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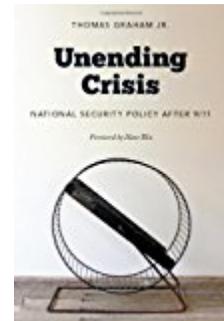
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Thomas Graham. *Unending Crisis: National Security Policy after 9/11.* Seattle: Institute of Global and Regional Security Studies, Jackson School of International Studies in association with University of Washington Press, 2012. 288 pp. \$24.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-295-99170-2.

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Plaw on Graham

Thomas Graham Jr's *Unending Crisis: National Security Policy After 9/11* offers a scathing critique of the neoconservative foreign policy of President George W. Bush's administration. It focuses on "seven important foreign policy issues" which, it contends, the Bush administration transformed into "seven serious and seemingly unresolvable crises" (pp. xviii-xix). While the book contains few new revelations about President Bush's policy or its effects, the cumulative effect of Graham's adept retracing of these multiple intersecting failures comprises a potent indictment of President Bush's neoconservative foreign policy and the legacy he bequeathed to the nation and to President Barack Obama in particular. This critique has particular topicality in the current election season as Americans consider foreign policy alternatives for the next four years. It is especially pertinent if one accepts the charge leveled by Democrats that Republican presidential nominee Mitt Romney proposes to renew elements of the neoconservative foreign policy agenda if elected. But even those who are skeptical of this last claim will find the book informative, engaging, and relevant. It will be of particular interest to those with a general interest in foreign policy but who have not followed it closely since 2000.

Much of the force of Graham's book emanates from the way it combines a broad overview of many dimensions of the Bush foreign policy, with a continual return to the same clear and simple story that it sees playing out in all of them: in each case it illustrates

how the ideologically driven Bush policy has made the challenges facing America disastrously worse. Graham summarizes the two pillars of the Bush foreign policy agenda (a little ungenerously, I think) as follows: "the Bush administration entered office in January 2001 with two primary policy imperatives in the national security and foreign policy areas: missile defense and the invasion of Iraq" (p. 115). Graham explains the goal of invading Iraq as part of a broader neoconservative vision: "When George W. Bush came to office in 2001, his administration was dominated by a neoconservative philosophy that in general appeared to support the following ideas... The United States should use its overwhelming strength to remake the Middle East in more or less its own image" (pp. xviii-xix). So according to Graham, the Bush administration was committed from day one to creating a little America in Iraq, even if force was required. The seven foreign policy problems that Graham argues were greatly exacerbated by the resulting policy are: the threat posed by the North Korean development of nuclear weapons; the continuing development of nuclear weapons by Iran; the dysfunctional government and stubborn insurgency in Afghanistan; Pakistan's proliferation of nuclear weapons, political instability, and conflict with India; the seemingly endless conflict between Israelis and Palestinians; the threats emanating from Iraq; and the erosion of the authority of international law and treaties. Not all of these subjects receive equal attention, nor are the critical examinations equally compelling, but in each case Graham does a good job of

providing the reader with a brief background on the key issues facing the United States and a concise narrative of the Bush administration's handling of them.

The book fits into a growing literature critiquing the Bush foreign policy, including David E. Sanger's *The Inheritance* (2009) or, in more narrowly focused veins, Albert Weeks's *The Choice of War* (2010) and Ahmed Rashid's *Descent into Chaos* (2009), or in a more populist spirit, Michael Isikoff and David Corn's *Hubris: The Inside Story of Spin, Scandal, and the Selling of the Iraq War* (2006). In one respect, *Unending Crisis* is closest to Sanger's book—that is, in examining the Bush foreign policy across a relatively broad spectrum of areas and not just focusing on one or two dimensions of it or the way it played out in one region. But Graham's book also contains something of Isikoff and Corn's *Hubris*, in that it attributes the persistent pattern of failure it identifies across these dimensions with a single dominant deficiency, and indeed one that could be plausibly characterized as hubris—that is, a firm commitment to a neo-conservative worldview which, Graham argues, the Bush administration refused to reconsider even as its approach stubbornly continued to exacerbate the challenges facing America.

Overall, the book makes a forceful case that the Bush administration made everything worse because of its adherence to this neoconservative mindset. But in some cases at least, this constant refrain also comes to feel like a bit of a Procrustean bed into which Graham is forcing each crisis. This sense that some of the material is being oversimplified is in some part an unavoidable concomitant of the book's ambitious scope, which denies Graham the leisure to explore the nuances of each issue. But it also results from Graham's overreliance on the assumption of the Bush administration's ideological imprisonment as a ready-made explanation for its foreign policy choices. Graham's narrative would have been better served by actually showing that in each case it was the blinders of ideology rather than, say, a prudential assessment of the options different from Graham's, which drove the administration's policy. Finally, I'm concerned that at times this pat explanation for the deficiencies of Bush policy encourages Graham to be too credulous about the viability of the alternative policy options that the Bush administration ignored.

Let me give you an example of the kind of thing I have in mind. In the second chapter of the book Graham excoriates the Bush administration for failing to pursue a "grand bargain" (p. 39) floated by the Iranian govern-

ment in 2003 while the United States was enjoying initial success in Iraq: he concludes that "It is a tragedy that the Bush administration did not even attempt to negotiate on the basis of this proposal" (pp. 39-40). The Iranian offer reportedly included opening its nuclear program to inspection, disarming Hezbollah, cooperating against al-Qaeda, helping to stabilize Iraq, and accepting the 2002 Saudi peace plan for Palestine and Israel. At the same time, Iran made demands, including the "recognition of Iran's legitimate security interests in the region," an "end to all U.S. sanctions" and blacklisting, "reparations claims from the Iran-Iraq war," and "full access to nuclear, biological and chemical technology, within the limits of relevant treaties" (p. 40). Admittedly, this represents an intriguing proposal. But its attractions depend very much, on how one interprets the meaning of things like "Iran's legitimate security interests in the region" and on what is entailed by "full access to nuclear, biological and chemical technology" permitted under relevant treaties. It also depends on how faithfully and energetically one can reasonably expect the Iranians to fulfill their obligations under the bargain. In short, there are perfectly good prudential reasons why Bush might have been skeptical of such an offer and might have wanted to resist being drawn into direct negotiations over it. Still, the passage in which Graham explains the U.S. failure to pursue the proposal does not dwell on such considerations. It is rather very revealing of the assumptions he brings to his examination of Bush policies: "Unfortunately, it was not to be. The administration that came to power in the United States in January 2001 was dominated by neoconservatives who were broadly of the view that foreign policy problems were not to be managed; rather, regimes were to be changed. Thus, it didn't matter so much what policies governments pursued; the important issue was what type of government it was. Was it democratic or authoritarian, elected or unelected? If it was not democratic, it should be made so, in some cases by military force. Then the policies would be correct. Iran was a repressive, aggressive, ideological state and must be treated with hostility until, one way or another, its regime changed. Neither did the complex, many-faceted political scene in Tehran fit into the Bush administration's 'with us or against us' philosophy. So Washington ignored the Iranian initiative" (pp. 37-38).

Admittedly, this reviewer finds it difficult to deny a certain cowboy posture that at times played a role in the Bush administration's foreign policy. But it also seems unnecessary and a little implausible to assert, without further evidence, that the administration was so locked

into the project of changing the regime in Iran that its officials dismissed this proposal without reflecting on the opportunities and perils that it opened up. After all, there are other perfectly plausible reasons for rejecting the proposal—one might, for example, doubt the sincerity of the offer (especially given the history of deceptive negotiation associated with the Iranian nuclear program), or one might think that in practice it would be an unfavorable bargain (e.g., one might think the benefits to Iran are frontloaded while its concessions may be more rhetorical than real), or even if one thinks it is a sincere and balanced offer one might have practical doubts over whether changing Iranian governments would be able and willing to follow through over time, particularly as the U.S. presence in Iraq diminished. The fact that the administration didn't pursue the offer doesn't itself prove that they were prisoners of an ideology. Indeed, if they were prisoners of the views Graham attributes to them then they would not have considered any offer that Tehran could possibly have made (including, for example, handing over all uranium and centrifuges, signing a peace treaty with Israel, and offering to ship the U.S. free oil for a generation), for Iran would still not be fully democratic and therefore would have to be transformed, by military force if necessary. But this is difficult to believe even if one is quite critical of the Bush administration.

Similar concerns arise in relation to other chapters of the book, including Graham's otherwise very useful discussions of North Korea's acquisition of nuclear weapons and of the Arab-Israeli conflict. In both cases he adeptly shows that some dubious decisions were made by the Bush administration, but not necessarily that these were the product of a neoconservative mindset, nor that alternative policies would necessarily have been more successful. In addition, in the latter chapter in particular, some of Graham's own arguments are based on unsupported assertions which could be strongly contested and even accused of being rooted in some ideological outlook of his own. For example, in regard to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, Graham makes the following claim about Hamas, a Palestinian Islamic resistance organization which now controls the Gaza Strip: "Hamas had been declared an international terrorist organization wrongly, in that it is a regional resistance organization with no ties to al Qaeda" (p. 156). Of course, being a regional resistance organization is not incompatible with being a terrorist organization if one of your tactics of resistance is to carry out mass casualty attacks aimed at civilians with the purpose of instilling fear and advancing a political agenda (which Hamas has done). It is also

possible to be a terrorist without having ties to al-Qaeda. So neither of these qualities shows that Hamas's designation as a terrorist organization was decided "wrongly" (p. 156). Moreover, even if this is an error, it is hardly limited to American neoconservatives, but is shared for example by the EU and Canada, which are rarely charged with pursuing neoconservative agendas.

Other chapters fit more tightly into the main narrative of the book. In particular, Graham's examination of the Bush policies towards Iraq and Afghanistan establishes pretty convincingly that it is impossible to make any sense on the administration's decisions without invoking neoconservative ideas and goals. Most of the remaining chapters, such as the one on the Bush policy in Pakistan, fall somewhere in between the relatively close coherence of the Iraqi case with Graham's central themes and the more ambiguous case of Israel-Palestine. But I do want to emphasize that whether or not each chapter provides direct and uniform support for Graham's central thesis, they are all richly informative and engagingly written and contribute to an evocative picture of the relative weakness of the Bush foreign policy record.

The book is at its very best in exploring and criticizing the Bush policies connected with arms control and nonproliferation (and international treaties and international law more generally). Graham draws on long and rich personal experience in these areas. He served as a senior U.S. diplomat involved in every major international arms control and nonproliferation negotiation in which the United States participated from 1970 to 1997. He served for fifteen years as the senior counsel for the U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency and briefly served as its acting director. He also served as Special Representative of the President for Arms Control, Non-Proliferation and Disarmament from 1994 to 1997. It is in critically examining the Bush record in the areas of arms control and nonproliferation that the book is at its most insightful and most passionate. It reads at times as if this issue is the real heart of the book and that the other six areas Graham examines are merely intended to reflect and reinforce the key pattern he identifies first and foremost here.

Graham's basic point in this key section of the book is that by recklessly pursuing missile defense and abandoning the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty and, in large part, serious arms reduction negotiations, the Bush administration reneged on the "basic bargain" underlying the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), weakening its hold particularly on non-nuclear states (pp.

xviii, 167, 182-184). Graham describes the basic bargain as follows: “Most of the world, that is, the NPT non-nuclear weapon states parties, undertake to never acquire nuclear weapons, and in return, the five NPT nuclear weapon states parties ... pledge unfettered access to peaceful nuclear technology... and to pursue negotiations aimed at the eventual elimination of their nuclear stockpiles” (p. 174). Graham’s illuminating overview of the long, delicate negotiations over the treaty and in particular over the agreement to make it permanent in 1995 is a real tour de force and worth the book’s purchase price alone. Moreover, the case that he presents that the Bush administration’s “actions undermined the basic NPT bargain of 1968, which the international community had developed with such effort,” and that “there are few things as important to U.S. security as a viable Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty” is persuasive (p. 183). This case, which I think constitutes the argumentative core of the book and its most valuable contribution, constitutes a formidable challenge to any effort to renew or revive the Bush agenda or the neoconservative ideas that helped to animate it. While readers may find some elements of the “basic agreement” underlying the NPT hard to entirely swallow at face value—notably the idea that any of the five recognized nuclear weapon states will ever entirely eliminate their stockpile of weapons—Graham’s overall argument remains compelling. In essence, he forcefully contends that it is overwhelmingly in the United States’ national interest to prevent the widespread proliferation of nuclear weapons; the NPT is crucial to that goal; by recklessly weakening that treaty that the Bush administration seriously endangered the long-term national security of the United States; and that some of the problems we face today, notably the Iranian nuclear program, have been made more intractable as a consequence. While there is certainly room for dispute around the periphery of this argument—for example, it might be alleged that the challenge of the Iranian program would have proved equally intractable even with a stronger NPT—Graham’s sound argument puts the onus on defenders of neoconservatism and President Bush to make the case.

The thrust of the book, it should be emphasized, is not wholly about what went wrong. It also contains positive reviews and recommendations. It ends, for example, with a brief conclusion that is generally approving of

President Obama’s efforts in foreign affairs, emphasizing in particular his signing of the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty with Russia in the spring of 2010 and the draw-down of troops from Iraq. Graham also acknowledges that the Obama administration’s considerable efforts have yet to bear fruit in other areas, such as the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, the Iranian nuclear program, and in dealing with the nuclear threat from North Korea, although he lays much of the blame on difficulties stemming from the Bush years. He ends the book with three recommendations for the future which, while reflecting good common sense, are also fairly conventional: we must be careful not to let our foreign policy be hijacked by “extremist talking heads” and the entertainment industry more generally; we need to better appreciate the importance of “economic power” (rather than military power) to effective foreign policy; and a “central item on the agenda should be greatly improved public and private education” (pp. 200-201).

The main focus of the Graham’s book is, however, what went wrong in the years after 9/11 and led us to our current straits. Here Graham’s book makes an important contribution to the examination of President Bush’s foreign policy, particularly in terms of the scope of its examination of multiple crises abroad, and the important common narrative that it identifies (although I think some cases fit the story better than others). The heart of the book, I think, is the powerful case Graham advances that the Bush administration’s reckless policies did serious harm to the NPT regime, and by consequence to the long-term national security of the United States. Here Graham’s intimate personal involvement with the negotiations around the treaty allows him to masterfully walk his readers through the key issues and to allow them to better appreciate the scale of harm done by the Bush policies. The issues that the book raises are especially topical and important now as we prepare to set the trajectory of U.S. foreign policy for the next four years in the November election. But the book’s clear and engaging prose and adept navigation of the intricate history of diverse aspects of U.S. policy will also make it of continuing interest to those interested in twenty-first-century foreign affairs, especially those not familiar with some aspects of the Bush administration’s policy.

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