnest, thus providing a necessary but long absent element of continuity, an understanding of what Llewellyn-Jones terms the ‘dawn of modern anti-submarine warfare’.

It must be said that the years from 1917–43 are given relatively brief coverage, although this is understandable given the author’s aims. However, the analysis is handled well and forms a vital background. Llewellyn-Jones concurs with the growing corpus of scholarly work suggesting that the interwar years were not stagnant or complaisant, here in terms of ASW development, contrary to the view which has continued to colour popular opinion. Further, the actual threat from submarines in terms of their numbers, German or otherwise, was relatively limited until the latter part of the 1930s.

Prospective readers should not expect an operational history. The view taken is very much that of the Naval Staff assessments, from whose records the bulk of the primary material is derived. This is perhaps unsurprising given Llewellyn-Jones’ position as a member of Naval Historical Branch, but nevertheless it presents the clearest possible view of the developing ‘state of the art’ of ASW. Significantly, Llewellyn-Jones seeks to engage with earlier NHB studies, as well as the criticisms of Vice-Admiral Sir Peter Gretton et al. The context of their critiques is surely all-important, however, and perhaps could have been made more explicit.

Evident throughout is the interaction between technological and tactical developments and the iterative approach which was necessitated. Technical solutions to problems were never as clear-cut as they
have been seen; the ‘foxer’ device against Gnat homing torpedoes, for example, was disliked by some naval officers as it interfered with asdic contacts, and tactical countermeasures were available. The RN organisation is portrayed as particularly successful in combining the inter-agency views of the Naval Staff, RAF Coastal Command, educational and training establishments, operational research and the views of experienced ASW practitioners, utilising the wealth of assessments generated to produce a highly effective and adaptable doctrine.

Perhaps most striking from the staff assessments is their extensive understanding of the actual contemporary capabilities of Allied and, particularly, enemy forces, as well as their likely development in the future. For instance, the schnorkel did not render aircraft totally ineffective in ASW, but instead made them better employed in extended night patrolling rather than daytime close escort, throwing the burden of this task back onto surface ships. Doctrine was never allowed to escape from operational and technological realities.

Much attention is given to the extensive attempts to assess the difficulties likely to be thrown up by the imminent development of fast submarines; these involved prisoner interrogations, experimentation with modified British and later captured German boats, both in Britain and the US. In the short term, fast submarines would have to be met by operational and tactical change, and in the longer-term technological developments would help to counter them. Despite the difficulties involved, Llewellyn-Jones reaches the important conclusion that fast submarines were never seen as an insoluble problem. Moreover, their weaknesses were recognised, as operating permanently underwater imposed limitations upon their ability to make contact with shipping and forced them to rely heavily upon aircraft, countering which also received attention.

The naval staff also recognised the Soviet weakness in experience, training and personnel, not to mention that the technical capabilities were still unproven. This type of long-term planning and close attention to detail belies any assertion that the Admiralty had not developed into a highly effective organisation, adept at handling complex problems. Indeed, Llewellyn-Jones seems to argue that the Admiralty in general maintained these standards throughout the entire period in review.

Doctrine lies at the heart of this book. The author makes a convincing case that the division between ‘offensive’ and ‘defensive’ approaches to ASW is entirely artificial. The Admiralty’s view during this period was much more holistic and focused upon the most effective way to defeat the threat of enemy submarines at a particular moment and with the resources available. Convoy was viewed rationally, on the basis of its effectiveness as a means of sinking submarines, rather than
being treated as a shibboleth, as some subsequent commentators have. Thus the debates were much more concerned with the most effective allocation of available resources, rather than simple prejudice against defensive tactics or lack of offensive spirit. This is not without important contemporary relevance as Llewellyn-Jones himself has contributed to the debate on the Royal Navy’s current doctrine.

In general, this is a piece of high-quality scholarship which casts significant light on a hitherto ignored area. It also succeeds in putting numerous myths and misperceptions into place. Whilst the archival research appears extensive and is well documented, the author is not afraid to grapple with ‘philosophical’ or strategic debates, or to examine the broader picture.

On the negative side, the text would benefit from the use of diagrammatic illustrations which would help to clarify (and distinguish) search and attack patterns. The reviewer also fears that the price tag would deter all but the most enthusiastic reader.

These minor points aside, Llewellyn-Jones has produced a major and important contribution to the understanding of ASW, doctrine development and the Royal Navy generally. He has successfully blended a revisionist analysis of a well-known but misunderstood period with a thorough study of the hitherto ignored later years, removing an artificial separation which has dominated much of the existing literature.

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Michael D. Swaine, Andrew D. Yang and Evan S. Medeiros (eds.), Assessing the Threat: The Chinese Military and Taiwan’s Security. Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2007. Pp.xv + 432. $22.95. ISBN 978-0-87003-238-7.

Far from improving, as it could have been hoped at certain times during the 1980s, the security situation in the Taiwan Strait has significantly deteriorated in the past few years, mainly since the election of President Chen Shui-bian (2000) and the subsequent strengthening of the Taiwan independence movement. In this context, a US Department of Defense report to Congress on the Chinese People’s Liberation Army (PLA) issued in 2006 (after the Chinese Anti-Secession Law of March 2005) estimates that mainland China’s military options with respect to Taiwan remain the following: (1) persuasion and coercion, (2) limited
force operations (information operations [IO], special operation forces [SOF], short-range ballistic missiles [SRBMs], or limited air strikes), (3) an air and missile campaign, (4) a blockade, and (5) amphibious invasion.

Each of these possible options is the topic of chapters of Assessing the Threat, which brings together a selection of papers originally presented between 2004 and 2006 during annual conferences on the PLA held in Taiwan under the auspices of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, the RAND Corporation and the Taipei-based Council for Advanced Policy Studies.

The book begins with an account of the regional geopolitical context: Alex Liebman’s introductory chapter on ‘China’s Asia Policy, Strategy and Tactics’ (pp. 25–51) provides an interesting development on the recent People’s Republic of China (PRC) efforts at ‘preventing countervailing coalitions’ (p. 32) at the regional level, mainly in the setting of economic agreements, but reflects above all the American perception of the current evolution of Chinese foreign policy in Asia. This perception of a growing threat for the security of Taiwan, which has been for decades a focal point of US policy in Asia, long before the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA) of 1979, is obviously reinforced by some facts coming from mainland China, such as the rise of the PRC defense budget, which increased in 2007 by nearly 18 per cent, from 283.8 billion yuan (US$ 35.3 billion) to 350.92 billion yuan (US$ 44.94 billion), making China’s declared defense expenditures the largest in Asia and third largest in the world after the US and Russia (p. 113).

The other contributors adopt a resolutely military and strategic approach. Section II of the book presents a comprehensive review, with official PLA chiefs of staff documents in support, of the PLA doctrine and capabilities. A chapter is devoted to the PLA thinking on Joint Operations (pp. 53–83), another to ‘Evolving Chinese Concepts of War Control and Escalation Management’ (pp. 85–110), and a third on PLA Power Projection (pp. 111–50). In the former, the authors, Roy D. Kamphausen and Justin Liang, emphasize Chinese participation in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations, the expansion of offshore PLA-run ‘access points’, combined exercises with regional neighbours (such as Central Asia states and Russia) and increased military presence worldwide. It appears, however, from their analysis that the PLA’s ability to project a significant conventional military force beyond its borders will remain very limited in the foreseeable future. Factors such as the absence of aircraft carriers, limited numbers of ‘blue water’ surface combatant vessels, the lack of overseas bases, incomplete overwater training evolutions, limited in-flight refuelling capabilities, and apparent lack
of power projection doctrine (p. 14), are not of minor importance, as the above-mentioned authors seem to estimate, at least in view of an attack against Taiwan. In this context, the hypothesis of an amphibious and airborne invasion of the island, following the launch of air strikes and a naval blockade, described from p. 274, appears highly unlikely.

PRC Information Operations (IO) capabilities, including psychological operations, special operations, computer network operations (CNO) and intelligence operations, examined by James Mulvenon, seem far more likely in the event of a major crisis (pp. 243–64). The issue of the US force posture in the context of a Taiwan–PRC escalation is also reviewed comprehensively, as is the current state of preparation of Taiwan’s armed forces. In this respect, several weaknesses of the Republic of China defense infrastructure are highlighted, mainly in the field of missile defense. Even if upgraded to the PAC-3 system, Taiwanese Patriot missile batteries ‘will be inadequate to defend against a PRC missile attack’ (p. 271), particularly if it is a barrage attack involving several hundreds of missiles.

The unlikely ‘nuclear dimension’ of a possible conflict is the topic of a chapter by Brad Roberts (pp. 213–41), which describes the defensive (‘retaliatory second strike’) nuclear posture of the PRC, and points out that ‘the most likely route to actual nuclear employment (in the event of a Taiwan–PRC conflict) would be through miscalculation and miscommunication’ (p. 236).

Curiously, the author does not address the issue of the electromagnetic pulse (EMP) nuclear option, even if such an option, in the event of a strike against Taipei, is far from likely. China is among the countries believed to possess the capability to detonate a nuclear bomb above the earth’s atmosphere, which would create a split-second electromagnetic pulse, similar to an extremely high-energy radio wave, potentially damaging or destroying military and civilian communications, power, transportation and other infrastructure.

As a conclusion, if useful in the study of the military balance in the Taiwan Strait, which is clearly shifting in China’s favor, Assessing the Threat needs to be complemented by other recent works, such as those of Wang (China and the Taiwan Issue: Impending War at Taiwan Strait, Lanham, MD: University Press of America 2006) and Wachman (Why Taiwan? Geostrategic Rationales for China’s Territorial Integrity, Stanford University Press 2007), in order to arrive at a balanced view of the complex and quickly evolving geopolitical regional situation.

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Dag Henriksen, NATO’s Gamble: Combining Airpower and Diplomacy in the Kosovo Crisis, 1998–1999. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2007. Pp.263. $24, PB. ISBN 978-1-59114-355-0.

After the 1991 Gulf War, a cottage industry sprang up among military scholars attempting to explain why precision airpower is not as useful as it appears. NATO’s Gamble falls squarely into this genre. Like so many works on contemporary airpower, Henriksen’s central arguments are that politicians put too much faith in airpower and that ‘airpower cannot do it alone’. However, because he chose to write a history of Operation ‘Allied Force’, a war that did not employ NATO ground power, he has his work cut out for him.

The most important part of this book is Henriksen’s history of the airpower debate since Vietnam. His discussion of the education of US Air Force officers in the years following the Gulf War at Air Command and Staff College is particularly interesting. For a brief period after the war, Colonel John Warden, the architect of the Gulf War’s air campaign, commanded the school, inspiring a generation of airmen who viewed airpower as a tool for winning conventional wars, according to Henriksen, a naïve mindset incompatible with the nuances of post-Cold War Europe.

The book also provides a fascinating window into the interplay between the Weinberger Doctrine and the Clinton administration’s flirtation with an emerging airpower doctrine. The first, championed by the US Army, categorically rejects the use of force for anything other than vital national interests out of fear that it could mire US ground troops in unwinnable wars. The second, backed mainly by the US State Department, argues that airpower holds the potential to solve military problems without the need for expensive troop deployments and the inevitable occupations that follow.

According to Henriksen, the airpower debate took its critical misstep after Bosnia. In 1995, after over three years of ethnic cleansing and bloody stalemate on the ground, the Bosnian Serb leadership finally agreed to withdraw its forces after two weeks of NATO air strikes. The timing of their capitulation led key figures in the Clinton State Department to believe the strikes had been effective. Henriksen, however, believes this assumption ‘was a substantial exaggeration of the role of airpower’.

In 1998, US diplomats began to apply the lessons they had mislearned in Bosnia to the crisis in Kosovo. When President Slobodan Milosevic of Yugoslavia rejected NATO’s demands, the Clinton administration turned to threats of bombing in the mistaken belief that Milosevic would quickly capitulate. Milosevic, however, believing European leaders would be unwilling to conduct more than a few days
of air strikes, did not back down. Henriksen then tells a fascinating story about how the interplay between these misperceptions led to escalating tensions, ethnic cleansing and eventually over two months of NATO air strikes.

The book is well researched and written but falls down somewhat on analysis. It begins with an excellent discussion of the tension between the Weinberger Doctrine and the airpower doctrine that emerged out of the Gulf War, but the author does not fully follow through in his analysis of Kosovo. While he clearly believes the Clinton administration put too much faith in airpower, he is less clear about whether he thinks a US-led invasion and occupation would have been preferable or whether he thinks the US should have left the threat of force off the table entirely – both were plausible choices, but each carried its own costs. A 78-day air war, even one without friendly casualties, is a horrible option. The question the author leaves unanswered is whether there is reason to believe the alternatives would have been preferable.

A second weak point in the book is that the author spends only a few sentences on the military aspects of the Kosovo campaign. He explains that before the war there was no strategy to inform air strikes beyond the first few days. This is true, but a novel strategy emerged during the war. This strategy coordinated US Air Force target lists with cyber attack, involved numerous US and allied agencies, and brought all the elements of national power to bear against Milosevic’s political supporters. A closer examination of this complex integrated campaign might have led Henriksen to tone down some of his stronger passages on the naiveté of air strategists and US diplomats.

NATO’s Gamble is an excellent book and does credit to its genre. Despite its flaws, it is a must-read for anyone interested in the role of airpower in modern diplomacy.

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Amitai Etzioni, Security First: For a Muscular, Moral Foreign Policy. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007. Pp.308. £14.99, HB. ISBN 978-0-300-10857-6.

When Amitai Etzioni begins his book by identifying a ‘realism deficiency’ (p. xiv) in the practice of American foreign policy, he does not imply that those in Washington DC are insufficiently versed in the works of Henry Morgenthau and Kenneth Waltz, but rather that policy-makers should remember that ‘politics is the art of the possible’
and that one must be ‘realistic’ about setting achievable objectives. Instead of aggressively pursuing an idealistic and woefully optimistic policy of ‘making the world safe for democracy’ the United States should simply aim to make it ‘safe’. In this sense, current priorities are to be inverted. Etzioni argues that basic security must precede attempts at democratization, pointing out that ‘security drives democracy, while democracy does not beget security’ (p. ix).

The book is divided into six constituent parts, each serving to layer this thesis. Part I sets the scene by casting an analytical eye over what has gone wrong with the Western nation-building efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq to date. Coming to the instant conclusion that ‘democracy cannot be fostered by force of arms’ (p. 1), Etzioni argues instead that the West should recognize and attempt to establish ‘basic security’ as a lowest common denominator – ‘the conditions under which most people, most of the time, are able to go about their lives… without acute fear of being killed or injured – without being terrorized’ (p. 2).

Part II outlines the limitations of ‘socially engineering’ liberal democracies through foreign intervention and suggests how to chart the perilous course between the Scylla of tolerating authoritarian governments and the Charybdis of attempting ‘regime change’.

Part III decries Samuel Huntington’s ‘clash of civilizations’ theory to assert that the true ‘fault line’ in the world is actually the bifurcation between those who ‘legitimate’ violence and those who ‘renounce’ it. This is illustrated by a comparison of the tenets of Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism and Islam. The key point is that each of these faiths is marked by a majority of ‘illiberal moderates’ who largely oppose violence. (The position of atheists on the matter is not noted!)

Part IV advances the notion of a shared ‘moral culture’ and how this is built upon ‘values’, many of which are derived from religion. The foci of Part V are the pressing issues of ‘homeland security’ and ‘ethnic’/inter-communal violence. The book concludes that the chimerical quest for ‘absolute’ security ought to be abandoned to attain a more stable and secure – if imperfect – world order.

The section on the brand of ‘faux security’ delivered by the Department of Homeland Security really stands out as particularly sobering reading. Etzioni offers a damming indictment upon the effectiveness of efforts since 9/11 to rectify weak links in domestic security. Regrettably, the colossal resources allocated to improving airport security – such as the risible policy of confiscating tweezers and mineral water – have been carried out ‘largely to reassure the public and to keep the airlines in business, but they do not provide safe flights’ (p. 213). Instead, these and accompanying measures (such as the Patriot Act) divert scarce resources from real threats, whilst generating new costs in the form of harassment and infringement of civil liberties and
resulting in serious damage to the nation’s tourism industry, for example.

At the same time as this dangerous exercise in wrong-headedness reaches its apogee only the most miniscule attention and resources are devoted to securing fissile materials in weak or ‘rogue’ states such as Russia, Pakistan and Nigeria, where the ‘door is wide open to nuclear terrorism’ (p. 232). It is the poorly guarded ‘closed city’ installations in Russia and the questionable loyalty of the Pakistani Army that should concern us, not the handicapped people and senior citizens making the way through airport security with their walkers! (Ibid.)

Unlike so much other International Relations scholarship that seeks to advance positivist explanations for state behaviour, this is an unabashedly normative work. It contends that the problems we face are man-made and ‘self-inflicted’, and as such they can be overcome. Overall, the thesis of Security First has much to recommend it. Etzioni states his case persuasively and consistently and marshals copious empirical evidence to support his claims. If any further empirical validation is needed for the author’s thesis, Joel Hafvenstein – an aid worker in Afghanistan – tellingly wrote in The International Herald Tribune of 9 November 2007: ‘security is the real currency of Afghanistan. The traumatized population of Helmand would trade anything for it, follow anyone who could offer it.’

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