

Book Reviews

The War for America's Soul, by Sebastian Gorka, 256 pp, hard cover, \$13.99, ISBN:1621579409, Regnery, 2019.

Why We Fight: Defeating America's Enemies—with No Apologies, by Sebastian Gorka, 256 pp, hard cover, \$12.49, ISBN: 162157640X, Regnery, 2017.

Defeating Jihad: The Winnable War, by Sebastian Gorka, 256 pp, hard cover, \$10.93, ISBN:1621574571, Regnery, 2016.

Sebastian Gorka, a Hungarian immigrant, advised the post-communist government in Hungary, and in the U.S. became a national security adviser to the Trump campaign and administration.

Before that, he lectured and advised U.S. military special operations schools on asymmetric warfare, a particularly modern problem caused by irregular (non-uniform) non-national terrorist, communist, and Islamist threats to America. He was awarded the Joint Civilian Service Commendation by U.S. Special Operations Command for his counterterrorism education and policymaking efforts.

The War for America's Soul (2019) is Gorka's commentary on domestic and foreign communist threats to the American Republic. The book is a follow-up and amplification of arguments he made in two previous books, *Why We Fight: Defeating America's Enemies—with No Apologies* (2018), and his first book that focuses on the Islamist threat, *Defeating Jihad: The Winnable War* (2016).

Gorka has a Ph.D. from Corvinus University, Budapest, and is the son of parents who escaped to London after the 1956 Hungarian uprising, which was crushed by Soviet troops and tanks in 12 days, on Nov 4, 1956. Thousands were killed and wounded, and nearly 250,000 Hungarians fled the country. Gorka's father, Paul, was imprisoned because he was an anti-communist resistance leader who was betrayed by British intelligence during the time of its traitorous group led by Kim Philby. The uprising enabled the family to escape. Sebastian returned to Hungary, pursued an education, and served free Hungary after the fall of the Eastern European communist bloc.

Gorka now appears regularly on Fox News Channel as a host of his own show and as a guest on other shows, and his commentary and arguments are consistently pro-American. Gorka knows the evil of the enemy on the left, and of Islamism.

The ranks of Gorka's enemies provide the best recommendations to read his books and commentaries. They engage in vilification, character assassination, and anti-Americanism against those who propose American and freedom-first answers to political questions.

In his ambitious *The War for America's Soul*, Gorka focuses on American security policy; the importance of recognizing propaganda and espionage in the strategy of the communists; and the effectiveness of the Reagan "we win, they lose" approach. He tells the story of Marine officer Chesty Puller, a hero who asks the Sun Tzu question: Do we know ourselves, and do we know the enemy? Then Gorka makes his recommendations: research, preparation, and resolve. He tells the long version of jihadi efforts to destroy Western civilization, and shows changes in Islamist strategies, new developments of multinational and internet-savvy efforts of the Islamists, and their reliance on disruptive terrorist attacks on Western nations.

Gorka conducts extensive interviews of Victor Davis Hanson and Conrad Black, two political historians of import, and finishes with a thorough interview of President Trump.

Why We Fight (2017) starts with a discussion of the importance of fighting, then addresses the worldwide problem of jihadism, unconventional asymmetric conflict, and the relentless nature of the jihadis, interrupted by a review of the Whittaker Chambers-Alger Hiss matter and the revelations of communist sabotage and espionage. Then he provides an enlightening discussion of the Trump effect of exposing the "deep state," and an excellent interview of Dave Rubin. Concluding the book are discussions of Gorka's work with special ops; good resources for research of political issues; the importance of the Trump

Administration's commitment to Israel; a description of the jihadis; and finally, a rational argument for why we need to understand jihadi militancy and its history reaching back to our nation's founding. He includes the jihadi depredations of Western civilization and Christians dating back to the 7th century.

Defeating Jihad provides Gorka's best historical analysis of aggressive Islamist movements through history, beginning with the warlord Mohammed.

To start with any of the three Gorka books is to become better informed on the threats to our beloved country. Gorka is a patriot and a man of boisterous fortitude and good humor. He provides a unique point of view as a Hungarian who loves America.

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A Crack in Creation: Gene Editing and the Unthinkable Power to Control Evolution, by Jennifer A. Doudna and Samuel H. Sternberg, 304 pages, soft cover, \$12.69, ISBN-13: 978-1328915368, Boston, Mass., Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017.

Jennifer Doudna, together with Emmanuelle Charpentiere, received the 2020 Nobel Prize in chemistry "for the development of a method for genome editing."

This book is a first-person account of Doudna's personal journey into CRISPR technology, with its potential so enormous that it sounds like science fiction. Therefore, it is not surprising that the first blurb on the book's cover was authored by *Star Wars* writer-director-producer George Lucas.

CRISPR is an acronym that stands for Clustered Regularly Interspersed Short Palindromic Repeats. Found in one region of the bacterial chromosome, CRISPR consists of repeated identical sequences of some 30 base pairs of DNA, which read the same forward and backwards (hence palindromic). These are separated by unique spacer sequences, which match a DNA sequence of a bacteriophage to

which the strain of bacteria has been exposed. They're almost always flanked by CRISPR-associated genes (*cas* genes). These code for specialized enzymes that include those that unzip the two strands of the DNA double helix or slice up RNA or DNA molecules.

The authors explain that CRISPR is one of the bacterial defenses against bacteriophages (bacterial viruses). It is the bacterial equivalent of the human immune system. It protects bacteria by remembering the "foreign attack" and having ready countermeasures for it.

Bacteriophages are the enemy of all bacteria and can present a big problem for humans. For instance, they can destroy yogurt-producing bacteria and therefore have a negative impact on the food industry. On the other hand, these viruses have a potential for treating bacterial infections in humans. Discovered in 1923, "phage therapy" lost momentum, especially in the West, with the development of antibiotics. But it is occasionally used even today. According to Doudna, about 20 percent of bacterial infections in Georgia (the former Soviet republic) are treated with phage therapy.

Because CRISPR is embedded in the DNA, the immunity is heritable. The mechanism is as follows: When attacked by the virus for the first time, the bacterium stores a segment of the attacker's DNA, the "spacer" sequence in CRISPR. During the second attack by the same virus, the bacterium can match the stored information with the RNA or DNA of the intruder. Then it can destroy the pathogen by snipping off part of its genome using CRISPR as "scissors," with the aid of enzymes coded for by the *cas* genes.

Scientists were intrigued by the possibilities beyond chopping up bacteriophage DNA. Normally, DNA is constantly damaged and must be repaired. Why not use CRISPR to cut out a segment deliberately and then supply a replacement segment? What if we could cut out a defective gene, or small portion of it, that codes for a dreaded disease, such as sickle cell anemia, cystic fibrosis, or Duchenne muscular dystrophy? These days it is easy to synthesize a DNA segment with a desired sequence.

Gene editing developed very quickly after the initial successes of using CRISPR to slice up DNA in a test tube, Doudna explains. (Though Sternberg is coauthor, the book is in Doudna's voice—the frequently recurring "I" refers to her.) In a

groundbreaking experiment reported in 2012, a CRISPR-associated protein called Cas-9, isolated from flesh-eating bacteria, worked with two molecules of RNA to target matching 20-letter DNA sequences, and cut them apart. "The RNA acted like a guide, dictating the GPS coordinates of the attack, and Cas-9 acted like the weapon to eliminate the target."

Doudna writes that scientists now have "the remarkable ability to rewrite the code of life with surgical precision and astonishing simplicity." She states: "Witnessing the protein and RNA molecules naturally deployed as antiviral defenses and bacteria being used to snip apart and precisely edit DNA sequences across the animal kingdom was breathtaking."

The first organisms included yeast, mice, fruit flies, microscopic worms, rats, frogs, silkworms, rabbits, pigs, goats, sea squirts, and monkeys. By now, human cells have been subjected to more CRISPR gene editing than those of any other organism. There are now tactics that include, besides simply slicing apart DNA and inserting new sequences, deactivating genes, rearranging sequences of genetic code, and even correcting single-letter mistakes. CRISPR can also be used as a gene-expression controller that can turn genes on or off or dial them up or down, "much like a dimmer adjusts lighting."

Astonishing applications that now exist, she states, include mosquitoes that are unable to transmit malaria, ultra-muscular dogs that make fearsome partners for police and soldiers, and cows that no longer grow horns. Doudna believes that we could ultimately have woolly mammoths, winged lizards, and unicorns. "No, I am not kidding." We might have genetically engineered pigs that can serve as human organ donors, she suggests. But while these applications were much talked about in 2015-2016, there is less discussion now.

Doudna recognizes that this tremendously powerful tool could have catastrophic consequences. "CRISPR gives us the power to radically and irreversibly alter the biosphere that we inhabit by providing a way to rewrite the very molecules of life any way we wish." A whole species could be driven to extinction, with incalculable consequences to the ecosystem.

In humans, the next step beyond curing diseases in persons already born is the attempt to alter DNA in human germ cells. Already, scientists are contemplating

using these powerful tools to create presumably better human beings—more disease-resistant, stronger, more intelligent, or perhaps smaller to reduce their carbon footprint, she writes. But in 2021, the difficulties she alludes to are becoming more apparent. The snipping part is much easier than inserting the desired replacement. There are newer, more precise methods.¹

Doudna writes that she is now involved in political activism, especially international meetings, in an attempt to prevent scientists from making heritable changes to the human genome. In 2015, just one month after she and colleagues published a call asking scientists to refrain, a Chinese scientist published an experiment in which he had injected CRISPR into 86 human embryos in an effort to precisely edit the betaglobulin gene that causes development of beta thalassemia. Along with a piece of synthetic DNA for repairing the broken gene, the scientist inserted a jellyfish gene coding for a green fluorescent protein, to find the embryos that continued to grow and divide by looking for glow-in-the-dark cells. It did not work very well. Although triploid embryos were used that could not develop very far, it appears to me that the Rubicon has been crossed.

Doudna notes that American spy agencies seem to be very concerned about this technology. A worldwide threat assessment described genome editing as a weapon of mass destruction. Others were Russian cruise missiles, chemical weapons, and nuclear programs.

Doudna's viewpoint is clearly that of a progressive. She is very careful with her use of feminine and masculine pronouns. She worries about whether we could edit embryos "equitably." Would wealthy people benefit more? Would germ-line editing inadvertently transcribe our society's financial inequality into our genetic code? Would it create a different kind of injustice? "As disability-rights advocates have pointed out, using gene editing to 'fix' things like deafness or obesity could create a less inclusive society." One glaring omission in all this equitability discussion is the enormous profits to academic patent holders.

Doudna recognizes that gene editing has been called the new eugenics, citing dark precedents. (She dreamed of meeting Adolf Hitler face to face.) She states, however, that the odds are minuscule that we would see anything similar happening with gene editing today. Her ethical

principle is choice. "Above all else, we must respect people's freedom to choose their own genetic destiny." She thinks that "if people are given this freedom of choice, they will do with it what they personally think is right—whatever that may be."

Her title expresses philosophical confusion: Was the world created? Is it possible to control evolution, a supposedly undirected process? She speaks of humanity as "our species"—just one of untold billions? Now that we have arrived through random changes over eons of evolution and have learned the alphabet (the genetic code), shall we become the intelligent designers or creators of a brave new world? Will there be a genetic caste system as in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*? Will there be dreary uniformity, or a diversity of creatures like in the barroom scene in *Star Wars*? Will we achieve transhumanism? Have we entered Jurassic Park?

I suspect that most physicians may have heard the term CRISPR but are unaware of the huge progress that has been made in genetic engineering over the past 20 years.² This book is a good primer, nicely illustrated with line drawings, on molecular biology and the sequence of early discoveries. It raises critical issues that may drastically alter our way of life, in ways Doudna, in my opinion, is far too quick to deny.

Physicians should note that this is only an elementary discussion, which is already outdated, written for the layman and the nonspecialist. Despite its promises, we are not curing even sickle-cell anemia, caused by one incorrect amino-acid residue. But we could be introducing as-yet-inapparent genome alterations in most of the world's population in mass injection ("vaccination") campaigns—an issue that apparently did not occur to these authors. Those who start with this book should not stop there.

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***Seductions of Appeasement* (Victor Davis Hanson Collection Book 1)**, by Victor Davis Hanson, 135 pp, Kindle, \$6.99, ISBN-10: 0817917152, Victor Davis Hanson Collection, PJ Media, 2016.

In this collection of his best columns from the Obama Administration's time, Victor Davis Hanson discusses appeasement's past failures and how apparent lack of resolve invited evil men to continue their behavior.

Appeasement defined the global conflicts of the 20th century, Hanson asserts. Time after time, America and other forces for freedom withheld their power in efforts to appease the most evil regimes in recent history. The efforts ended with World War II. Hanson asks why appeasement is so seductive, and what its place is in the 21st century.

He argues that if America continues appeasing Islamists and the aggressive totalitarian regimes in China, Russia, and North Korea, those forces of evil will ignite events that would rival those of World War II. Hanson uses the past to inform the present.

America must also put its financial house in order, Hanson says, and restore defense spending to reasonable levels. Otherwise, our path is open to the "postwar trajectory of broke, tired, and socializing Britain, conceding to more aggressive and robust nations."

Hanson is now a Fellow of the Hoover Institution of Stanford, and previously Professor of Classics at University of California, Fresno. He is a prolific author of military and classical history, and his essays appear regularly in many internet commentary outlets.

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To Make and Keep Peace Among Ourselves and with All Nations, by Angelo M. Codevilla, 248 pp, hard cover, \$22.55, ISBN-10: 0817917152, Hoover Institution Press, 2014.

Angelo Codevilla has a history of service in naval intelligence, was on the staff of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, and held academic appointments at Georgetown University and the Hoover Institution. He retired from his position as professor of international relations at Boston University in 2008 but continues to write

prolifically and lecture widely.

In this book, he parses the choice between war and peace through American history with a subtlety one would expect from a distinguished translator of Machiavelli. John Quincy Adams, for example, "wished aloud for a navy big enough to exterminate the... Barbary pirates," but "he did not propose trying to do this, because that navy was lacking." Adams maintained cordial trade relations with the Russian Empire while opposing its efforts to support monarchy in the Western Hemisphere, a stance in which Codevilla finds a precedent for our present relations with China.

Codevilla is positive about Teddy Roosevelt's approach but considers John Quincy Adams and Abraham Lincoln to be best at obtaining lasting peace.

President Woodrow Wilson set the stage for World War II when negotiating the resolution of World War I. President Franklin Roosevelt's naïveté about the Soviet Union set the world adrift into the Cold War.

Codevilla has some praise for Dwight Eisenhower and was disappointed with the Reagan Administration's lack of resolve and follow-through to achieve lasting peace. Now a succession of mistakes following the fall of communism have left America flailing and constantly acting in self-destructive ways, particularly about armed conflict.

President Barack Obama was in power when this book was written, and America's international credibility was weaker than at any time since the Carter Administration. American policy evoked contempt overseas, and even more at home because of its poor record. Bad results, unfinished business, and nagging resurrections of bad actors become the rule, not the exception.

What is the source of the problems, and how might they be remedied?

Codevilla contends that self-designated foreign policy elitists regularly steer our foreign policy into the ditch, and that these repeated errors are born of leftist/socialist/post-modernist concepts. These schools of thinking derive from "turn-of-the-20th-century progressivism" that results in belief that since America is powerful, it should lead, police, stabilize, impose standards of civil behavior, and generally reach farther than it can grasp. This results in repeated foreign policy errors despite American military superiority, he writes.

Codevilla lists many current

problems. Europe's security is tenuous, and frontiers are in play for the first time since the fall of communism. Muslim invasions will be the ruin of Europe. Russia and China have a new rapprochement, and both countries continue to pursue aggressive policies. Iran and the radical, terrorist Islamists are running free and causing anxiety in less radical Islamic regions and nations, so traditional American allies in the Sunni world feel betrayed. China has pursued expansion of its influence and power in the Pacific Rim, but even farther into the Middle East, South America, and Africa.

Foreign adventurism has always been problematic, Codevilla writes. Our national interests should always have priority in bringing peace. Americans have shed enough blood and squandered enough treasure in extended interventions with their "rules of engagement" and ill-defined goals. Only a very few benefit from interminable wars.

Peace and war are more art than science, and Codevilla warns of excess confidence: "Awareness of the stakes, laser-like focus on a vision of the peace that is to follow, green-eye-shade comparison of costs and benefits, are the albeit-imperfect guides for planning the transition from peace to peace."

Codevilla warns that elites repeatedly exaggerate their ability to control events because, after all, they consider that they are exceptionally smart, got good grades at the most prestigious universities, and deservedly got access to the political power structure and its influence.

Codevilla offers simple, workable, sensible suggestions. He writes: "Discernment of what does and does not impinge on our peace is essential because there is no such thing as a small war any more than a small pregnancy." He states that you must know your goal in order to manage foreign conflicts, and that nothing is more important to success than continuing to advance strategies toward it. Cease-fires and "peace plans" will only leave an enemy to recruit, re-arm, and re-energize so that it can all be repeated *ad infinitum*.

Codevilla condemns the repeated diplomatic and lawyerly acceptance of half-solutions and substituting useless paper waved in the air as a proper resolution. His deepest disdain is for the now-common postwar twilight of "no-win war, no peace." I would say he has had enough of long-war nonsense: wars

waged by lawyers and apparatchiks, talkers and writers rather than warriors; incrementalism; and lack of resolve, prudence, and fortitude.

Codevilla favorably references Adams's assertion that "the first and paramount duty of the government is to maintain peace amidst all the convulsions of foreign wars, and to enter the lists as parties to no cause, other than our own." The Progressives of the next century, however, sought salvation through social engineering at home and abroad.

Codevilla has no patience for "rational actor" theories: "Human beings routinely sweep aside reason about interest. In this regard, today's Middle East is no different from Europe, 1914.... Our civilization abounds with accounts of ideas and mentalities that utterly exclude peace." Codevilla calls for a house cleaning that results in a different attitude, one that puts America first and deplores imprudent adventurism, and instead puts in place a different, genuine elite with the outlook of America's founders.

"America needs a new generation of statesmen," he contends, who "would have to affirm their craft's forgotten fundamental: that the search for peace begins with neutrality in others' affairs and that when others trouble our peace we impose it upon them by war—war as terribly decisive as we can make it."

Codevilla recommends an Augustinian approach based on the idea of a "just war," but he reports in passing: "The U.S. government banned the teaching of [Augustine's] 'just war' theory in its academic venues because of its Christian origin."

It is hard to find an academic venue still interested in teaching the fundamentals of Western Civilization, so it is no surprise to see that progressivism dominates in academia despite its proven failures, and that it results in a foreign policy mindset that creates ineffective "solutions" and unending wars.

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The Price of Panic: How the Tyranny of Experts Turned a Pandemic into a Catastrophe, by Douglas Axe, William M. Briggs, and Jay W. Richards, 266 pp, hardcover, \$28.99, ISBN: 978-1-68451-141-9, Washington, D.C., Regnery, 2020.

This book concerns the virus and the computer model that destroyed the world economy.

George Gilder calls it "the definitive account of the most egregious policy blunder in the history of American government." Authors are professor of molecular biology Douglas Axe; statistician William Briggs, author of *Uncertainty: The Soul of Modeling, Probability, and Statistics*; and philosopher Jay W. Richards.

While there is no denying the seriousness of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has caused more than 600,000 deaths in the U.S. alone, it is not the Black Plague. Instead of bodies piling up in the streets, we have had coalescing red dots on a world map published by Johns Hopkins University, with daily body counts in the news media. The counts are not just of dead bodies, but of cases that are defined by a highly unreliable test that can produce more false than true positives. Of course, the totals keep mounting higher, even though the vast majority of the cases recover fully.

The Imperial College of London mathematical model, deeply flawed and greatly exaggerating the potential number of deaths, was taken up by powerful government experts around the world.

The science called decision theory, the authors point out, is devoted to the problem of what to do when you don't know the risk. It offers three tactics for dealing with a problem. The first is to *Leave It Alone*. Authors call this the Charlie Brown solution. In a *Peanuts* cartoon, Linus asks Charlie, "if you have some problem in your life, do you believe you should try to solve it right away or think about it for a while?"

"Oh, think about, by all means! I believe you should think about it for a while," Charlie answered.

"To give yourself time to do the right thing about the problem?"

"No," Charlie explained, "to give it time to go away!"

Sometimes that is the right answer, and most seasonal disease outbreaks are basically dealt with in this way. Take sensible precautions, and eventually enough of the population becomes immune, so that the outbreak fades away.

The second tactic is *One Step at a Time*. You gather relevant information, figure out the likelihood of various outcomes and what actions are within your power,

weigh the costs and benefits, and choose. As more data comes in, you can contemplate a change in course. Taiwan and Singapore took this approach with the coronavirus.

The last approach, which was taken by American leaders is called *PANIC*. "In politics, this tactic results in a look-at-me virtue-signaling arms race, with leaders trying to best each other in showing their commitment to the problem. In real life emergencies, *Leave It Alone* is almost always followed by *PANIC*." Some politicians use panic as a way to increase their power. More commonly, the approach results from worst-case-scenario thinking with use of the Precautionary Principle. The problem is, as the coronavirus pandemic shows, is that the cure can be far worse than the disease.

Social media played a huge role in spreading the fear, through the very powerful network effect. In what he calls Metcalfe's Law, George Gilder has argued that the power of a network goes up as the proportion of the square of the number of users. On top of that, social

media platforms "worked overtime to boost the signals of official experts who preached panic, while at the same time purging dissenters who urged caution and calm."

The human cost of the panic has been tremendous. As Henry David Thoreau said, "the cost of the thing is the amount of what I will call life, which is required to be exchanged for it, immediately or in the long run." The cost in dollars involves life also.

The authors estimate that the minimum financial cost for a lockdown that lasts a couple of months is \$2 trillion. If limited to six months, the response to the coronavirus may be the steepest bill the U.S. will ever pay. Then there's the deaths from despair, deaths from extreme poverty, deaths from delays in medical care, wasted goods, crime, loss of trust, and government expansion and tyranny.

The book outlines many lessons to be learned. These include: Balance expert advice with common sense, take models on predictions with a pinch of salt, beware the overconfidence of experts, choose freedom over central planning,

take traditional media cautiously, and make social media accountable. The authors warn that we must fight against the "brave new normal."

The authors also analyze the costs and benefits of various measures such as masks, social distancing, and lockdowns, with international comparisons. Life may not seem worth living as a misanthropic hermit in a hazmat suit. Moreover, it turns out that there are rapidly escalating costs for rapidly diminishing returns.

Thomas Sowell has a good summary of the book in the opening quotation, "What can we be certain of from history? That human beings have been wrong innumerable times, by vast amounts, and with catastrophic results. Yet today, there are still people who think that anyone who disagrees with them must either be bad or not know what he is talking about."

The book is a valuable resource, both for the big picture and for the detailed analysis of various policies.

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