

## Disarming Iraq

HANS BLIX

*Pantheon, \$24.00 cloth, ISBN 0-375-42302-8*

Pity the dilemma of Hans Blix. The author and former Swedish diplomat spent a long career as director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency where he directed efforts to control, contain, and eliminate the proliferation of nuclear arms production for 16 years. Previously, he served in Sweden's UN delegation for 20 years. In 2000, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan asked him to leave retirement and head up the new inspection program to ensure Iraq was disarmed and free of weapons of mass destruction.

In recounting the events that unfolded thereafter, Blix tells of his reluctant return from retirement, then his growing determination to pressure the Iraqi government and military to cooperate. This was followed in short order by a barrage of criticism from a Bush administration that would accept only one outcome from the UN efforts even as it questioned the competence and courage of Blix' team.

Blix' book is biographical, but it is also a defense of his leadership and his team's performance leading up to America's unilateral decision to reject the evidence of Iraq's weapons disposal. Of note is that Blix says he was never convinced Iraq had completely eliminated weapons of mass destruction, but the Bush administration co-opted his inspection group's very realistic opportunity to find out without going to war.

In the cool, even prose one would expect from a career Scandinavian diplomat, he sets up his case by posing a simple question:

*Now, many months after the armed action by the U.S. and its allies, I cannot but wonder how the world would have reacted if the inspectors had simply declared that they agreed with the U.S./UK assessments—which were later shown to be wrong or highly dubious. ... What if the Security Council had then authorized the armed action and occupation only to find Iraq devoid of prohibited items?* ■

## Ghost Wars

*The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and bin Laden, From the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001*

STEVE COLL

*Penguin, \$29.95 cloth, ISBN 1-59420-007-6*

Afghanistan, depending on whom you ask in Washington politics, is either past history and no longer of major significance or is very much contemporary history and the key to the future of Central Asia. Between the two views lies a depth of cultures, tribal loyalties, assassinations, global political gamesmanship, massacres and maiming of innocents, Islamic determination, and sheer warrior-class courage buttressed by hate that Westerners find difficult to fathom.

The writer, a Pulitzer Prize winner and managing editor of *The Washington Post*, was the *Post's* South Asia bureau chief from 1989 to 1992, when he covered Afghanistan. His presence there, as the Soviets completed their withdrawal and the country descended into civil war, gave him an inside window on the

carnage Afghanistan's tribes and factions waged on one another, as well as on America's early abandonment of the people it had supported during their war to expel the Russians. Coll was also witness to the early days of the Taliban movement, and established invaluable sources leading from Kabul to Islamabad to Moscow and then to the U.S. State Department and CIA. Those sources would eventually provide the grist for this story.

With the intensity of a journalist determined to verify every fact and with the ease of a great storyteller, Coll explains the CIA's secret war against the Soviets in Afghanistan that eventually provided Osama bin Laden with both the blueprint and the recruiting ground for his war against the West. It is also the inside story of CIA officers and operatives, how they remain caught in a compromised relationship with their supposed ally, Pakistan's own super-spy agency—the ISI—and a full account of plans and frustrated efforts to kill bin Laden before 9/11. ■

## American Dynasty

*Aristocracy, Fortune, and the Politics of Deceit in the House of Bush*

KEVIN PHILLIPS

*Viking, \$25.95 cloth, ISBN 0-670-03264-6*

## House of Bush, House of Saud

*The Secret Relationship Between the World's Two*

*Most Powerful Dynasties*

CRAIG UNGER

*Scribner, \$26.00 cloth, ISBN 0-7432-5337-X*

I recall attending a large gathering of journalists in Washington, D.C. in 1972, in the midst of the Watergate revelations, when Kevin Phillips, a young, little-known White House staffer, appeared on the speaker's podium as a participant in a debate on government efforts to muzzle the media. A friend sitting next to me turned and whispered, "that's Kevin Phillips. He's one of the young Republican Nixon apologists." Phillips' comments, as I recall, were sincere, strident, and very much in keeping with the Nixon view—quite accurate, it turned out—of the media as his sworn enemy.

In his latest book, Kevin Phillips describes himself as a "former longtime Republican" who "must acknowledge that the party of my youth and middle age has changed enormously." Phillips split with Republican Party loyalists when he published such titles as *The Politics of Rich and Poor*, *Arrogant Capital*, and *Wealth and Democracy*. He is even less forgiving of the Bush family. Though at times overexplanatory and verbose, his book is a worthy study of both the historical and contemporary manipulations by the Bush family. He describes a four-generation dynasty that he says has pulled the levers of American and global business and political cronyism from behind the scenes to the family's considerable financial aggrandizement and that in the 21st century engages in the same practices openly and with flagrant disregard for the effects on both domestic and global societies and governments.

As Phillips explains, it is a family trend that did not begin with the current resident of the White House, or even his father, but now

*is writing a new definition of the presidency. They are bending public policy toward family grudges and interests.*

It may not be fair to compare Craig Unger's book on Bush family relationships to the extended Saudi family with the deeper historical study in Kevin Phillips' book. Unger is a journalist; Phillips is an astute political historian.

Unger focuses on the Middle Eastern ties and complex financial dealings of today's Bushes, while Phillips lays out the history and behavior patterns of more than 100 years of Bushes and Walkers. There is overlap, but each book supports the other. Unger, for better or worse, will probably become better known as the writer appearing in Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11* film, but his book deserves its own notoriety as persuasive and well-documented investigative journalism.

As Unger tells it, when the Saudis came looking for American political friends in the wake of the 1973 OPEC oil embargo, they hit a gusher with the Bush family. Steeped in the oil business as a family tradition, George H.W. Bush not only understood per-barrel oil price hedges, but he knew the Saudis expected access to Ronald Reagan. What followed was 30 years of mutually beneficial family and financial dealings and socializing, including arms deals, and then collaboration with the extended family of Osama bin Laden. It came into the public's eye when Unger and other journalists began to report that the Bush White House made special arrangements to fly bin Laden family members, along with other Saudis, out of the U.S. in the days following 9/11 when air travel was closely restricted.

His discussion of how the Bushes' relationships with the Saudis and other wealthy Arabs are continuing, however, is troubling. Unger makes it clear that the spirit as well as the letter of Bush business relationships will pose controversy for a long time to come. ■

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REVIEWER: **James O. Sample** is a Denver-based writer who worked as a newspaper and magazine journalist in Washington in the 1970s and mid-1980s covering the Pentagon and Congress. He is presently editor of a Web-based education service that covers media and technology and a related Blog site, Insight Media. He is also writing a book examining the impact of the Internet and other electronic media on Middle Eastern and Central Asian cultures and is coauthoring another about the late Abdul Haq, one of the prominent leaders of Afghanistan's war against the Soviets who was executed by the Taliban in 2001. Sample served as a U.S. Army officer in Vietnam in 1968-1969 where he was a platoon leader and company commander.