

the grand narratives of all empires.

America's destruction of Iraq and Afghanistan mobilized the Muslim world against us, but more than that it put the global other on notice. For much of the West and most of Islam, the lie of modernity as American altruism is dying in Iraq. Americans care about the death of their soldiers but barely a whit for the destruction of a society wrought in the name of "democracy."

Our future now veers wildly from the Cold War's end, when our sacred narrative touched fulfillment. We thought we were moments from finishing the Lord's work. Now the Lord's work is killing Islamists.

A great nation continues to marshal its collective power, but it will face a changed world. There will still be grand nations like China, India, and others. The United States survives, in material terms greater than ever. But its war narrative has helped to birth a changed world and to cast off its claim to the universal. There will also be a weltering of new human combinations and re-combinations.

The subsiding of modernity may be liberating. Freed from the world center, we might find a safer place to survey an evolving humanity. No longer the object of all attack, we might productively rethink our national purpose. Old modernity's institutions and practices will be folded into, and thus partly lost within, a new world-cultural mix. This may not be our preferred outcome. But losing our claim to the universal opens the way to new realities. We might take comfort that American modernity will be a part of them.

We might take comfort too in being history's greatest midwife to change, if also to our own undoing. ■

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A special group at the CIA's Counter Terrorism Center, very similar to the group that tracked the activity of al-Qaeda through the 1990s, has been working on the Lebanese terrorist organization Hezbollah over the past three years.

In the wake of the failed Israeli incursion into Lebanon last summer, the White House asked these Hezbollah analysts to provide a comprehensive assessment of the organization, its tactics, and its leaders. A team of analysts headed by an experienced senior officer completed the report over a month ago and concluded, surprisingly, that Hezbollah is actually a collection of diverse interest groups, and its leader, Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah, far from being a fanatic controlled by Tehran, is a fairly nuanced and astute politician who has maintained his independence from the Mullahs. It also indicated that Hezbollah's threat to American interests has been seriously overstated. The report recommended that the U.S. government make an effort to establish a dialogue with Nasrallah in an attempt to moderate his organization's more extreme policies; it suggested strongly that Nasrallah would likely be receptive to such an approach. The more politically sensitized senior managers of the CIA analytical division took one look at the report, were shocked by its conclusions, and sent it back to the Counter Terrorism Center for reconsideration and redrafting in a form that would be more politically acceptable to the White House.



Reports that an Iranian scientist working on Iran's nuclear program has been assassinated by the Israeli intelligence service, Mossad, appear to be the latest in a series of deliberate fabrications.

Ardeshire Hassanpour, who died on Jan. 15, was an award-winning and internationally known scientist who worked at a plant in Isfahan where uranium hexafluoride gas is produced. The gas is used in the centrifuge-based enrichment process to generate nuclear fuel for the main Iranian research center at Natanz, and initial reports suggested that Hassanpour had died of "gas poisoning," though the Iranian authorities did not hint of any unusual circumstances or foul play. Hassanpour's death was first reported without additional comment by Prague-based *Radio Farda*, which broadcasts in Farsi into Iran and is funded by the U.S. Department of State. It was subsequently reported by the U.S.-based private information service Straffor, which has close ties to Israeli intelligence and suggested that the Mossad was possibly involved. The story was then picked up and further relayed by Rupert Murdoch's *Times of London*, which has often served as an outlet for Israeli disinformation and has also been reporting very alarming but usually erroneous information about Iran. Several U.S. intelligence sources believe that the Israelis have only limited intelligence capabilities inside Iran and that the story of Hassanpour's assassination is, in fact, a fabrication produced by Mossad to frighten Iranian scientists working on Iran's nuclear program, making them worry that they might be assassinated next. Hassanpour is certainly dead, but he most likely died in an accident, not because he was targeted and killed.

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Arts & Letters

FILM

[*The Last King of Scotland*]

A King Without a Kilt

By Steve Sailer

THE HOTTEST TREND on the London stage has been political drama offering fictionalized surmises about recent matters of state. Now playwright Peter Morgan's two fly-on-the-wall historical screenplays have brought this genre to the Oscar races, with Helen Mirren and Forrest Whitaker winning most of the early acting awards for, respectively, "The Queen" and "The Last King of Scotland."

Whitaker first made his mark in a brief scene in Martin Scorsese's 1986 pool shark movie, "The Color of Money," as a gentle giant who out-hustles (and out-acts) Paul Newman and Tom Cruise. He later starred as doomed saxophonist Charlie Parker in Clint Eastwood's "Bird" and directed the hit "Waiting to Exhale" but has been largely relegated to supporting roles too small for him.

The superstars who emerged in the 1930s, such as John Wayne, Jimmy Stewart, Gary Cooper, Cary Grant, and Clark Gable, tended to be imposing six-footers (when that was an unusual height). Yet even though the average American has gotten taller and fatter, leading men, such as Cruise, are now typically energetic little welterweights.

Whitaker finally enjoys a suitably beefy role in "Last King of Scotland" as

the 1970s Ugandan dictator with the surrealist name, Idi Amin Dada. At a self-proclaimed 6'2" and 220 pounds, Whitaker is still smaller than the real Amin, who was the most entertaining of all the monsters of the 20th century, a megalomaniacal cross between Joseph Stalin and Muhammad Ali. Sure, Idi was a semiliterate cannibal, but he was a likeable one.

Amin reveled in such self-bestowed titles as Lord of All the Beasts of the Earth and Fishes of the Sea and Conqueror of the British Empire in Africa in General and Uganda in Particular. An admirer of his former Scottish officers in the King's African Rifles—"I love *everything* about Scotland! ... Apart from red hair, which your women may find attractive but which in Africa is quite disgusting"—Amin saw himself as the natural leader of a Caledonian independence uprising: "the Last Rightful King of Scotland."

Although Whitaker is the frontrunner for the Best Actor Oscar, Amin technically is a supporting character. The fictional antihero protagonist—played well by young James McAvoy, who must be seven inches shorter and 80 pounds lighter than Whitaker—is a callow Scottish intern, who, like so many of his ancestors who built the British Empire, flees dour Presbyterian boredom for some fun in the tropical sun. While working in Uganda in 1971 as a mission doctor, idly trying to seduce his boss's wife, he's called to bandage the injured presidential wrist.

In Giles Foden's 1998 source novel, the Scottish doctor recalls, "I couldn't help feeling awed by the sheer size of him and the way ... he radiated a barely restrained energy. ... I felt—far from being the healer—that some kind of ele-

mental force was seeping into me." The doctor accepts Amin's impetuous offer to become his personal physician. He is soon advising Amin on policy, while trying to ignore the reports of political opponents being fed to the crocodiles, too mesmerized by the Big Man's outlandish charisma to flee.

"The Last King of Scotland" may be the best exploration yet of the Big Man syndrome, which, while most notorious for afflicting Africa, is hardly restricted to that continent. A Big Man's grandiose sense of entitlement assures him that he deserves to run things. What's odd is how often the rest of us, like McAvoy's doctor, agree with him, sometimes against our better instincts.

Big Men tend to be more masculine in physical and emotional traits like muscularity, self-confidence, and aggressiveness. But as the film illustrates, one of the strangest paradoxes about Big Men is how feminine their minds can be. Whitaker's Amin displays what would be called female intuition in anyone who's not such a mountain of a man. He can read the doctor's secrets off his face and then use his mercurial personality and verbal suppleness to charm and terrify him into obeying his sinister will rather than simply going home to sane Scotland.

Scottish director Kevin MacDonald, best known for the documentary "Touching the Void" about a mountain climber who saved himself by cutting the rope from which his friend dangled, shot "Last King" on location in Uganda to look like a slightly cheesy '70s blaxploitation flick. It's not a great film, but it is a memorable one. ■

Rated R for some strong violence and gruesome images, sexual content, and language.