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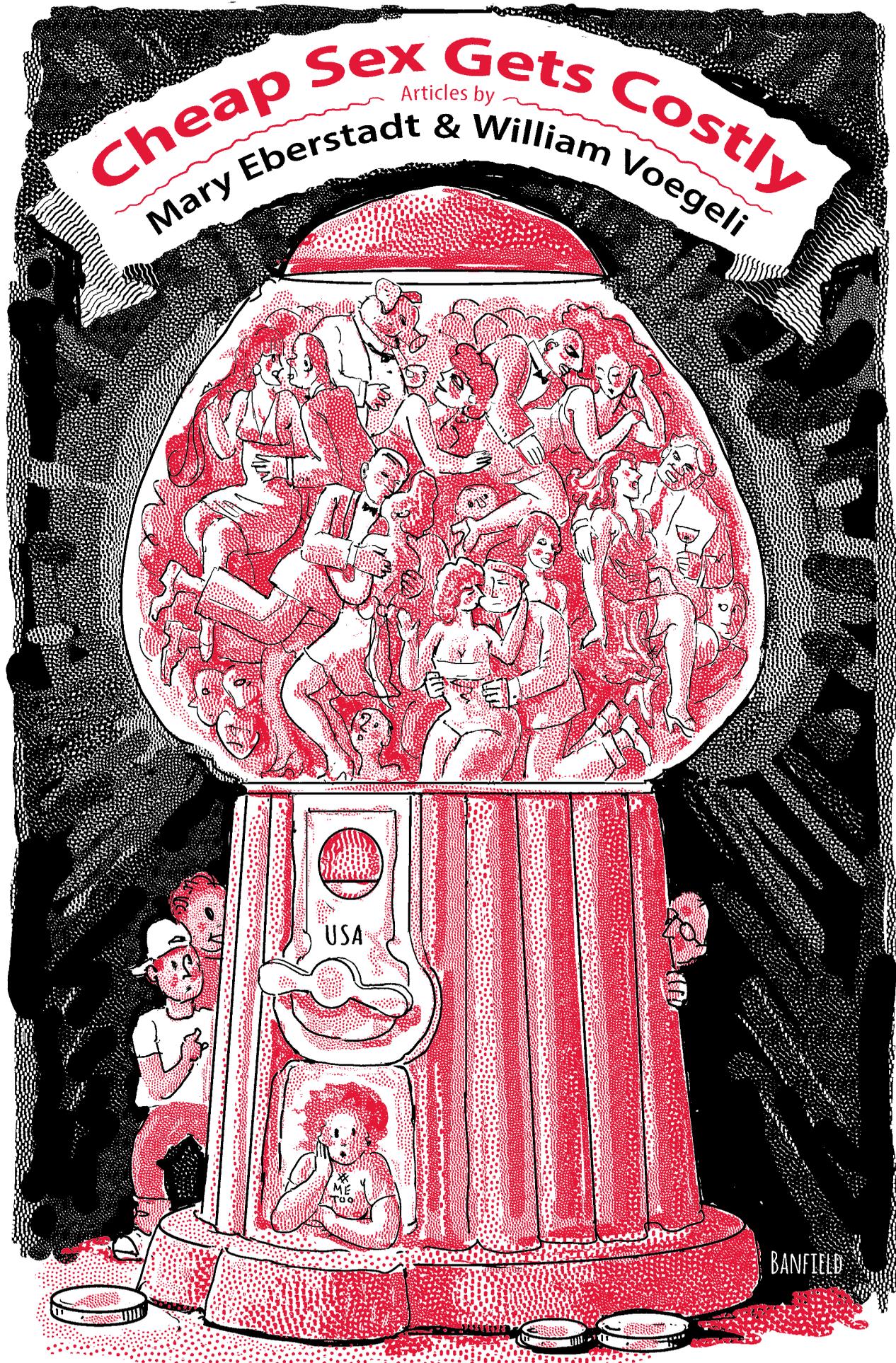
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Book Review by David P. Goldman

CONDOLEEZZA RICE GOES TO THE SEASHORE

Democracy: Stories from the Long Road to Freedom, by Condoleezza Rice.
Twelve, 496 pages, \$35



IN JULES DASSIN'S 1960 COMEDY *NEVER ON Sunday* Melina Mercouri's Piraeus demimondaine weeps at the awful denouement of "Medea," but cheers up when the actors take their curtain call. They didn't die after all, Mercouri exclaims, adding, "And they all went to the seashore." Former Secretary of State and National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice has written a report, *Democracy: Stories from the Long Road to Freedom*, on the tragic failure of democratic movements in the Middle East, Russia, and elsewhere, but with the sad bits left out. So convinced is she of democracy's inevitable triumph that every story has a happy ending.

Iran's regime "may for a time prevent the Iranian people from rising against their government, but it almost ensures that when they do, the landing will not be a soft one for the regime or the country." Rice reports her "shock" when Hamas terrorists won the 2006 Palestinian elections urged by the State Department (so shocked, she says, that she called the State Department watch officer

from her elliptical workout to confirm the news). She learned, she tells us, that "armed groups should not participate in the electoral process." The remedy lies in "nurturing a diverse set of institutions...empowering entrepreneurs and businessmen, educating and empowering women, and encouraging social entrepreneurs and local civic organizations." She praises former Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Salam Fayyad, who told her that the P.A.'s security services were "a bunch of gangsters," but does not bother to mention that Fayyad was fired in 2013 after he failed to make a dent in the P.A.'s kleptocracy.

OF HOSNI MUBARAK'S FALL AND THE Egyptian military's return to power she declares that "the Egyptian people were calling for [Mubarak's] immediate ouster" in February 2011. By the people, she means the fraction of Egypt's population that fit into Cairo's Tahrir Square. Then the Muslim Brotherhood "won an impressive victory in peaceful elections." Unfortunately, the

Brotherhood's president, Mohamed Morsi, had an "Islamic and autocratic tilt" and "was blamed, whether fairly or not, for attacks on religious minorities." In July 2013 the military overthrew him, after "violent protests swept the country, with millions of Morsi supporters and millions of his critics facing off."

This involves an improper use of the plural. The Cairo-based International Development Center's report on the demonstrations counted fewer than one million pro-Morsi and 30 million anti-Morsi demonstrators in July 2013—a majority of Egypt's total adult population. Never before or after did the "Egyptian people" proclaim their views with such unanimity. To Rice, the "Egyptian people" were present to topple Mubarak but not to expel Morsi. It happens that Egypt had less than a month's supply of wheat on hand when General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi took the country back from the Muslim Brotherhood with the manifest support of a supermajority of Egyptians. Mass popular support for a return to military rule does not fit Rice's narra-



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tive, so she simply leaves out the unpleasant facts.

Still, Rice concludes her account of Egypt's "Arab Spring," in effect, they all went to the seashore: "despite these dark prospects and the repression unleashed by the Sisi regime, the dream of a freer and more democratic Egypt lives on. It can be seen in the stories of activists who, at great personal risk to themselves, continue to advocate for [sic] reforms." It is of no consequence to her that half of Egyptians are functionally illiterate, that nine tenths of adult women (according to the World Health Organization) have undergone genital mutilation, and that Egypt imports half its total caloric consumption, feeding about half its people on subsidized bread. The country lives on loans from the Gulf States and the International Monetary Fund, and would starve without \$20 billion of remittances from Egyptians working overseas. It holds on to social cohesion and life itself with difficulty. Yet Rice reduces Egypt's tortuous story to that of a few Western-educated activists. "Someday Egypt's future will be brighter," she writes, "and [the activists] will have another opportunity to build their dream. It might be a far-off and distant future. But those who think otherwise discount the human yearning to be free." In the meantime Rice discounts the human yearning to be fed.

DEMOCRACY IS HAVING A BAD DECADE. China—the world's largest and most successful dictatorship—is extending its influence beyond its coastal waters and into Eurasia, through the trillion-dollar One Belt, One Road program (and others). Chinese investments in Pakistan, Iran, and more recently Turkey have given new vigor to dictatorial and sometimes dangerous regimes. Russia has quadrupled its oil exports to China. The two main Eurasian powers may compete, but they agree on preserving the Assad regime in Syria. Iraq's main military forces now are Shiite militias advised or commanded by Iranian Revolutionary Guard officers.

At this writing the U.S. administration is still debating how to respond to Iran's long-range ballistic missile program and its attempt to create a "Shiite corridor" from Iran to the Mediterranean. A decade ago, America could have destroyed Iran's nuclear weapons development program, a course of action advocated by then-Vice President Dick Cheney. Rice and Defense Secretary Robert Gates persuaded President George W. Bush to forbear. Not just China and Russia, but other European and Asian nations are eager to do business with Iran, and America's ability to shape events is shrinking. Worst of all,

America's technological edge in warfare is eroding.

Remarkably, Rice has almost nothing to say about China, except to suggest that a credit bubble in the Chinese economy shows the vulnerability of its authoritarian system. Yet China continues to grow at a rate that will double its economy every decade or so, and to increase its dominance in high-tech electronics manufacturing. New rail lines from China link Iran and Turkey to Chinese industry and bind them to China's economy. Turkey, for that matter, merits barely a passing mention. Rice laments the lost opportunity of the Iranian 2009 "Green Revolution" and the Obama Administration's refusal to support popular protests against election fraud. But the only initiative she mentions from her tenure in office was a short-lived cultural exchange program, "to try to end the isolation of the Iranian people, even if we could do nothing about their government." That's hard to read without gagging, considering Rice did everything in her power to stop the Bush Administration from doing something about their government.

At the turn of 2018, Iranians took to the streets in more than 70 towns and cities to protest the Islamic Republic's policies, and many denounced the Islamic Republic itself. Insufficient data are available at this writing to evaluate the origin and future of the new protest movement, but they have put regime change back on the agenda. The Trump Administration's vigorous response to Iranian aggression contrasts with Rice's fatalism about the theocratic regime, and gives the Iranian people hope the U.S. can indeed do something about their government.

TO A HAMMER, EVERYTHING LOOKS like a nail; to Condoleezza Rice, every "democratic transition" looks like the American civil rights movement, to which she devotes more pages than any other subject. Chattel slavery and the denial of civil rights to the descendants of slaves for a century after the Civil War was a shameful stain upon the United States, but it also was an anomaly in a country founded on the principle of universal equality. Oddly, Rice thinks the civil rights movement was a "moment of democratic transition," like those in Poland, Egypt, or Iraq, rather than the extension of an existing democracy to a previously excluded minority. America, in her reading, is not exceptional, but simply another case study in "the long road to freedom."

It is telling that Rice's account of the civil rights movement doesn't mention that its leaders were Christian ministers who ap-



pealed to the conscience of a Christian nation. On the contrary, she rejects the notion that Christianity had much to do with the American Founding. The “Constitution gave ‘We the people’ no religious identity,” she writes. “Many have made the point that Christians founded America. These men and women lived in a time when at least some expression of Christian belief was an absolute necessity for moral propriety...but in the final analysis it doesn’t matter whether they were Christian believers, Deists, or atheists.” Although she dismisses religion’s contribution to America’s policy, she denounces “religious prejudices in American social life and politics,” for example, her perception that “Muslim Americans find themselves constantly professing their loyalty to the United States in answer to those who too easily draw a link between them and violent extremists in the Middle East.”

“AS LONG AS HUMAN BEINGS FEAR those who are ‘different,’ prejudice and suspicion will be a part of the human experience,” Rice concludes. Her personal view of the matter is understandable. She recalls that “my friend Denise McNair and three other little girls [were] killed in a bombing at the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham in September 1963,” when Rice was nine years old. The reader sympathizes with her impulse to universalize this terrible event, but it is a woefully mistaken view of the world. The racists of the American South claimed that black Americans were incapable of shaping their own political destiny, and the civil rights movement proved them wrong. Should we assume that every people in every land is equally capable of shaping its own destiny? The notion that largely tribal Muslim societies can march to democracy on the same path as Americans who elected their own pastors and collected their own taxes has caused endless mischief. Time and again, Rice’s prescription comes down to “assume a civil society,” where none ever has existed.

It was Rice’s misfortune to enter the political arena just as Poland broke free of Soviet control. If Poland could succeed at democracy, Rice believed, every other country could, too. But there was no question of building democracy in Poland: the Poles had built that for themselves during the interwar period, and it was torn from their hands by Nazi and Soviet occupation. Civil society persisted in Poland through the Catholic Church during the years

of Communist oppression, and the Poles took their first opportunity to *restore* a polity that was dormant but never destroyed.

Poland produced leaders like Lech Walesa; Russia produced nothing but predators like Roman Abramovich, Boris Yeltsin’s main backer among the Russian oligarchs. Russian Orthodoxy fostered piety, but not what the Catholic Church calls subsidiarity, the proliferation of religiously-influenced institutions through civil society. That is one crucial difference between an independent church and an imperial church. The Communist system extirpated virtually all social life not under the direct control of the Communist Party. Through adverse selection, toadies and mediocrities rose up the bureaucratic ranks—except in the secret services, the one Soviet institution that rewarded daring and intelligence. It was inevitable that Russia’s new leaders would come from the ranks of the KGB, because that was the country’s only school for leadership training.

To Condoleeza Rice, every “democratic transition” looks like the American civil rights movement.

RICE MENTIONS THE WESTERN EXPERTS who flocked to Russia in the early 1990s to advise the post-Soviet government on reforms. I was briefly one of them. The late private equity investor Theodore Forstmann engaged the supply-side consulting firm Polyconomics to study Russia’s economy. As the firm’s chief economist, I made several trips to Moscow and was duly appointed an adviser to Yegor Gaidar’s finance ministry in 1992. I wasn’t able to give much advice because everyone in power was too busy stealing public assets to listen. But the most striking thing about Russia under Yeltsin was the Russians’ utter passivity in face of a kleptocratic social breakdown. This wasn’t John Paul II’s Poland, but the sorry outcome of 70 years of Communist terror preceded by centuries of Tsarist autocracy. To expect a different outcome was delusional.

Culture doesn’t matter for Condoleezza Rice, who reduces the world to simple ideological categories. Her contribution to misguided American policies has been substantial. Amer-

ica hasn’t begun to pay for the consequences of her mistakes. The Bush Administration and its successor spent over \$4 trillion to build nations in Iraq and Afghanistan, with nearly 7,000 American dead and more than 50,000 wounded. What do we have to show for it? Iraq “continues to function in a quasi-democratic fashion—the institutions are weak but at least present.... Freedom of religion is guaranteed... [y]et religious minorities are being driven out of the country...because the government cannot protect them from sectarian militias and terrorists,” reports Rice. Moreover, “The Iranians will have free rein if there is no American counterweight,” by which she means, I presume, boots on the ground—that is, more of the same things that failed in the past.

WHAT WAS AMERICA’S OPPORTUNITY cost in return for this dismal outcome? It is one thing for Jack to bring home a magic bean, and quite another to trade his mother’s cow for it. Rice, to be sure, is still waiting for her magic bean to sprout, but it’s nonetheless fair to ask what she traded for it.

Had we left Saddam Hussein in power or (as Daniel Pipes suggested at the time) installed one of his generals to succeed him, and spent a fraction of that \$4 trillion on advanced military R&D, we would have little to fear from Russia’s S-400 air defense system or China’s DF-26 carrier-killer missile or satellite-killing capabilities. A tiny portion of the butcher’s bill for Iraq and Afghanistan would have bought America a missile shield sufficiently reliable to allow us to laugh at North Korea. We would not require China’s and Russia’s assistance to persuade Pyongyang to stop firing missiles in our direction. China and Russia would fear our unchallenged technological prowess, as they did during the Reagan Administration, and the nuclear aspirations of Iran and North Korea would seem trivial in the face of American countermeasures. Our defense budget would not be constrained by spiraling deficits. Most of all, the world, as it did during the 1980s, would look up to the United States as the well-spring of growth rather than to China.

That is how the tragedy of the aborted democratic movements became America’s tragedy. The prospects for a day at the beach are shrinking fast.

David P. Goldman is a columnist for Asia Times and PJ Media, a senior fellow at the London Center for Policy Research, and is the author of How Civilizations Die (And Why Islam Is Dying Too) (Regnery Publishing).

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