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From the Editor

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From the Editor

In this Issue . . .

From Polybius to Petraeus, and all in between, generations have struggled to identify the skills and responsibilities required of those who would lead. The art and craft of generalship has captured the attention of societies from the very onset of organized conflict. Frederick the Great attempted to impart the challenge of generalship in his *Instructions to His Generals*: “A perfect general, like Plato’s republic, is a figment. Either would be admirable, but it is not the characteristic of human nature to produce beings exempt from human weaknesses and defects.” Equally as compelling and mystifying is General Fred Franks’s reflection in his 1997 book *Into the Storm*: “I believe generals get to focus on and solve big problems in peace and war. They must know details and occasionally dip into those, but essentially they must figure out the few deciding issues or battles for their times and conditions and focus their energies on those.”

In our first thematic offering, “Generalship,” we are indeed fortunate to have two distinguished authors willing to share their perspectives related to the duty and conduct expected of those bearing the mantle of general. Martin Cook’s “Revolt of the Generals: A Case Study in Professional Ethics” is derived from a presentation to the Interuniversity Seminar on the Armed Forces and Society in October 2007. The author attempts to extend the normative thinking process related to military professionalism beyond specific criticisms and judgments appearing in the media. To accomplish this normative analysis Cook develops a number of hypotheticals, thereby avoiding the emotion and prejudice associated with specific incidents and individuals. He then draws on the work of various experts to conclude that in almost every imaginable circumstance the decision to speak out or disobey in contravention of “civilian masters” is never a “black and white” decision, but always some shade of gray. Only in cases where the performance of duty would place the individual in direct conflict with a moral or ethical standard, or in violation of the rule of law, are decisions to disobey expected. Wade Markel’s “The Limits of American Generalship: The JCS’s Strategic Advice in Early Cold War Crises” draws on an article by Lieutenant Colonel Paul Yingling regarding American generalship. The author contrasts Yingling’s standard with the actions of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in three crises: the Korean War, the Cuban Missile Crisis, and the decision to commit US forces in combat in Vietnam to develop his thesis. Markel uses the three cases to demonstrate the limits of American generalship, at least in the arena of national policy. He concludes that it is when senior military leadership attempts to dictate national security strategy or policy that they risk being overcome by political dynamics. The author closes with a stern warning to Americans; temper your expectations. Today’s generals are politically astute and well-educated, with keen strategic judgment, but they are not oracles.

Pat Proctor provides our third article, “The Mythical Shia Crescent.” The author reveals that recently various world leaders have warned of an emerging “Shia Crescent” in the Middle East; an amalgamation led by Iran and encompassing Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq. Proctor’s examination of the prospective membership of this geopolitical alignment raises a number of issues for the reader’s consideration. The author focuses his examination on Syria and its relationship with Iran. He dismisses the argument that shared religious identity is the foundation on which the Shia Crescent will be built. Proctor believes the United States may be misinterpreting the political-calculus in the region and selling the Syrian regime of Bashar al-Assad short. The author closes with a call for the United States to co-opt Assad with security guarantees that will relieve him of his dependence on Iran and destroy any possibility of an emerging Shia Crescent.

Our second thematic feature in this issue is “China’s New Reality.” Felix Chang and Jonathan Goldman have authored a stark and unsettling article, “Meddling in the Markets: Foreign Manipulation.” The article examines the possibility of a foreign government, specifically China, manipulating the world’s financial and commodities markets to create an economic crisis in the United States. The authors suggest a scenario that would inflict as much damage on the American way of life as any conventional military attack. They close with a warning to America’s political and military strategists; the United States has to be prepared with well-coordinated plans capable of countering these gravest of threats if it hopes to maintain its economic and national security. The second article in this feature is Chris Zambelis and Brandon Gentry’s “China through Arab Eyes: American Influence in the Middle East.” The authors examine several recent initiatives that have increased China’s influence in the Middle East. Although there has been minimal publicity associated with individual agreements, Chinese and Arab leaders have used these opportunities to strengthen and expand economic, energy, and cultural ties to unprecedented levels. The authors believe the motivation for this new engagement strategy is obvious, China’s need to secure vital energy resources. They conclude that although China’s strategy in the Middle East does not pose any near-term threat to American interests in the region, Washington cannot afford to ignore the unavoidable fact that the Arab world has an ever-growing interest in China and its economic potential.

Our final article in this issue is “The Strategic Importance of Central Asia: An American View” by Stephen Blank. Blank cautions that US regional policy in Central Asia may be wrong-headed. The author believes that Washington focuses on Central Asia primarily as a theater in which it might directly challenge forces involved in the war on terrorism. Russia and China, on the other hand, view the region as a vital locale for defense of their domestic interest. This asymmetry of interest has led to a direct competition for influence in the region. The author’s analysis reveals that for China and Russia the urgency of countering American interests in Central Asia has actually drawn the two former enemies closer together. — RHT □