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Memoirs are as essential as they are misleading, and can be both at the same time when they are unintentionally revealing. The George W. Bush administration has produced an unusual number of attempts at self-explanation, and Melvyn Leffler has given us an incisive and fair-minded account of them.¹ The latter characteristic is unfortunately not to be taken for granted because despite some of the great heat having gone out of the debates with the end of the war in Iraq, the winding down of the American role in Afghanistan, and the cessation of torture of the prisoners, the temperature is still pretty high. Although Leffler is critical of many of the

¹ John Ashcroft, *Never Again: Securing America and Restoring Justice* (New York: Center Street, 2006); L. Paul Bremer III with Malcolm McConnell, *My Year in Iraq: The Struggle to Build a Future of Hope* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006); Dick Cheney with Liz Cheney, *In My Time: A Personal and Political Memoir* (New York: Threshold Editions, 2011); Richard A. Clarke, *Against All Enemies: Inside America's War on Terror* (New York: Free Press, 2004); Douglas Feith, *War and Decision: Inside the Pentagon at the Dawn of the War on Terrorism* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2008); Ari Fleischer, *Taking Heat: The President, the Press, and My Years in the White House* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2005); Jack Goldsmith, *The Terror Presidency: Law and Judgment Inside the Bush Administration* (New York: Norton, 2007); Richard N. Haass, *War of Necessity, War of Choice: A Memoir of Two Iraqi Wars* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2009); Karen Hughes, *Ten Minutes from Normal* (New York: Viking, 2004); Scott McClellan, *What Happened: Inside the Bush White House and Washington's Culture of Deception* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2008); Richard B. Meyers with Malcolm McConnell, *Eyes on the Horizon: Serving on the Front Lines of National Security* (New York: Threshold Editions, 2009); Condoleezza Rice, *No Higher Honor: A Memoir of My Years in Washington* (New York: Crown Publishing Group, 2011); Karl Rove, *Courage and Consequence: My Life As a Conservative in the Fight* (New York: Threshold Editions, 2010); Donald Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown: A Memoir* (New York: Sentinel, 2011); Ricardo Sanchez with Donald T. Phillips, *Wiser in Battle: A Soldier's Story* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2008); Hugh Shelton, *Without Hesitation: The Odyssey of an American Warrior* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2010); John B. Taylor, *Global Financial Warriors: The Untold Story of International Finance in the Post 9/11 World* (New York: Norton, 2007); George Tenet with Bill Harlow, *At the Center of the Storm: My Years at the CIA* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2007); Dov S. Zakheim, *A Vulcan's Tale: How the Bush Administration Mismanaged the Reconstruction of Afghanistan* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution, 2011).

policies and of the memoirs, a great virtue of his article – at least in my eyes – is that it tries more to explicate and explain than to judge.²

His coverage is necessarily selective, and my review will be even more so. Leffler touches on but does not fully explore the general utility of memoirs. On the one hand, this seems self-evident because they can tell us much that we would not otherwise know, certainly not without access to documents. Furthermore, memoirs can reveal the emotional states of the participants, something that documents often conceal, and Leffler starts his essay by quoting from Condoleezza Rice's account of a meeting which led her to re-live the emotions aroused by the 9/11 attacks. As I will discuss below, I think that for this administration, even more than others, emotions were central. But since memoirs are written to persuade, we obviously cannot take them at face value (of course, neither can we do so with contemporary documents, most of which are written to persuade others in the government, if not later historians). It remains useful to learn what the writer wants to persuade us of, however, and when we have multiple memoirs written by people who had deep conflicts with each other, a skilled historian like Leffler can look for areas of convergence, divergence, and un-rebutted claims. Thus it is significant that none of the memoirs argue that terrorism had a place high on the administration's agenda before September 11 (192-93), and that while several of them try to refute the claim that the administration made only woefully inadequate preparations for the occupation of Iraq, these assertions are far from convincing (206).

From one perspective (one that is more common in political science than diplomatic history), the whole utility of memoirs can be questioned: we seek explanations for what states are doing and should find them in the patterns of behavior that we observe. Internal deliberations and arguments are interesting, but really not central. The obvious reply, and one to which I would subscribe, is that the motives, beliefs, goals, and perceptions of the key participants are central, both as things we want to explain and as factors that we use to explain behavior. Memoirs may not be a totally reliable guide here, but they often are an important source because only the participants can tell us what they thought and how they thought, and even if they are consciously or unconsciously being defensive, if not deceptive, it is very hard for them to make up the story out of whole cloth. There is much to this argument, and in my own work I certainly have used memoirs. But it is worth noting that modern psychology has re-discovered the truth of Freud's basic argument that the unconscious is very powerful. Although the memoir-writers know this, both they and scholars have paid less attention to the fact that we do not have privileged access to much of our own thinking and that the reasons we give for many of our impressions and actions not only to others but to ourselves are not correct.³

² For an excellent justification of why historians make moral judgments about those they study, see Paul Schroeder, "International History: Why Historians Do It Differently than Political Scientists," in Colin Elman and Miriam Fendius Elman, eds., *Bridges and Boundaries: Historians, Political Scientists, and the Study of International Relations* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), 408-16.

³ For a summary of much of this research, see Timothy Wilson, *Strangers to Ourselves: Discovering the Adaptive Unconscious* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002).

Nevertheless, I think there is no reason to doubt the testimony that the terrorist attacks of 9/11 had an extraordinarily powerful emotional impact on the government's leaders. It wasn't only the immediate shock, which was well understood at the time, but the powerful role of fear and, Leffler argues, guilt that drove their actions. The fact that there were no successful attacks (and few serious attempts) on American soil in the aftermath can lead us to overlook (or not feel in our gut) the great fear that gripped Washington. Leffler notes that in varying ways and degrees all the memoirs bring this out. The weeks and months after 9/11 were filled not only with rumors and wild intelligence reports, but with news of the anthrax-filled letters that were mailed to news organizations and two Democratic Senators and that killed five people. Even if the letters were not sent by Al Qaeda, something that took quite a while to determine, they showed how deadly and disruptive even a small biological attack could be. Furthermore, there were all sorts of reports of follow-up attacks, including fairly credible intelligence about a nuclear weapon that had been planted in Washington, fears that were magnified by the discovery that Al Qaeda had been pursuing Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD). All these rumors turned out to be false, but the general public remained on edge for months, and the decision-makers were even more fearful because they were being bombarded by so much frightening (if incorrect) information. With this background it is not surprising that the memoirs portray the decision to invade Iraq as having been driven much more by fear than by the hope that Iraq would become a thriving democracy that would spread to the rest of the Middle East. Leffler agrees with this portrayal (202-208), and so do I.

The decision-makers also had the responsibility for protecting the country, and even the most critical and cynical of us should acknowledge how heavily this sense of duty weighed on them. It was compounded, Leffler argues, by a sense of guilt that was perhaps all the more powerful for not being openly acknowledged. The administration leaders realized that they had ignored the terrorist threat. While they might not have been able to avert the attacks had they correctly understood the situation and been alert, they knew that in fact they had not done all in their power to keep the country safe. For conscientious leaders (and, misguided as they were, they did put the nation's welfare before all else) this knowledge was a heavy burden. This may have been part of the reason why they felt that any chance of another attack was too great to tolerate and that they had to impinge on American civil liberties, torture prisoners, view the situation as one of war rather than dangerous crime, and invade Iraq despite what many (but not all) of them realized was the lack of ties between Saddam Hussein and Al Qaeda.

I think emotions also played a crucial role in what remains the central but less-than-fully explained failure of the Bush administration to plan for the occupation of Iraq. Of course many events are difficult if not impossible to foresee, and so not all errors call for explanations that are grounded in psychology. But outside experts and the CIA warned that a Sunni-Shi'a conflict was almost inevitable and that the occupation was likely to face very significant obstacles. What is striking is not so much that the administration remained unprepared, but that these warnings were simply brushed aside. Critics of the war are tempted to see this as evidence of the administration's dogmatism and hubris (see 212), if not stupidity. There is something to this, but it is not the whole story. Political and psychological pressures made it impossible for the administration to take the occupation seriously. Leffler suggests that the failure to think carefully about the occupation was "baffling" (214). I would argue that it was disastrous, but not baffling. President Bush and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld were committed to transforming the

military and reducing the size of the army, a goal that was incompatible with keeping a large American force in Iraq for a prolonged period of time. More broadly, for the administration to admit that the occupation might be very costly would make it much harder to rally support for the war. It was much more politically convenient to both exaggerate the threat and downplay the costs. But the advantages of this were psychological as well as political. People try to avoid perceiving painful value trade-offs,⁴ and Bush and his colleagues felt great pressures not only to tell others that the occupation would be quick and easy but to believe it themselves. These psychological dynamics, I think, explain how Richard Cheney could so clearly see the dangers of going to Baghdad when he was Secretary of Defense in 1991 and be oblivious to them when he was Vice President in 2002-3. In the former case there were no pressing reasons to overthrow Saddam (the expectation was that the Iraqi military would do the job for the United States, and that if it did not the U.S. could live with a chastened Saddam), but in the later period Cheney's fear and sense of threat led him to believe that the U.S. had to invade, and he changed his view of reality to ease the burden that he would have felt had he also believed that the occupation would be dreadful.

The first two volumes of Henry Kissinger's memoirs provided much of the intellectual frame within which the subsequent scholarly debate on the Nixon administration was conducted. The memoirs of the Bush administration will not do so, in part because while admitting that the policy-making process was dysfunctional, they disagree on who was to blame. As Leffler shows, none of these memoirs either provides as strong a narrative as Kissinger's, or is as lively and gripping. But they, like Kissinger's account, reveal an administration whose members not only disagreed with one another, but often viewed each other with contempt. Although Richard Nixon disliked personal conflict, he may have viewed these divisions as a useful tool of management. There is no reason to believe that Bush did, and while the writers of these memoirs each point a finger at the others, the blame, as Leffler notes, must primarily rest with Bush. Since the memoirs do not tell us why he failed to exert a stronger hand, scholars must take up this challenge.

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⁴ Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), chapter 4; Jervis, "Understanding Beliefs," *Political Psychology*, vol. 27, October 2006, 641-64.