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PARTY FOUL

On Geoffrey Kabaservice's *Rule and Ruin*

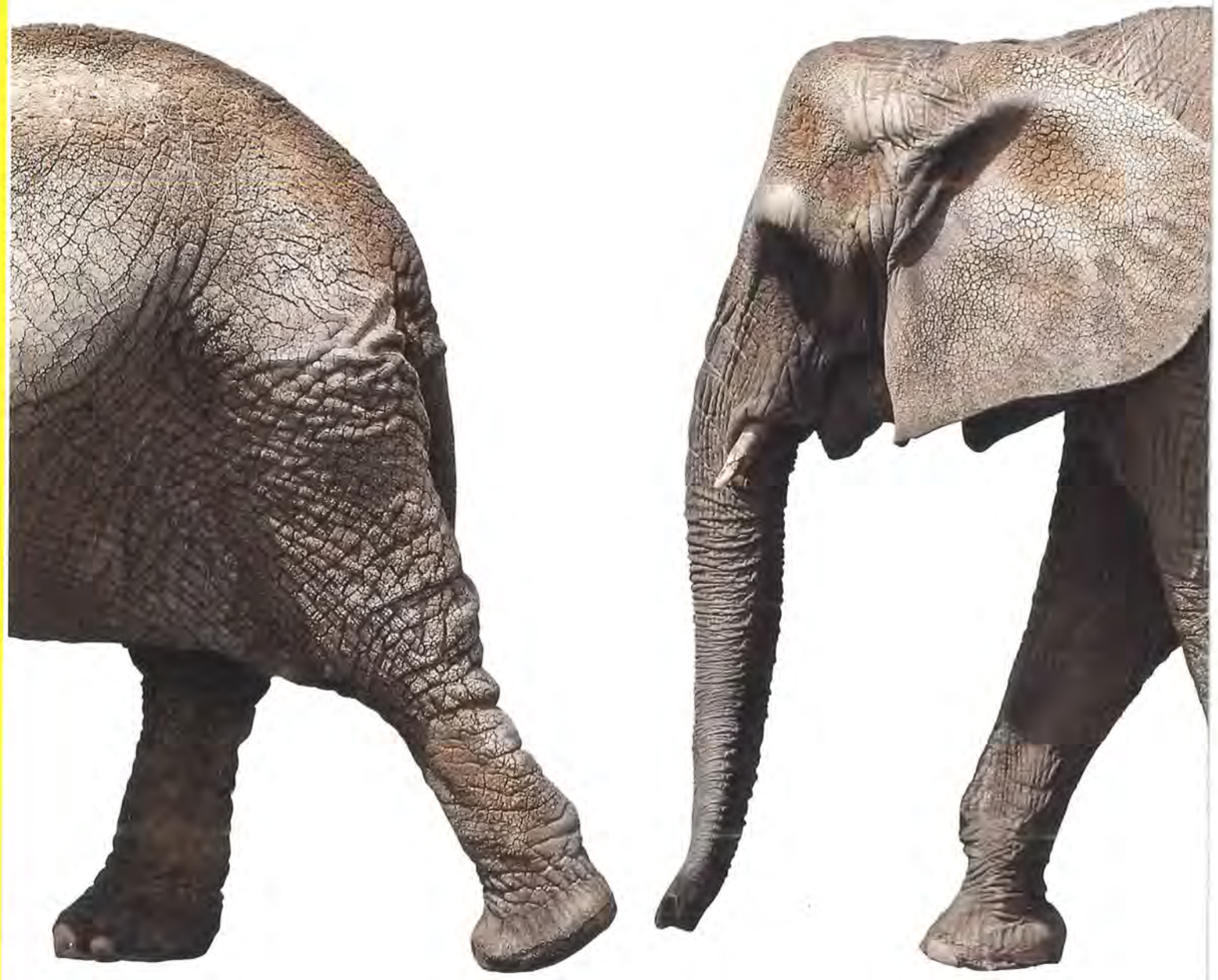
THE MEDIA cannot help but cast the current Republican presidential primary as a war of party identity. Mitt Romney, the candidate with executive experience in the public and private sector, looks good on paper, but the party establishment views him with a skeptical eye, especially since he is a graduate of a suspicious Wall Street tradition, as well as a member of a religion that makes evangelical Christians, who are arguably the grassroots backbone of the Republican Party, politically queasy. As a result, the running narrative has been the cyclical identification of the "not-Romney" candidate, from the tea party darlings Michelle Bachmann and Herman Cain to established Republicans like Newt Gingrich and Rick Santorum. Republicans cannot decide whether they want a business conservative for the current economic climate, or a social conservative who will bring the party establishment even further to the right. Candidates with a history of moderate conservatism, such as Tim Pawlenty and Jon Huntsman, were easily chewed and spit out by primary voters; that said, Romney's ability to build a campaign machine in states like New Hampshire and Florida indicates that he can speak directly to conservative voters, though it is unclear what would happen in a general election (voter turnout in almost every primary is down). If anything, the Republican primary has painted a picture of a fragmented party, which desperately needs to coalesce behind a single candidate in order to pose a serious challenge to President Obama in November.

THE REPUBLICAN Party has been here before...in 1964. Senator Barry Goldwater of Arizona was the clear front runner in that year's presidential primary. He appealed to the southern white voter who was frustrated by the civil rights movement and the federal government's intervention to compel integration of schools. Geoffrey Kabaservice's *Rule and Ruin: The Downfall of Moderation and the Destruction of the Republican Party* spends significant time dissecting this chapter in political history, especially since it was a moment that foreshadowed the transformation of the Republican Party.

Kabaservice describes a party dominated by moderate conservatives, who all had a hand in opposing McCarthy -era blacklists and drafting the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964. Goldwater, in the name of small-government conservatism, opposed the CRA, and ultimately alienated himself from the party establishment.

For most moderates, the possibility of cooperating with Goldwater disintegrated on June 10, when Goldwater returned to the Senate and was one of only six Republicans to join segregationist Democrats in voting against ending the filibuster over the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The Senate overcame the opposition of Goldwater and the southerners by voting for cloture, 71-29—the first time in history that the Senate had mustered the necessary two-thirds vote to shut off a filibuster on a civil rights bill. Nine days later, Goldwater was again one of six Republicans to vote against the bill itself, which passed 73-27. In opposing the Civil Rights Act, Goldwater was setting his standard against not only one of the most significant pieces of Congressional legislation in the twentieth century, but also one of the greatest achievements of the Republican Party (98).

Kabaservice goes on to describe the important role played by Republicans in drafting the CRA, in particular House Representative William McCulloch from Ohio. McCulloch made sure to restrain federal overreach in the CRA, specifically in removing "measures that struck him as unconstitutional or overreaching, including the elimination of racial imbalance in education, federal controls on banks and mortgage companies, and racial quotas for employers" (100). Although McCulloch sincerely believed that the government could and should intervene to prevent the discrimination of minorities, he would not allow the federal government to excessively intrude into the private sector. McCulloch's version of the bill ensured that civil rights legislation could be tenable for Republicans and pass the House, which included eighty percent of Republicans. When Goldwater voted against the bill in the Senate, he effectively undermined what should have been seen



as a Republican achievement (101).

Goldwater's rejection of the party establishment led to a search for a primary challenger. Here again, one cannot help but compare the 1964 primary with the ongoing primary, where establishment Republicans look wistfully at governors like Mitch Daniels of Indiana and Chris Christie of New Jersey, contemplating what could have happened if at least one had entered the race. Political commentator William Kristol has been vocal about drafting Daniels or Congressman Paul Ryan for a last-ditch challenge that could possibly go to the convention, though it has become clear that no new candidate could enter the race at this point and win, especially with the overwhelming fundraising and organizational handicaps.

The odds were long even in 1964, when the Republican establishment got their wish: William Scranton, governor of Pennsylvania, entered the race. Scranton, a moderate who many attempted to cast as a Republican "Kennedy," remained ambivalent about running for president, which Kabaservice attributes to simply not wanting to be president. By the time Scranton entered the race, Goldwater had already won a majority of delegates to take to the convention; the only way to win would have been to convince the delegates to change their votes from Goldwater to Scranton, which might have been possible if these delegates were supporters of anyone but Goldwater. Goldwater attracted, as Kabaservice describes, the most stalwart and bullheaded supporters, who were excited to be on the inside of the party. These supporters made up the Goldwater delegation, making a Goldwater nomination inevitable. Although the remote possibility of winning remained a constant hope, it was ultimately pushed to the periphery in order to make the Scranton campaign an answer from moderate conservatives to the new breed of conservatives with Goldwater. Despite winning the nomination, Goldwater did not receive a unified welcome at the GOP convention. In fact, the 1964 convention was filled with contention, from booing of speakers to assaults on African-American Republicans:

> Most of the howling came from the galleries, as Clif White attempted to restore order on the floor, but the official delegates were part of the uproar. Doug Bailey was at the convention, and he was sure that the clamor "wasn't just the galleries. It was the floor, it was the hall. The venom of the booing and the hatred in people's eyes really was quite stunning. I remember I was standing next to an officer from the San Mateo Country Sheriff's Office, who was there to keep the peace, and there he was, pistol unsheathed, booing along with everyone else." Tanya Melich, the political research director of ABC News at the convention and a moderate involved with the New York YRs [Young Republicans], remembered that the anger directed at Rockefeller was "horrible. I felt like I was in Nazi Germany. It was really scary." Dwight Eisenhower found the tumult "unpardonable—and a complete negation of the spirit of democracy. I was bitterly ashamed." Ike later claimed that his young niece had been "molested" by Goldwater thugs on the convention floor (113).

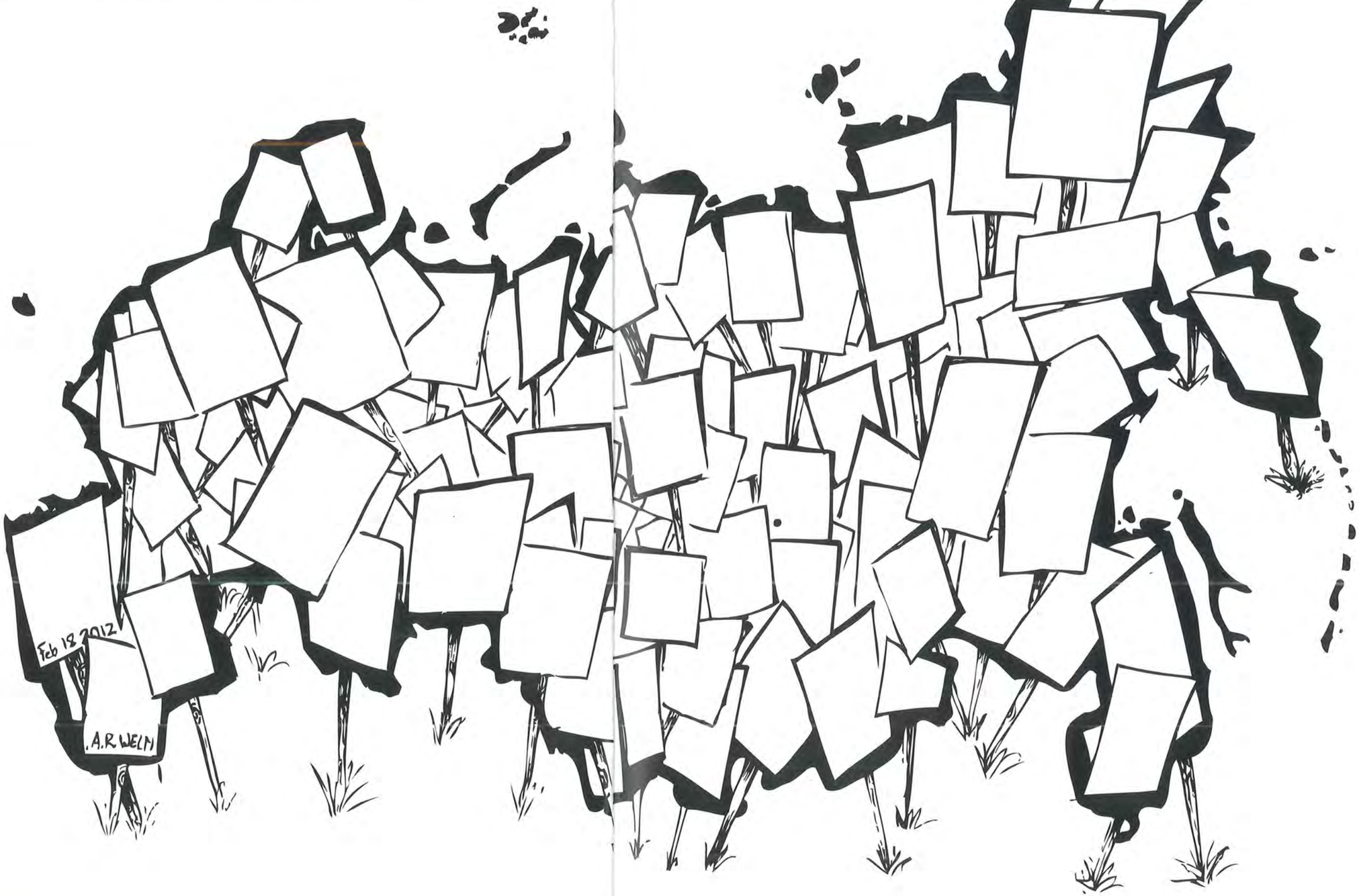
KABASERVICE ASCRIBES the toxicity of the convention to a violent struggle between establishment Republicans from the Northeast and the growing number of conservatives from the South and the West, who wanted to be the new establishment. Kabaservice aptly quotes journalist Murray Kempton: "This convention is historic because it is the emancipation of the serfs...The serfs have seized the estate of their masters" (114). The convention was fundamentally a "rebellion against the prim and proper mores of the East," in favor of regions with growing industrial economies. Kabaservice lists the different companies growing in places like California to underscore the East's loss of economic influence, which translated, beginning at the convention, to a loss of political influence.

Although it is unlikely that the 2012 Republican convention will be as ugly as the 1964 one, it will not be the bastion of party unity that it has been before. The party is changing, and change breeds political violence in the form of literature, advertisements, debates, and personal attacks. Kabaservice deftly identifies a period in political history that speaks to the current climate, yet he fails to recognize the opportunity that presented itself then as it does now. The ugly side of democracy is still democracy, and these tumultuous times in history are always the catalyst for a great conversation where some political ideals die and others are born and nurtured. Democracy doesn't always come to the right answer, and Goldwater was not the right answer for a country finally healing from Civil War-era wounds. Yet Goldwater was the beginning of a great transformation, even though many objected to that transformation.

Kabaservice ends his book lamenting the death of the moderate conservative, though he most likely means that he would prefer a Rockefeller or a Scranton, moderate Republicans who are amenable to Democratic policies, to a tea party candidate. Nevertheless, Kabaservice makes an important point when he correlates the fall of moderate conservatism to abuse of power by Republican leaders. The 2000-2008 Bush years were hardly examples of economic pragmatism, and the debt ceiling crisis last summer left the country salivating for moderates, in both parties, who would be capable of compromise. Whether or not you agree with his final analysis, *Rule and Ruin* is a timely and important book. By looking back at the history of the Republican Party, the reader can gain a better understanding of the present political climate and enter the transformative conversation happening right now.

—Erin Shadowens

FEATURES + REPORTS



WORD PLAY: Protestors pun "You do not even represent us" with "You do not even know who we are."

RUSSIAN FICTION

Moscow's struggle for democracy

By Evgenia Olimpieva

MARCH 4, 2012—the date of the upcoming presidential elections in Russia. With the Russian population's traditional political apathy, nobody expected that there would be anything new and exciting about presidential elections this year. And it probably would have been just so was it not for the State Duma (Russia's parliament) elections that happened on December 4, which caused social unrest that has continued over the past two months.

The wave of protests started on the night of December 4 right after the Duma election results were published. The results revealed an outrageous electoral fraud and confirmed once again that the democracy in Russia is a fiction. The protest wave reached its peak on December 10: people from 99 Russian cities and 42 cities around the world went out on the streets to attend peaceful demonstrations to show their disagreement with the results of the elections. On December 24 and February 4, between 80,000 and 100,000 protesters flooded Moscow in the biggest demonstrations that Russia has seen since the fall of the Soviet Union.

The main cause of the protests was the fraud revealed in the December 4 Duma elections, anticipated by Russian and non-Russian election observers, and evident as results rolled in. Outright fabrication was abundant and obvious: 93.14% of the electors (353 people) "voted" for United Russia (the country's leading party) in one of the Moscow psychiatric hospitals. Similarly, in Chechnya, where a staggering 99.51% of the population cast a vote, 99.48% of those chose United Russia. Volunteer poll observers witnessed voter fraud but were unable to stop it; many of the observers were removed from electoral quarters because of "excessive activity," that is, attempting to stop electoral abuses. Often, the ballots filled out in favor of United Russia would be found inside the electoral baskets before the elections even began. "Carousel voting," in which a group of people is driven from one electoral centre to another, voting at each one, was another method of fabrication. Some employers threatened their workers with dismissal if they refused to vote for United Russia. Finally, the numbers were simply changed while being transferred into the computer system. With more than 70 million Russian internet users, reports of the frauds instantly spread around the country, becoming the cause and the central grievance of the protest movement.

THE VERY FIRST protests were violently suppressed by the police and additional special forces. Many people were arrested and then sentenced without having an opportunity to see a lawyer. Later on, seeing that so many people were going out on the streets, the authorities allowed the protests, which have continued peacefully since. Many people arrived at the demonstrations with white flowers and balloons. By carrying the balloons people were saying "we have been deceived"—in Russian *menya naduli* (literally, "I have been inflated") means "I have been fooled." The main symbol of the protest was a white ribbon, which Putin,

during a televised call-in show, said he mistook for a condom: "Why did they unwrap it?" was the first question that came to his mind, he said. Protesters responded creatively, bringing posters that read, "Use contraception against political AIDS!" or the extremely crude "Dutin–Pick," where transposing the first letters of the two words suggested the source of "political AIDS" and the nature of that source. In a response to Putin's statement that December 10 protesters were paid by the United States, people brought posters that said, "I am here for free," or, "The United States gave me $10 for being here." In the same infamous TV show, Putin, after charging protesters with anti-Russian sentiments, compared them to the *bandar-log*—monkeys from "The Jungle Book." In St. Petersburg, a man in a monkey mask carried a poster reading, "Have you called for me?" (In the well-known cartoon, the python Kaa hypnotizes the monkeys, calling them to move closer; Putin quoted the snake on the show, saying, "Come to me, *Bandar-logs*!") In a response to Putin's accusations of the West, people brought posters that read, "I want to be friends with the West" and, "We don't believe in the foreign enemy".

To those familiar with Russia, the notion of protests with thousands of participants has long been unthinkable. It is important to remember that Russia is not the kind of country where protesting is a typical tool for the expression of civic concerns and demands. Demanding from those higher in rank is not in the Russian mentality. The fact that so many Russians are aware of their country's revolutionary past and have fresh memories of the mess of the nineties, which followed the fall of the Soviet Union, explains why protest is the last tool for civic expression that a Russian citizen would turn to. Just a month ago, Russians protested only when the issue was a matter of life and death and when there were simply no other options left. Other than that, it was only nationalists or communists who went out on the streets. The December protests, then, mark a radical shift in Russia's political climate. As a young protest participant, Alexandra Tkach, said, "It seems that everything changed overnight; something that was unthinkable a couple of days ago is a reality today."

BEFORE DUMA ELECTIONS

THE ELECTORAL fraud became a logical culmination of the announcement made by the president Dmitry Medvedev on September 24, 2011, saying that Vladimir Putin was running for the presidency again. Dmitry Medvedev was elected to the Russian presidency in 2008, backed by outgoing president Vladimir Putin, whose two consecutive four-year terms made him constitutionally unable to run again. For years there had been no figure who could somehow compete with Vladimir Putin, and many hoped that Medvedev would become an opposition leader, despite the fact that it was Putin who appointed him to the presidency.

During his time in office Medvedev created the illusion that he was slowly moving away from Putin. They were never shown together on the television; they never openly praised or supported each other. Their focus and political strategy aimed at very different groups of the population. Medvedev appealed to the educated, intellectual masses, and the businessmen. His rhetoric was always pro-liberal and pro-modernization. He positioned himself as an intellectual, democratic, European-minded politician. A graduate of St. Petersburg State University, with a Ph.D in law, he fit perfectly the image of a liberal reformer.

IN THE SUMMER of 2011, at the opening of the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum, Medvedev discussed his modernization plans for Russia's economy, repeating over and over again that it was his choice, his view of Russia, as if deliberately opposed to somebody else's view: "My choice is a policy that gives millions of people maximum opportunities for economic activity, and protects them with laws backed by the full weight of state power. My choice is a Russia that, over the next decade, will build an economy offering a high standard of life and an economy that makes life comfortable and interesting and produces what is necessary to make Russia one of the world's leaders."

Meanwhile, Putin cultivated the image of a brutal and direct politician, a man of actions rather than words. His speeches were often rude and abusive, and were filled with scorn and sarcasm. As opposed to Medvedev's highly civilized and educated speaking style, Putin's language, although grammatically correct, has been a fusion of working class and prisoners' slang. The image of a leader who thought like the working class and was sympathetic to it has always been extremely important to Putin. At the recent United Russia convention, the prime minister's candidacy won praise from Valeriy Yalushev, a steelmaker from Nizhniy Tagil. He said that Putin "visits our factory from time to time, gives us advice and makes suggestions; that is why we do our job well." Direct involvement in the factories' business has been Putin's calling card for years. He became popular by publicly exposing the corruption and crimes of the factories' managers.

The contrasting images of Putin and Medvedev appeared so different that many believed truly competitive elections were near with Medvedev as a plausible leader for Russia's future. But any hope of Medvedev becoming the standard-bearer for Russia's political opposition collapsed when, on September 24, 2011, at the twelfth meeting of United Russia, Medvedev announced Putin's candidacy and, moreover, announced that this rotation had been planned long ago. Some Russians have lampooned the action as *rokirovka*, the Russian term for "castling" in chess. When the rotation became a reality, the pair lost the trust

DEMANDS: "We want to live in an honest country."


pizza ollis
РОССИИ
НУЖНА
ЧЕСТНАЯ
ВЛАСТЬ

THUS SPOKE RUSSIA: "My voice has been stolen" (taped on mouths); "I did not vote for these bastards: [emblem of United Russia]; I voted for other bastards: [emblems of all other parties that partook in the elections]" (poster, left); "We do not need revolution, we need honest elections" (poster, right).

INCENTIVES: "[The Statue of Liberty] gave me $10 and asked me to stand here."

and respect of millions of people. Both Medvedev and Putin became the targets of endless, and often very talented, mockery. While Putin is still up on the stage getting ready for the future elections, Medvedev is slowly fading from the public eye. In the public eye, he turned out to be nothing but Putin's puppet. As somebody put it in a joke: "Medvedev seat warmers—guaranteed for four years." Medvedev's announcement of a long-planned *rokirovka* deeply offended millions of Russians and made Russian "democracy" look like nothing but a staged show.

WHAT COMES NEXT

SO, AFTER ALL of this, will Putin come back? Yes, probably. No strong alternative has arisen who would be able to unite the opposition.

As one of the St. Petersburg protesters said, "I do not know what to do. They will give me a heart attack. There is no one to vote for, we have not been given an opportunity by our two 'cuties.'" However, she expressed confidence that the opposition would be able to find some leader that would unite people before the presidential elections.

Unfortunately, though, such a figure has not appeared yet. Excluding the Communist Party, the only candidate running for the presidency and somehow capable to compete with Putin is oligarch Mikhail Prokhorov, who some believe is part of a Kremlin effort to deceive voters. But it is very unlikely that he can gain significant support: since the nineties, for many Russians "oligarch" is a synonym for "thief". Thus, Putin will likely be back for at least one more term.

Putin's return does not mean, however, that the protests have been pointless. The government has been forced to recognize the existence of civil society and the power of its own people. The authorities saw that Russia has changed; it is no longer submissive. It is no longer a politically apathetic society, but a demanding society that holds its government accountable for its actions and words. I think it was not just the government that learned something about its people, but the society itself realized its present state. Perhaps the people of Russia are recognizing the need for real, decisive reform.

Because of this "Russian Spring," people with a deep political consciousness became aware of their own power and found widespread support. Hopefully, the protests are a sign that civil society in Russia is starting to wake up and mature, and that it will force the government to attend to the wishes of the people. Moreover, the protests have provided strength to anti-Putin opposition, increasing the possibility that Russia can see the end or at least the weakening of the Putin regime.

The opposition might not have much power this year, but it will in the future if people keep on speaking and the civil society keeps on growing.

The protests mark a change in the Russian people's attitude towards their own role in the country. Russia has grown up as a society, and this society now demands corresponding changes among those who hold political power.

CROSS-PURPOSES

Syria's Christian question

By Ian Tuttle

"THE MEDIA are liars," says Joshua. "What the media is showing—fighting, killing—that's not regular life. There is a problem, but not like you see on the news." His brother, Thomas, concurs: "The regime is simply not that bad. We have rights. We have freedom."

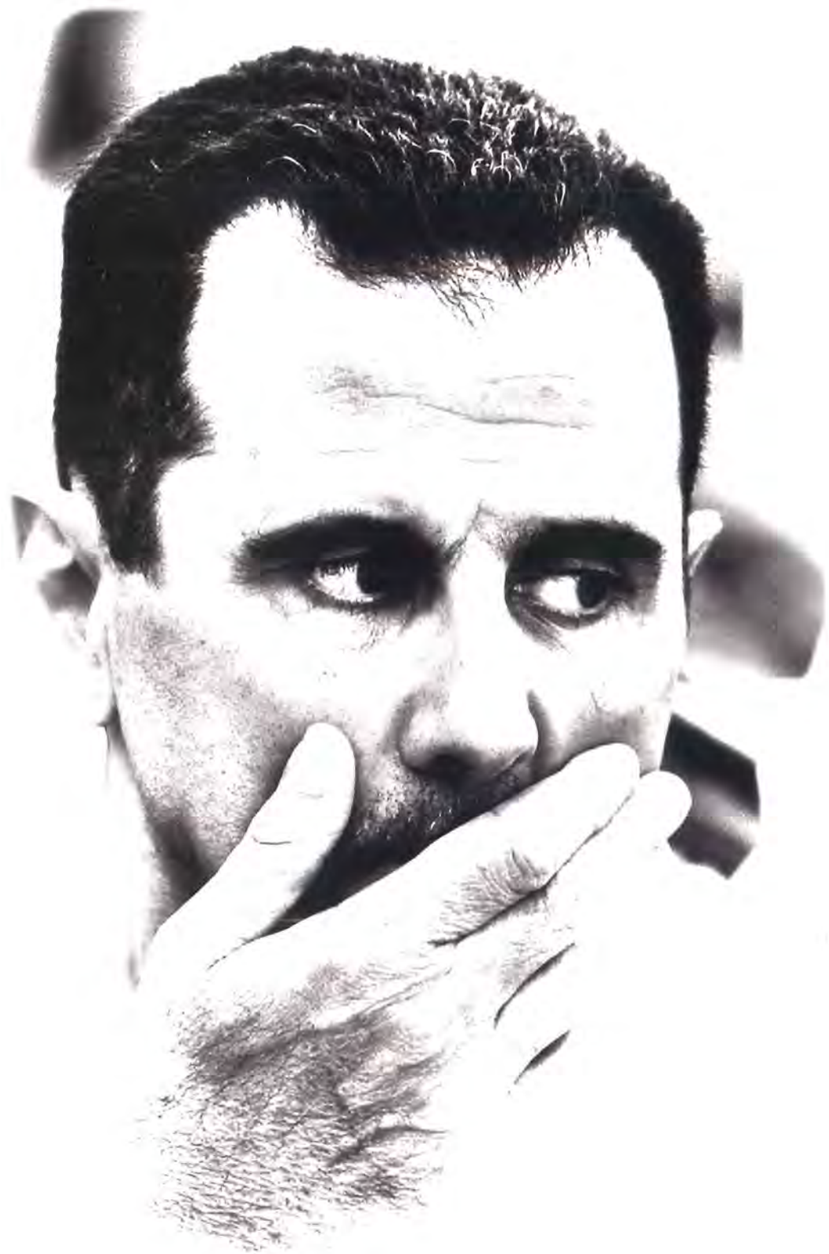
Joshua and Thomas are both Syrian Christians who, after living several decades in Syria, now reside in the United States. But their kinship to their homeland, where much of their family remains, is palpable. The brothers can trace their family's history in Syria back more than a millennium. "We've been there forever," one says. "The boundaries and governments have changed, but we have always been there."

Syria is unique among Arab nations. Under the secular regime instituted by Hafez al-Assad and now led by his son, Bashar, the nation's two million Christians, comprising ten percent of the population, are allowed to practice their religion with relative freedom. Clergy are not in danger. In the country's major cities, church bells mingle with Muslim muezzin calls to prayer. For Christians, say the brothers, there is opportunity for prosperity.

But to Western observers, the Assad regime is a brutal dictatorship whose sophisticated leader uses a state-run press and widespread military and intelligence network to crush dissent. For more than a year, protesters have staged demonstrations against the regime, many of which have ended in staggering body counts, and the protests are now intensifying, threatening civil war. For Syria's Christian minority, the country's deteriorating situation is alarming. They fear that the overthrow of the current government will lead to the targeted persecution of Christians and the ascendancy of a militant Islamist regime. Like their coreligionists in Egypt and Iraq, they worry that, should the protests succeed, they will no longer have a Syria to call home.

THE CHRISTIAN community in Syria has a storied past extending to the first known use of "Christian" at Antioch (modern-day Turkey), as recorded in the Book of Acts. When various eastern Christian sects separated from the Roman Church over theological and political differences in the fifth century, many found refuge in the hills of northern Syria. Over the next millennium, they suffered the ravages of the Islamic conquests, the Crusades, the thirteenth-century Mongol invasion, and the political domination of the Ottoman Empire. However, they managed to take advantage of opportunities to trade with European merchants, securing some measure of economic autonomy. When the Ottoman Empire collapsed, Syrian Christians emerged as the region's pivotal thinkers: George Antonius, a British-Syrian diplomat, published *The Arab Awakening* in 1938, and Michael Aflaq cofounded the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party in 1947, which would eventually come to power under Hafez al-Assad. For these thinkers, forging an Arab cultural identity that transcended religious divisions was a way to ensure Syria's minority Christians would avoid future discrimination and persecution.

Hafez al-Assad rose to prominence as part of the five-member military committee that launched a successful



coup in 1963. The revolution, which brought the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party to power (Saddam Hussein was from the same party, though the Syrian and Iraqi branches suffered a major ideological schism in the late 1960s), upended Syria's social and political structures, transferring power to the minority Alawites, a Syrian subset of Shiite Islam that comprised only twelve percent of the population, over the majority Sunni Muslims. Over the next seven years, Hafez rose through the Cabinet (he presided as Defense Minister over Syria's humiliating defeat to Israel in the 1967 Six-Days War) to become the country's unchallenged leader in a bloodless 1970 coup. To secure his regime against Sunni majoritarianism, he promised security and a variety of freedoms to Syria's minority populations, among them Christians, with whom he shared an ideological bent.

Hafez's thirty-year rule was marked by growing international influence and the consolidation of internal power. Hafez emulated the Soviet police state, establishing 15 separate intelligence agencies, which conducted surveillance mainly on Syrian citizens. And he was willing to shed blood to maintain firm control. In June 1979 the Muslim Brotherhood killed 50 Alawite trainees at a military academy in Aleppo, Syria's largest city, and a year later attempted to assassinate Assad by grenade. The day after the attempt, a military unit headed by Hafez's younger brother, Rifaat, shot several hundred political prisoners and religious dissidents in their cells at Tadmor Prison in the worst prison massacre in history. In 1982 Muslim extremists rose up in Hama, killing Ba'ath Party officials and calling for a nationwide revolt. In response, Hafez destroyed half the city, and death estimates range from 10,000 to 40,000 people, mostly civilians. Foreign correspondent Robin Wright has called it one of "the single deadliest acts by any Arab government against its own people in the modern Middle East."

However, the domestic oppression was countered by significant internal reforms. Syria had experienced dozens of attempted coups since the final departure of French troops in the mid-1940s. Hafez's emergence as sole leader brought much-needed stability to the country. He initiated massive infrastructure projects, from modern roads, hospitals, and schools, to dams and electrical grids. And although he stamped out political dissent, he opened the country to foreign investment and reformed the constitution to protect religious minorities, like Syria's dwindling Christian population.

Bashar came to power in 2000, the second-choice successor to his father (who had originally chosen his first-born son, Basil, for the presidency, until his untimely death in a car accident). Bashar's early presidency was marked by a restrained liberalism: the release of hundreds of political prisoners, a loosening of restrictions on political conversation, attempts to curtail widespread government corruption—a development many optimistically labeled the "Damascus Spring." Western observers, however, argue that this liberalism has diminished over Bashar's presidency, giving way to a resumption of police-state activity—surveillance of civilians, state-controlled media, political imprisonment and torture, etc. Syria, under both Assads, has long been condemned for gross human rights abuses.

Nevertheless, for Christians, both Hafez and Bashar ensured opportunities for religious, political, and economic freedom unparalleled elsewhere in the Middle East. Notes Joshua, "Christians can be found in every position: in the government and the Cabinet, in the military, in business."

"As a Christian," says Thomas, "I have more freedom in Syria under Assad than here in the U.S. under Obama." And, he argues, Bashar's Syria is, politically, very open: "Under Hafez, there was no political discussion permitted. Under Bashar, you can say anything, joke. You feel a lot of freedom." For Joshua, Thomas, and Syrian Christians like them, then, the protests taking place in certain parts of the country are worrying.

THE SYRIAN uprising began in March 2011 as demonstrators, calling for the release of political prisoners, marked a "Day of Dignity," coordinated, like many of the demonstrations that have characterized the so-called "Arab Spring," through social media. Eight days later government forces killed a number of protesters in Deraa, stoking further unrest. Attempting conciliation, the government released dozens of political prisoners and, a month later, lifted the country's state of emergency, which had been in force since 1963. In May, as tanks appeared in Homs, Deraa, and the suburbs of Damascus to quell intensifying anti-regime protests, Assad granted amnesty to the country's political prisoners.

A back-and-forth of bloody crackdown and conciliatory measures has characterized the government's response to the widespread protests. However, as the protests have intensified, the government response has become more brutal, and in January the government vowed an "iron fist" response. In Homs, an epicenter of anti-regime demonstrations, more than 200 people were killed in an attack on February 2, 2012. Protesters say that government forces have been shelling the city indiscriminately and snipers have been firing on women and children. But Joshua and Thomas are quick to point out that the matter of aggressor and victim is extremely complicated—and they blame Western media outlets for obscuring the facts. They say that the protesters are not peaceful demonstrators; they are firing on Syrian troops, who are, naturally, returning fire in self-defense. Syria's protests, says Thomas, "are not spontaneous. This did not just happen, say, because of the 'Arab Spring.' They [the protesters] made things happen. Everything was planned." And the "Free Syrian Army," a band of Syrian military defectors and others who have formed an independent militia to defend protesters against government forces? "Only a tiny portion are actually military defectors," says Thomas. "The vast majority are drifters, crazy, the down-and-out."

According to the UK-based Barnabas Fund, which aids Christian minorities facing persecution, Syria's Christian community has recently suffered several kidnappings, purportedly by the Free Syrian Army, which has demanded large ransoms. At least two of the kidnapping victims were killed after the money had been paid. "Some families," the organization reports, "are becoming so desperate that they tell the kidnappers to kill their loved one immediately rather than subjecting them to torture."

And what of the Syrian National Council, a coalition of anti-Assad Syrians in Turkey that bills itself as Syria's transitional government and the true representative of the Syrian people? The group is headed by Syrian academic Burhan Ghalioun, who has lived in France since 1978. Joshua scoffs. "The SNC claims to represent the people of Syria. Its leader, Ghalioun, has not even been in the country since the '70s. How can he claim to represent his country?"

Moreover, the fragmentation of the Free Syrian Army into several small, competing bands hints at the fracturing of the anti-Assad opposition, which, despite the government's severe tactics, has failed to organize into a unified front, permitting its goals—outside of the overthrow of the current regime—to remain vague. As the uprising intensifies and the country nears civil war, fissures are beginning to appear between pro-democracy demonstrators and Islamic extremists.

Also complicating the situation is the response of the international community. In May, the United States and the European Union tightened sanctions on Syria; by August, President Obama and European allies had called on Assad to step down. In October, a United Nations resolution condemning Syria failed; the Arab League suspended Syria and voted to impose sanctions in November. The following month Syria allowed Arab League observers to enter the country to monitor the situation; in January the monitors left because of the increasing violence. In February—on the day of the massive attack on Homs—Russia and China blocked a UN Security Council draft resolution condemning the Syrian government.

SYRIA'S GEOPOLITICAL significance as a strategically located, influential Middle Eastern power has frustrated unified international action. For the United States, Syria has been a longtime antagonist, despite the overtures Hafez made to Washington when the Soviet Union collapsed. Bashar's Syria comprises a fundamental threat to Middle Eastern stability and Western security. Syria is suspected of funneling arms to insurgents into post-Saddam Iraq; moreover, after a break in relations when the Soviet Union dissolved, Syria is again receiving economic and military assistance from Putin's Russia, whose oil interests are served by Syria's advantageous geography and whose anti-American military interests are served by a powerful Middle Eastern ally. (Russia recently sold $550 million worth of fighter jets to Syria.) Similarly with China, which has also made overtures in post-Qaddafi Libya. Finally—most importantly for Western security—Syria is the sole Arab supporter of the Iranian regime headed by Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, on the verge of acquiring nuclear weaponry, and non-Arab Tehran is unlikely to sacrifice this key ally, which supports its ideological interests.

Herein may lie the trouble for the Arab League, for whom an aggressive Iran threatens the sovereignty of the predominantly Sunni Muslim Arab states in the Middle East. Iran and Assad's Syria are bound by a shared Shiite Islam. Thus, the Arab League's condemnation of Syria can be seen as much more than a humanitarian concern.

It would seem, then, that America's interests would be best served by Assad's overthrow. However, the Obama administration has maintained that the Syrian conflict can be resolved without military intervention, a position many find incongruous given the administration's willingness to use force to oust Muammar Qaddafi from Libya to prevent a "humanitarian crisis." Why, they ask, was the administration willing to intervene in Libya to prevent killing yet remained unwilling to intervene in Syria, where the United Nations estimates 5400 people have already died since March of last year? For the United States, taking action now will likely require choosing which of two unpalatable alternatives is worse: a well-funded, internationally influential state sponsor of terrorism with close ties to Iran, or a rogue Islamist regime with access to Syria's extensive chemical weapons network, which may be willing to indiscriminately use or sell that technology.

"There is a problem," says Joshua, "there is blood. But not like we see in the media." They say the media and the Obama administration, by taking any steps toward Assad's removal, are making "a huge mistake," the same mistake they made one year ago as the "Arab Spring" took hold throughout the Middle East: backing protesters whose goals and motives are unclear. For Syria's Christians, America's approach to the "Arab Spring" showed that the United States preferred betraying dependable—if disreputable—allies for capricious demonstrators, permitting stable governments to be replaced with Islamic extremists. "The US sold out Mubarak. Who wants to align with America now? That is exactly what Arabic news is saying. They are worried that the US will sell them out in a moment."

Granted, the situation is different in Syria, where the present regime is not an ally and is decidedly anti-American. However, Joshua and Thomas firmly believe that whoever is next will be much worse. And for Syrian Chris-

tians, the unpredictability is precisely the problem. "Who's next? That is the crucial question. That is the question everyone needs to be asking." Syria's small Christian population, they say, watched what happened in Iraq, where 400,000 Christians fled the country following the downfall of Saddam Hussein (half of them into Syria), and in Egypt, where the country's Coptic Christian minority has become a target of Islamist violence since the ousting of Hosni Mubarak. "In Egypt, they are burning churches, burning Christian homes and business—200,000 have fled, and the rest cannot leave their homes," says Joshua. And, as the brothers observe, in the wake of the Mubarak regime, Islamist parties—chief among them the Muslim Brotherhood—have vaulted into power with huge popular support. Among the groups comprising the Syrian National Council is the Syrian arm of the Muslim Brotherhood. Thomas says that the driving Islamist force in the protests is obvious. "Look at the FSA [Free Syrian Army]: there is not a single Christian, not a person of any religion except Islam or ethnicity except Muslim. It is nothing but al-Qaeda-lite." And his worries may not be unfounded. US Director of National Intelligence James Clapper told Congress in February that al-Qaeda "is extending its reach into Syria" with help from Iran. According to Clapper, al-Qaeda is infiltrating anti-Assad groups, likely without their knowledge, increasing the possibility that extremists would fill the power vacuum that could occur should the Assad regime fall. Moreover, al-Qaeda head Ayman al-Zawahiri, who took over after the death of Osama bin Laden, has issued a video calling on Muslims to support the Syrian rebels. Joshua claims, furthermore, that al-Jazeera has manipulated coverage of the conflict to generate international sympathy for the rebels. Difficulty getting independent media into the country has made determining the extent of the situation challenging—thus the conflicting accounts of suburban skirmishes and widely divergent death estimates.

However, the brothers claim that the media distortion goes far beyond even this. "55 percent of Syrians support the regime, did you know that? Five million people have taken to the streets to show their support of Assad!" He is citing the recent YouGov Siraj poll commissioned by the Doha Debates, funded by the Qatar Foundation, and while the number of pro-Assad demonstrators is difficult to verify—some reports claim tens of thousands, some claim millions—it remains a fact that Assad enjoys widespread support. And for good reason, says Thomas. "Assad has accomplished many reforms that no one wants to talk about: elections for Syrian Congress, for instance. Syrians receive free education through college, free healthcare, a certain amount of food free; we have no income or property tax."

"The fact is," says Joshua, "there are no problems throughout most of the country."

THE IMMEDIATE fear for many, especially Syrian Christians, is civil war. "Civil war will be a disaster," declares Joshua. "It will kill the economy. It will lead to blood in the streets." And Bashar, Thomas says, is trying to avoid that. "Bashar is a nice guy, nothing like his father. He is well-educated, westernized—not at all like they make him out....Hafez would have killed everybody in a week." Yet as the international community applies pressure and violence increases within the country, civil war becomes more likely, and the threat of massive bloodshed looms. Syria's Christians, writes Kurt Werthmuller, Research Fellow at the Hudson Institute's Center for Religious Freedom, are "in an increasingly untenable position: they are caught between a minority-friendly and yet oppressive dictatorship; a mass uprising that is brave and legitimate, but with a growing armed faction; and the feared possibilities of sectarian violence in the short-term, and Islamist rule in the long-term."

"Syria will go back 1500 years if the regime falls," says Joshua.

For Syria's Christians, the threat is second-class citizenship, a drastic diminution—perhaps even annihilation—of their freedoms, and transformation of their historic homeland into an extremist caliphate. In Homs, where the fiercest fighting is occurring between rebel and government forces, 100,000 Christians are trapped in the city. That seems to be the situation for Syria's Christians nationwide. They are trapped, and there is nothing to do but to wait, hope, and pray.

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