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Eric Alterman. *Who Speaks for America: Why Democracy Matters in Foreign Policy.* Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998. ix + 244 pp. $25.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8014-3574-4.

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Eric Alterman fears for the future of his country. He reviews the history of the steady growth of presidential power in foreign affairs, the erosion of Congressional responsibility (a product both of lassitude and corruption), the coldly impersonal influence of the new globalization, and concludes that the present system is hardly more than a psuedo-democracy. If the definition of tyranny is rule by a minority, then American democracy has sadly become rule by minorities. How did the nation's journey lead to this distortion of the original republican vision of the future? Did we lose our way at some point? Unfortunately, no. If that were the case, the remedies for our present predicament would be easy to define, if not far easier to carry out.

In the early republic, Jefferson and his Republican cohorts understood all too well where the Hamilitonian program was leading the country. Yeoman farmers might be the backbone of democracy staving off the "plundering classes" who reached greedily for the levers of government but they were already under siege amid a capitalist marketplace. So convinced was Jefferson of the need to forestall the likely denouement, that he was willing to ally himself with the hated British crown against his beloved republican France to secure the Louisiana Territory. "By enlarging the empire of liberty," Alterman quotes Jefferson, "we multiply its auxiliaries, and provide new sources of renovation, should its principles, at any time, degenerate, in those portions of our country which gave them birth." But it was a fateful decision for all of its "idealism." "Such calculations by future American presidents in pursuit of further expansion would eventually strangle the very goals and principles in whose pursuit Jefferson made his original Faustian bargain."

Jefferson's successors renewed the pact many times over, until it became habit, just as LBJ's retaliation for Pleiku became Rolling Thunder. In the course of things, the public's role was simply to be "informed," or worse yet, a potential obstacle to be "managed." In the 1920s Walter Lippmann and John Dewey participated in a great debate over this threat to the republic. Much as he decried the situation, Walter Lippmann could see no remedy except a deliberately elitist network of intelligence gatherers to employ the methods of social scientific inquiry in place of the now-impossible exchange of ideas in the intellectual marketplace. Dewey conceded that as matters stood the public was not capable of grasping problems or framing solutions to them. Lippmann's proposal, however, entrusted too much to elites. Dewey called for the re-establishment of "community" between government and the public, but, notes Alterman, failed to work out the mechanisms through which his ideas might be realized.

No one else took up the challenge as America moved into World War II. Instead, average citizens devoted even less time to foreign policy questions, meekly accepting the argument that political debate should halt at the water's edge. To be sure, there was the investigation into the Pearl Harbor attack, but the war had been a great success. During secret deliberations over the Truman Doctrine, some senators on the Foreign Relations Committee made the point that presidential initiative in foreign affairs decided how Congress must behave, because, should it reject his requests for aid to Greece and Turkey, that would embolden the Soviets to act with impunity. President Truman's actions at the outset of the Korean War thus won approval from liberal circles, with the most powerful dissent coming from Senator Robert A. Taft, a conservative who warned his colleagues that if the president could go to war in Korea today without Congressional approval, tomorrow, "he can go to war in Malaya or Indonesia or Iran or South America."

Indeed, even the thought of consulting Congress raised fears in Dean Acheson's mind that, "you might have completely muddied up the situation." Just as the Founding Fathers intended! Alterman protests. Acheson had gone to the Security Council for approval of actions already taken by the United States in preference to Congress, because he and the president had "fewer

concerns about political opposition." The Korean War marked the transformation of the Cold War into a global confrontation, and with it the evils of "bipartisanship" became more and more evident as a threat to the republic. Not only were foreign policy issues not debated, but there arose a conviction that they should not be, and that the two political spheres of domestic and foreign policy were somehow not concentric. The pernicious notion that foreign and domestic policies are or ever have been separate, Alterman avers, is one of the greatest dangers to democracy.

And yet that argument would prevail until in the midst of an unsuccessful war an administration official would testify to the committee that in the atomic age, Congress's sole right to declare war was obsolete. The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, Nicholas Katzenbach insisted in a famous confrontation, was a functional equivalent (so far as presidential powers were concerned) of an old-fashioned declaration of war. When Nixon failed to move swiftly enough to end the war without further damage to the "imperial presidency," Congress passed the War Powers Act in 1972. But even after the shock of Vietnam, Congress still had not the stomach for a confrontation with Nixon's successors over Grenada, Panama, or the Gulf War. Congress was not alone in the Cold War in abasing itself. State Department policies of refusing passports to those whose travels were "not in the interest of the U.S." met with barely more than a ripple of protest from the American Society of Newspaper Editors.

Whatever the arguments in favor of surrendering all power to the government during the Cold War era, and Alterman does not find them convincing at all, there can be no justification now for a continuation of the old ways either by government, or by the citizenry. The debate over NAFTA and the defeat dealt to Clinton on the fast-track proposal suggest to Alterman that there is an awakening going on. Globalization should bring home to Americans that foreign policy begins in the living room. In the wake of the heated NAFTA debate there is a stirring in the ranks of labor unions; there is resentment at efforts to pretend that Mexico had met U.S. demands for the sake of passing the bill; and there is a realization that the United States is not simply a nation of consumers, but also of producers. When NAFTA and fast-track were before the public as issues, the punditocracy's (Lippmann's heirs?) scorn knew no limits. Opponents were held up to ridicule as card-carrying members of the Washington chapter of the Flat Earth Society. Despite the heavy dose of disparagement, those who believe NAFTA has had a negative impact on America once again outnumber supporters by 43 percent to 28 percent in polls of the larger public. Business executives remain pro-NAFTA by large margins, however.

The punditocracy exposed itself, Alterman believes, as ignorant of the real state of the nation. So, in a sense, we are at last confronted with an opportunity for a true debate over, "Who Speaks for America," without Cold War self-censorship. Will we seize the opportunity, or will the issue go by default to those who continue to have no faith in the public's ability to grasp or understand foreign affairs? Where Dewey failed to supply the necessary mechanism to realize his idea for reconstituting a community between government and the citizenry, Alterman devotes the final section of his book to a proposal based on the jury system. The way this would work, he offers, is that the jury would be made up of ordinary people "hired" by the American people "to be full-time citizens and foreign policy jurors for a one-time period of, say, six years." Since there were be no lobbying interests allowed near the jury "room," questions could be decided on their merits. And the government would have to come clean with all its secret intelligence. The jury could be as many as a thousand people, a number that would lessen, presumably, the danger that a small group would not have broad enough interests or background to judge fairly.

The proposal actually sounds something like things I have heard said about reforming the House of Lords into a deliberative body. But under Alterman's proposal, this jury would actually decide questions. It also sounds a little bit like Progressive Era fascination with Initiative and Recall. But it would take on itself the general business of governing, not just selected issues. Of course there would be a transition period, during which the jury's recommendations would not replace the Congress or the executive "as the nation's final authority." Perhaps questions of whether to go to war at the superpower level would still have to require Congressional and presidential approval, Alterman concedes. "But 'police actions' and the like, which characterized almost all deployment of armed force by the United States in this century, would no longer be undertaken on the word of the president alone."

There is much to ponder here. Suppose that the jury system could be dramatically expanded in such a fashion. Is it really the case that arguments for the Truman Doctrine turned on the efforts of private lobbyists? Suppose that the government did come clean with its secret intelligence materials before the jury. Using intelligence "sources" and materials has always been an art form more than a science, primarily designed to convince doubters

and skeptics. At present it is the forte of Cold War triumphalists who assign it high priority on H-diplo and other places. Why should we believe that a majority of such a jury would reject Government arguments that "national security" forbid open debate of sensitive matters? Government will always have access, moreover, to other "juries," particularly the newspapers and (more and more important) television news channels. The behavior of the press in accepting Pentagon rules in the Gulf War does not encourage a great deal of hope in resistance to the government's cajoling or threats.

There is, on the other hand, a growing literature concerning the need for suggestions for making democracy something real again. Mostly, these concern themselves with local or regional questions. Eric Alterman has offered a plan for dealing with national and international issues. It has not even the slimmest of chances of being adopted, but it represents a positive effort to break free from sour assumptions that given the public's ignorance and unconcern there is nothing to be done. Federally-funded national elections, for example, might address some of the problems Alterman cites. Weaken the power of "special interests" to influence elections and there would be a fall-out that could well reach deeply into foreign policy questions, such as bloated Pentagon budgets, trade treaties and exceptions thereto, and diplomatic support for multinationals in resisting new international environmental regulations. The worst thing, as Alterman reminds us forcefully, is simply to shrug and say, "Nothing's to be done. The public's not equipped for anything more than to be kept informed."

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