Notwithstanding these shortcomings, *Forgotten Continent* provides a compelling rejection of populism and a strong call for open economies and liberal democracies. Few books on Latin America present this case, making Reid's effort all the more valuable to the current debate. Yes, the region has been largely off the radar screen in the developed world in recent years. But if that is the price of attaining normalcy, the "forgotten continent" will not mind being forgotten.

Juan Carlos Hidalgo
Cato Institute

Heads in the Sand: How Republicans Screw Up Foreign Policy and Foreign Policy Screws Up the Democrats

Matthew Yglesias
Hoboken, N. J.: John Wiley and Sons, 2008, 229 pp.

Credit where credit is due: At 229 pages, Matthew Yglesias has written the world's longest blog post. The first of a generation of journalists who came to prominence through their personal weblogs, Yglesias now blogs professionally for the Center for American Progress. *Heads in the Sand* has all the virtues and flaws of the medium Yglesias helped pioneer. It tends toward bite-sized arguments and pith over substance, which leaves some of the chapters with a stapled-together feel. *Heads in the Sand* gives the impression of a Web journal read straight through, with an extremely thin set of footnotes substituting for links. Nevertheless, the book is by and large excellent. It is full of wit and erudition, stringing together a series of incisive arguments about politics and foreign policy.

The book focuses on a vital subject: how the American body politic blundered so catastrophically into Iraq. Yglesias finds the root of this error in a Democratic Party whose ignorance and fecklessness prevented it from providing coherent opposition to the president's war schemes, both initially and over the first years of the war. This allowed Republicans to do what Yglesias's Republicans do: screw up foreign policy.

Heads in the Sand contains two primary arguments. First, it outlines a typology of foreign policy traditions in American history: isolationism, liberal internationalism, and a nationalist conservatism.

Second, it posits an ideational taproot of politics—it was the Democrats' confusion over their own liberal internationalist tradition that led to such limp-wristed opposition to the Iraq war. Yglesias concludes that if the Democrats do not return to the true faith in their public arguments, they are likely to produce bad foreign policy as well. Although *Heads in the Sand* provides a plausible—and depressing—account of the politics of American foreign policy, its main arguments are not quite right.

Yglesias believes the heart of the real liberal tradition is international cooperation. Liberal internationalists create and expand international institutions to create a reasonably just rule-based order. Rather than ignorant armies clashing in the night of international anarchy, liberal internationalists look to trade and tourism as the principal forms of international interaction. Rules will help states achieve their common interests, while producing the trust and legitimacy necessary to solve tough problems and defend the system. International politics will become a positive-sum game.

In this view, liberal internationalism became the hegemonic tradition in American foreign policy after the Second World War. Harry Truman and his successors built a rule-governed order in the West, improving on Woodrow Wilson's universalism with an incrementalist approach. The Bretton-Woods institutions, NATO, the European Economic Community, and later the U.N. all represent the gradual advance of a cooperative Leviathan. Foreign policy after the Cold War is to be understood as part of the same project, from Kuwait to Kosovo. These were all missions blessed by international organizations and surfeited with legitimacy, which served to enforce the rules and expand their scope.

Yglesias deserves credit for stating fully and forthrightly the institutionalist position, which is often obscured in contemporary discussions of foreign policy. It represents a cogent vision that ought to serve as a pole in the debate. But Yglesias's account of the position is unconvincing. Worse, it undermines his account of the politics of the Iraq war, which is the real strength of *Heads in the Sand*.

Yglesias's view of liberal internationalism during the Cold War is, shall we say, generous to the liberal view. Whatever it became later, NATO during the Cold War was a security alliance, not a rule-based institution. Whatever trust it fostered between the European powers came from the gentle reassurance of the American boot on

Europe's neck. The Europeans often had a very different view of American legitimacy than *Heads in the Sand* concedes—ask the ghosts of De Gaulle, Adenauer, Eden, and Brandt, to name just a few of the European leaders America had to smash to keep in line. In the end, the Cold War was a realist containment policy with an aggressive liberal spin. Its central feature was the Soviet-American rivalry. A rule-governed order, it wasn't.

Rule-governed behavior works best for problems where mutually compatible interests exist as long as neither side cheats. In these classic "prisoner's dilemma" situations, institutions can aid cooperation. Much international economic exchange fits this pattern, and some of Yglesias's economic institutions are apposite examples. For other types of problems rules are merely irrelevant—one strains to believe the liberal order will find a solution to the incompatible preferences of nations regarding global warming, for instance.

The security problems Yglesias fears—among them nuclear proliferation, failed states, terrorism, and humanitarian crises—are not amenable to rule-governed cooperation. To begin with, these problems usually have at least one party whose interests are not amenable to cooperation: the target state. These are problems of enforcement, not cooperation, and the rules to be enforced have often not been agreed upon beforehand. Second, the problems affect different states differently, which generates different interests in seeing the problem solved and in willingness to contribute to a solution. This typically results in a situation where (a) not everyone can agree on what is to be done and (b) very few are willing to pay to solve the problem.

A dilemma naturally arises in such cases. America either can admit that cooperation has failed and let the problem go unresolved, or it can attempt to juice the game with American power. The latter option usually involves coercing our allies and others into going along in one way or another. It also entails bearing most of the costs ourselves. This leads to further American demands to control the policy, and thus to further friction with other states, many of whom were not enthused about American muscle-flexing to begin with. The end result looks little like cooperation and even less like rule-governed order.

Pace Yglesias, such was the story of American military intervention in the 1990s. An American desire for control over a revamped

Somalia operation and greater contributions from others led to its aggressive second phase and disaster. In Bosnia, America chafed under European conditions for three years before presenting our allies and the UN with a diplomatic fait accompli for intervention. In the interim, the Clinton administration went behind the backs of the international community, breaking the arms embargo and facilitating the training of the Croatian military in order to end the stalemate. In Kosovo, strong-arm American diplomacy dragged NATO into an ill-considered war that soon became the defining feature of an alliance stretched to the breaking point. The vaunted legitimacy of liberal internationalism was tossed to the wayside after UN approval was denied.

American control of policy and aggravated allies defined these operations—all paid for on an American tab. That they did not end in military or diplomatic disaster is more the result of luck than cooperation. It is no accident that the Balkan wars sparked the creation of the European Security and Defense Policy, a bid to undercut the supposedly trust-building institution of NATO. The Europeans had seen what America meant by rule-governed order: American rules and a hegemonic order.

The trouble with all this is not merely that *Heads in the Sand* views liberal internationalism through rose-tinted glasses—it is hard to see how a liberal could do otherwise. Rather, Yglesias's misunderstanding of liberal internationalism undermines the book's political analysis.

Yglesias offers a brilliant and troubling account of the Democrats' time in opposition. He painfully reconstructs Democratic failure to effectively impede a ruinous foreign policy: the decision to avoid discussion of Iraq in 2002, to unfairly savage the liberal internationalist Howard Dean in 2003, to let Kerry run a schizophrenic campaign in 2004, to fall for dreams of an Arab Spring in 2005, to paper over a strategic critique of Iraq with claims of incompetence in 2006, to fail to address the wisdom of attacking Iran in 2007. In each case, Yglesias highlights two central flaws with Democratic thinking: a desire not to talk about foreign policy and the presence of a hawkish liberal faction acting in the name of internationalists.

This latter problem has been particularly acute for the liberal opposition. As *Heads in the Sand* recounts, the importance of liberal hawks in Democratic discourse diverted efforts into attacking the

extreme and marginal left rather than the Bush administration's claims. More importantly, the continued prominence of liberal hawks focused foreign policy debates on tactical critiques of the Iraq adventure, rather than calling out Bush's doctrines for the strategic failures that they are. So, instead we get the "incompetence dodge," an attack on administration venality and stupidity in its foreign policy, with the concomitant idea that a more honest and intelligent administration might have done better with Iraq. We get demands that the administration ask congressional permission to bomb Iran, rather than arguments that counterproliferation is fundamentally incompatible with American interests.

What Yglesias fails to see is that the prominence of liberal hawks—and indeed, also the Democratic desire to avoid debating foreign policy—is the *natural and inevitable* result of liberal internationalism applied to security problems. The structure of these problems means they will mostly be immutable to cooperation. The result is one group of people who want to quit the field and talk about problems they *can* solve, and another group that wants to use American power to rig the rules in the name of the greater liberal good. Yglesias has the causality reversed: it is bad policy that is causing terrible politics.

Thus, it should come as no surprise that the Democratic hunt for new ideas has led to the deplorable examples he criticizes heavily in the last chapter, namely, a bevy of proposed new institutions to authorize American security operations. After all, such operations are vital and necessary, are they not? For years, liberal internationalists have been pointing at failed states, nuclear proliferation, and civil wars while screaming "*Hic Dragones*!" If there are liberals sharpening lances and mounting chargers, the villagers ought not protest.

Heads in the Sand conceals the hard fact that in practice liberal internationalism is just a sweet term for liberal imperialism. The failure of institutional solutions to politics bifurcates liberals into hawks and doves. The hawks care more and the doves tend toward opportunism—no one ever won an election by promising not to face down threats. The right has the left wrong: when liberals do foreign policy, white feathers fly, not white flags.

Yglesias sometimes recognizes this dynamic. Indeed, most of his arguments against the Iraq war do not involve defending international law. They simply point out that the war had an unnecessary objec-

tive, an impossible goal, and an astronomical cost. In other fora he has admitted that if pressed he would abandon the Kosovo intervention and other examples of liberal hawkery. In a throwaway line at the end of the book, he admits that a realist offshore balancing strategy would serve the interests of the nation perfectly well. He seems to understand that what America needs is an ideology of restraint. In short, he is prone to making conservative arguments. Watching liberalism in opposition is enough to drive most people to oppose liberalism.

But a liberal grand strategy cannot serve conservative arguments and liberal internationalism will not restrain America from damaging its own interests. Yglesias's depressing account of the politics of Iraq is all the gloomier for its central irony: just as his own analysis builds on a foundation of liberal ideas, so too did the thinking of the politicians he criticizes. That their analysis was the more natural result is a criticism of liberal internationalism, and of *Heads in the Sand*.

Brendan Rittenhouse Green
MIT Security Studies Program