

Book Reviews

EBERHARD SANDSCHNEIDER, *Der erfolgreiche Abstieg Europas. Heute Macht abgeben, um morgen zu gewinnen*. München: Hanser Verlag, 2011. 208 pages, €19.90. ISBN 978-3-446-42352-7

“The alleged victory of the West in 1989 was also the onset of its decline”, writes Eberhard Sandschneider (p. 10). This is a normal historical process, and the main task of today’s politics is to manage it responsibly. Dangers lurk in miscalculations and in smug, self-righteous attitudes. From 1989/91 onwards, the West as a strategic entity has ceased to exist, perspectives are diverging across the Atlantic, and national interest has returned with a vengeance. Unexpected shocks and creeping trends (i.e. demography, IT development, resource scarcity) have led to international shifts in power. One example is the financial crisis of 2008, which, with its continuing repercussions, has caused a dramatic decline in the reputation of the West. When the pursuit of growth becomes greed and achievement is revealed to be simply fraud, the attractiveness of Western values, which Western politicians and journalists like to brag about, inevitably crumbles (p. 32). Values should not be held up to others but should determine one’s own moral standards. What if the rest of the world were to treat us now as we have treated them for the past 200 years? And Sandschneider points to another problem with value-based politics: values are not negotiable. There are only winners and losers – or double standards, which are so evident in Western politics (pp. 32–33, 81).

Sandschneider reminds readers of Barbara Tuchman’s 1984 book *The March of Folly. From Troy to Vietnam*, where she emphasised the consequences of insisting on false choices, and of rigid mindsets. The absence of critical questioning of established political behaviour patterns, and the misguided use of information, remain two major sources of error. Modern means of communication place decision-making under huge time pressure, and few people have the courage to deliberately slow down that vicious cycle. Instead, many people rely on previous decisions, on master plans, and on ideas from the past. Thinking in black-and-white binary opposites is part of the folly, as is the search for enemies, in academic discussions as well as in practical politics. We should instead come to recognise and end our self-deceptions; we should reform our thinking and refrain from zero-sum games, dichotomies, bogeymen and double standards.

It appears questionable to both the United States and China, how much political weight Europe will retain in the future. One chapter of the book ad-

dresses “transatlantic self-deception”, leading to a call for more European realism. We in Europe are living with the negative consequences of the overambitious extension of the EU. In the EU as a construct *sui generis*, national interests will remain dominant. The EU does not need a constitution but rather a stronger effort towards consolidation as well as a readiness to solve problems pragmatically wherever they may emerge. Sandschneider cautions against debates about identity which are exclusive; the strength of the EU is in its diversity, not in enforced homogeneity. Europe has always been an elite project, whose complexity can hardly be explained to voters. Consequently, the main issue is not more participation but rather enhanced transparency of interests and decisions. Europe needs to increase its problem-solving capacity or it might sink into obscurity.

Aggravating the decline of Europe are think tanks that mostly benefit from crises: “Europe’s continuing crisis is mostly feeding those who constantly revive it in debates” (p. 154). Another problem is the media, in which disinformation now supersedes information. Pictures can be manipulated and used in global disinformation campaigns. The internet offers similar problems, and many people nowadays feel overwhelmed by a flood of information and withdraw into private life altogether; yet democracy needs critical public debate. And that presumes an educated public that is aware of hidden dangers, as well as of the disinformation campaigns (p. 65) that are being discussed in some social media and online debates – and are very slowly becoming a topic in some official media circles that recognise the need for self-criticism. The nuclear disaster at Fukushima vanished from the media within just one month. Sandschneider criticises the fact that politics is not in the habit of evaluating such events, in contrast to private industry, where this is common practice (the book appears to have been finished before the German government’s adoption of the *Energiewende*, a transition to low-carbon, environmentally-friendly energy). Sandschneider touches upon far-reaching questions, about energy policy and the ongoing financial crisis, that continue to confront us; he only briefly mentions the German sociologist Ulrich Beck, who has described the political process by which industrial (and other systemic) dangers are produced: they are economically externalised, legally attributed to individuals, legitimised by a subservient science and finally politically belittled (p. 123). The motto of Sandschneider’s book reads: “Questions not asked can be more dangerous than misguided answers.”

The world is changing rapidly, and visibly: economic growth, export developments, resource needs, demography and educational standards are changing our international environment, and many in Germany do not even perceive these international trends. Sandschneider stresses that politics needs to talk about uncomfortable truths, like the declining influence of Germany and Europe. Whether we recognise these major challenges, and whether we find peaceful

responses, depends on our ability to correct old patterns of thinking. A growing self-assurance among the emerging countries is evident. China criticises Western weaknesses, such as our failure in development policy towards Africa, and the problems in our political systems, which have come to the surface during the financial crisis. The bipolar world is gone, and the idea of a multilateralism of cooperation among equal partners is unrealistic, according to Sandschneider. Non-polarity is his term for the present. To deal with this situation peacefully presupposes new forms of long-term cooperation. This period of major international changes requires historical consciousness among the main actors; accordingly, it is not helpful that German parties tend to have ever younger people in leadership positions.

In its negative experiences with colonial powers, China realised that there was nobody to rely on. The “Western community of values” must sound rather hollow to many countries with similarly negative experiences as well. And this self-declared community of values has not integrated any new members as equal partners. Therefore it is all the more important to recognise the significance of the new G-20 state grouping. This is a more promising step towards international partnership than if emerging political powers have to fight for their rights at every step of the way (p. 108). As models for the future role of Europe, Sandschneider contrasts Great Britain, which has been struggling for about 100 years now to accept its declining international standing, with Switzerland, which has achieved an international political role without ever having been a major political power.

In times of widespread self-deception in Western political debates, and after years of political instrumentalisation of the “human rights debate”, Sandschneider’s appeal for realistic appraisal may well be called courageous. The book addresses important questions to broaden the thinking of those dealing closely with politics in process. The first advice can only be: more humility.

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T. A. HEATHCOTE, *Balochistan, the British and the Great Game. The Struggle for the Bolan Pass, Gateway to India*. London: Hurst, 2016. 288 pages, £30.00. ISBN 978-18490-4479-0

Ever since Rudyard Kipling popularised the term the “Great Game” in his novel *Kim* (1901), the history of the British political, military and colonial engagement and competition with Russia in the borderlands to India and later the Raj has been of particular interest to historians and to a predominantly British audience. The fateful military campaigns in Afghanistan from 1839–42 and 1878–1880 still influence the perception of Afghanistan and the Afghan