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## Caveat: Realism, Reagan and Foreign Policy

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Haig, Alexander M., Jr. *Caveat: Realism, Reagan and Foreign Policy*. New York: Macmillan, 1984. 367pp. \$17.95

A reviewer must take the author's point of departure. Mr. Alexander Haig has written "a personal memoir . . . from the point of view of a participant" of his 18 months as Secretary of State. Here is no richly complex review of American foreign policy such as Mr. Henry Kissinger and his acolytes have given us, all the more valuable for being in not insignificant parts true. Nor is it a Chinese dynastic history (all passion, all thought removed) such as Mr. Cyrus Vance has given of his stewardship. A reviewer of the present book can fault the author's facts, point out discrepancies with other records, or carp at the author's performance. Several reviewers have done these and done them well (see Stanley Hoffman, "The Vicar's Revenge" in the *New York Review of Books*, 31 May 1984). Mr. Haig would disarm more serious comment by saying that what it was all about "belongs to future books."

We have here an operator. The word has a pejorative connotation, not always deserved. Like mercenaries, the operator too may "save the sum of things for pay." But, as with the soldier, there is a need to question the basis on which the operator acts. Here, Mr. Haig's book raises real questions.

His account of his defense before the Senate of his actions in the Watergate crisis (Watergate does not appear in the index) omits the

fateful line to Elliot Richardson about "your commander-in-chief orders you," and in the end reads like a German general officer's post-1945 defense: "I had not been there when the misdeeds took place."

When faced with the need to tell a new and supremely ignorant administration about the realities of East Asian policy, Mr. Haig missed the point. He saw China as a strategic partner able to balance the West's deficit with the Soviet Union. This never has been so. The rapprochement with China relieved the United States of a tremendous strategic burden but it added little to the West's scales. But Mr. Haig doesn't seem to see the larger question, to call in one totalitarian state to balance another totalitarian state is for democracies a very expensive business—witness the bill the USSR presented for the defeat of Hitler.

Mr. Haig's actions (and his account of them) on Nato problems does him credit and does little to give confidence in the judgment of his political masters. On Lebanon, Mr. Haig's instincts were good and certainly better than those of his superiors. But as usual, the emphasis was on dexterous operations, not a sound policy.

On the Falklands issue, Mr. Haig's account has been subjected to Pharisee-like examinations by the British. (*The Times Literary Supplement* has had a two months perils-of-Pauline review of Mr. Haig's role in the Peruvian initiative and the sinking of the *General Belgrano*.) The whole story belongs probably to one of those "future books," but Mr.

Haig's account seems fair, although he fudges somewhat on the actions of Americans at Buenos Aires, the United Nations and Washington. It might be noted that the publisher found it necessary to distribute errata sheets on the Falklands chapter, among others.

Mr. Haig's brief authority as "vicar" (he blames the word on Mr. Paul Nitze) was not a happy time and he gives us a disturbing view of how our foreign policy is made. His criticisms of the present administration's preoccupation with domestic affairs and public relations have been well publicized. Great powers cannot act that way for too long without paying a high price. One Washington luminary (the literate one) when reminded of a treaty commitment, replied, with lines from a 17th century play, "That was long ago and in a distant land. Besides, the wench is dead." Mr. Haig saw clearly what this attitude might mean at the end of the day.

It would be easy to dismiss Mr. Haig as tinkling brass (or, given his civilian status, as the clink of his gold wrist bracelet). To do so would not take account of the problem he faced in an administration that didn't like "furriners." But the baggage Mr. Haig brought to his task was equally heavy. Did he understand all that much about his own country? Consider his almost Marxian view of the American roles in the Korean and Vietnam Wars: he professes to believe that if the middle and upper classes of our society had been involved directly on the battlefields,

the United States would have followed different strategies or would "have pursued policies that would have preserved the American position without recourse to arms in the first place." This is sheer mindlessness. If Mr. Haig believes that Mr. Harry Truman or his successors embarked on wars in East Asia with a class view, then he has defined starkly for us the limits of an operator. Messrs. Baker, Deaver and Meese indeed may be "essentially public relations men" but good PR men (Mr. Haig described them as "wizards") know their product and its audience. Caveat may well be the word, and thus warned, we should look behind this tale, "neither autobiography nor formal history."

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Komer, Robert W. *Maritime Strategy Or Coalition Defense?* Cambridge, Mass.: Abt Books, 1984. 116pp. \$19

This is a spirited and thought-provoking defense of the Carter administration's "NATO-first" policy (which established the adequacy of US forces for the defense of Western Europe as the *sine qua non* for US military preparedness elsewhere), and a critique of the next Administration's "maritime strategy" that was very much a reaction to the perceived overemphasis of Western European defense at the expense of other areas. Komer, who was Defense Secretary Brown's under secretary for policy, deliberately avoids the historical contrast