Among the most memorable lines in English literature are those that William Shakespeare cast in the form of a query from his “star-cross’d” heroine in *Romeo and Juliet*:

What’s in a name? that which we call
a rose
By any other name would smell as sweet;
So Romeo would, were he not Romeo call’d,
Retain that dear perfection which he owes
Without that title...

As every student knows—or at least used to know before the professional educational bureaucracy threw out the literary canon along with virtually every other meaningful standard of excellence—Juliet means to tell Romeo that names are mere social conventions and that her affections were directed toward a person who happens to be surnamed “Montague” rather than the Montague name and certainly not the Montague family, rivals of her own Capulet clan. Unfortunately, the truth that the bard tried to communicate about the primacy of the substantial over the nominal has been largely ignored or forgotten by most newspaper reviewers of Norman Podhoretz’s new book, *World War IV: The Long Struggle Against Islamofascism*. By condescendingly focusing almost exclusively on the provocative title and subtitle of the work, these *bien-pensants* have largely failed to engage the substance of the argument that the writer, with his characteristic intellectual rigor and felicitous turn of phrase, has advanced.

To Podhoretz who, coincidentally, was serving on a jury at the courthouse on Centre Street in downtown Manhattan on September 11, 2001, and was on the street being evacuated when the second tower of the World Trade Center collapsed, the truth of what happened was as clear as the skies over New York that sunny morning: the United States was the victim of an act of aggression that “far from being the first salvo fired at us by an enemy as implacable as any we had ever faced, actually represented the culmination of a long series of attacks that we had insisted on treating not as deliberate acts of war demanding a military response but as common crimes or the work of rogue groups operating on their own that could best be handled by the cops and the courts.”

While the early stages of the enemy’s emergence were obscured as America’s foreign policy focus was primarily on the latter phases of the cold war, the record of administrations, both Democratic and Republican, in the face of Middle East terrorism in general and its predominant Islamist strain in particular, is pretty dismal. Notwithstanding the March 1973 hostage taking and later killing of U.S. Ambassador Cleo Noel and American diplomat George Curtis Moore (along with the Belgian *chargé d’affaires*) in Khartoum, Sudan, by the Black September faction, the Nixon administration established the first official dialogue with the Palestinians—and this despite the fact, attested to by a State Department report only declassified in 2006, that it knew from signal
intercepts that the operation “was planned and carried out with the full knowledge and personal approval of Yasir Arafat.” Things hardly improved during the brief tenure of Nixon’s successor since Gerald Ford’s advisers somehow convinced themselves that it would be politically risky for the president to involve himself directly with anything related to terrorism. The signal was quickly transmitted throughout the Beltway establishment, as evidenced by one episode I came across a few years ago while researching American policy toward terrorism: When the chair of the Ford administration’s own counterterrorism working group tried to convene a high-level task force on terrorism, the highest-ranking officials he managed to sign up were two deputy assistant secretaries, one from the Department of Justice and the other from the Department of Transportation. (The Justice Department’s representative, interestingly enough, was a 31-year-old associate deputy attorney general named Rudolph W. Giuliani, for whose presidential campaign Podhoretz serves as a senior foreign policy adviser.)

The Carter years were, of course, marred by the Ayatollah Khomeini’s Islamic Revolution in Iran and the subsequent seizure of the U.S. embassy in Tehran and humiliating 444-day captivity of America’s diplomats. Ronald Reagan would eventually prove to be more to Podhoretz’s liking: In World War IV, the author reviews his many criticisms of the fortieth president and forthrightly concedes that “they were right in almost every detail even though they were dead wrong about the ultimate effect” because Reagan’s acts proved to be “a series of prudential tactics within an overall strategy that in the end succeeded in attaining its great objective,” the end of the cold war by hastening the collapse of the Soviet bloc. Nonetheless Podhoretz does not pull his punches on the Reagan administration’s antiterrorism record: “Having cut and run in Lebanon in October [1983], Reagan again remained passive in December when the American embassy in Kuwait was bombed. Nor did he hit back when, hard upon the withdrawal of the Marines from Beirut, the CIA station chief there, William Buckley, was kidnapped by Hezbollah and then murdered.”

During George H. W. Bush’s four years in the White House, there were several attacks on Americans in the Middle East, but “none of these was as bloody as previous incidents, and none provoked any military response from the United States.” Bill Clinton was barely inaugurated when terrorists led by the blind sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman tried to blow up the World Trade Center with a truck bomb that killed “only” six people and wounded more than one thousand. Podhoretz excoriates Bill Clinton for being “so intent on treating the World Trade Center bombing as a common crime that for some time afterward he refused even to meet with his own CIA director,” R. James Woolsey, who believed that the culprits were connected with a then little known Islamist terrorist network headquartered in Sudan at the time called Al Qaeda. Over the course of the Clinton administration’s two terms in office, Al Qaeda hit U.S. missions and personnel repeatedly, including the simultaneous 1998 bombings of the embassies in Dar es Salaam and Nairobi and the 2000 attack on the U.S.S. Cole in Yemen. In Podhoretz’s view, America’s consistently insouciant response to terrorist attacks over the more than three decades leading up to 9/11 directly led to that morning’s attacks.

The sheer audacity of what bin Laden went on to do on September 11 was unquestionably a product of his contempt for American power. Our persistent refusal for so long to use that power effectively against him and his terrorist brethren—or to do so effectively whenever we tried—reinforced his conviction that we were a nation on the way down, destined to be defeated by the resurgence of the same Islamic militancy that had once
conquered and converted large parts of the world by the sword.

It is not surprising that Podhoretz offers a vigorous defense of President George W. Bush or, more precisely, the Bush Doctrine, constructing his edifice largely with elements threshed out over the course of the first five years after 9/11 in the pages of *Commentary*, the journal he edited from 1960 to 1995 and at which he remains editor-at-large. In Podhoretz’s parsing, the Bush Doctrine rests on four major pillars. The first is the rejection of moral relativism and the affirmation of universal judgments as in the president’s assertion: “We are in a conflict between good and evil, and America will call evil by its name.” The second pillar is, according to Podhoretz, a new understanding that “terrorists, with rare exceptions, [are] not individual psychotics acting on their own,” but “agents of organizations that depended on the sponsorship of various governments.” Thus “countries that gave safe haven to terrorists and refused to clean them out were asking the United States to do it for them, and the regimes ruling these countries were also asking to be overthrown in favor of new leaders with democratic aspirations.” The third pillar is the assertion that America would no longer wait to be attacked because, as Bush put it in his 2002 commencement address at West Point: “The war on terror will not be won on the defensive. We must take the battle to the enemy, disrupt his plans, and confront the worst threats before they emerge.” Finally, the United States would assist those nations that stood with it in this fight and oppose those that stood against it—thus the strong support of Israel and the conditioning of U.S. support for a Palestinian state on, in Bush’s words, “its leaders engage[ing] in a sustained fight against terrorists and dismantle [ing] their infrastructure.”

The bulk of *World War IV* consists of Podhoretz’s examination of the intense opposition that the Bush Doctrine has aroused across a broad spectrum. One does not have to agree with the president’s policy, much less with the tactical skill—or, rather, all too often lack thereof—with which his administration has pursued its chosen strategic objectives, to admire Podhoretz’s *tour de force* that tears through populist anti-Americanism and media mendacity on its way to answering the more elevated critiques of both left-wing and right-wing isolationists, liberal internationalists, realists, and, interestingly enough, even neoconservatives. Podhoretz, one of the charter members of the latter movement, comes close to sounding like a realist when taking younger neoconservative thinkers—including Michael Ledeen, Richard Perle, Max Boot, Joshua Muravchik, and Nicholas Eberstadt—to task for complaining that Bush has fallen short of his own ideals with respect to policy toward Iran, North Korea, and other strategic flash points, comparing his disciples to “utopians to whom pursuing a principled or idealistic policy necessarily precluded the prudential judgment that determined which fights to pick at a given moment and which to delay until the time was ripe, when to pause and when to advance, and which tactic was the right one to use in maneuvering on a particular front.”

With regard to realists, Podhoretz exhorts them to pay less attention to the school’s traditional theoretical preoccupations about stability and agnosticism about the internal character of sovereign states—he quotes Bush (“For decades free nations tolerated oppression in the Middle East for the sake of stability. In practice, this approach brought little stability and much oppression, so I changed this policy”)—and to be more attune to current realities. By way of illustration, Podhoretz approvingly quotes at length no fewer than five times throughout the book the perspectives of Amir Taheri, senior fellow of the National Committee’s Project on the Middle East: Islamic Law and Peace, on prospects for political reform in Muslim societies and notes that Henry Kissinger, described as “the universally acknowledged leader” of the realist school, came out in favor of using force
against Saddam Hussein and has been “adamant about the need to stay the course.” Kissinger himself, of course, is a bit more dispassionate in his reasoning than Podhoretz, writing in an International Herald Tribune op-ed article earlier this year that U.S. forces are not in Iraq “as a favor to its government or as a reward for its conduct. They are there as an expression of the American national interest to prevent the Iranian combination of imperialism and fundamentalist ideology from dominating a region on which the energy supplies of the industrial democracies depend.”

A central figure in the political and cultural debates of the country for almost half a century, Podhoretz is accustomed to controversy. Even those who are predisposed to agree with the course he would chart for America’s ship of state through the shoals ahead will beg to differ with some of the tacks Podhoretz adopts in World War IV.

First, the argument that he makes for numbering the current conflict IV, rather than III, is literarily elegant and intellectually compelling, but it is hard to see how it will prevail given that influential historiographers of the cold war like Melvyn Leffler and John Lewis Gaddis have never referred to the object of their inquiry as a “world war.” Quite simply, because we are not used to referring to the cold war as “World War III” and there seems to be no trends in that direction, I am not sure how “World War IV” will ever take, especially because, as Podhoretz’s own work attests, considerable currents have yet to be convinced that there is even war afoot, notwithstanding the formidable capacities that extremist Islamists can bring to bear beyond hit-and-run terrorism.

Second, Podhoretz is certainly right on that, pace Bush’s preferred designation of “Global War on Terror” (GWOT), the security of the United States is neither jeopardized by a generic tactic aimed at producing an emotional response (“terror”) nor even by any and all practitioners of said tactic (although America does not condone the actions of the Basque separatists of ETA or the Tamil Tigers, it also does not face existential threats from them). The threat is more specific: Podhoretz calls it “Islamofascism” because it “comes from a religious force that was born in the seventh century, that was schooled in the totalitarian ideologies of the twentieth, that went on to equip itself with the technologies of the twenty-first, and that is now striving mightily to arm itself with the weaponry of the twenty-first as well.” Precisely because this taxonomy—to say nothing of Podhoretz’s assessment of its significance—has been and is likely to continue to be hotly disputed, one would have wished that the author had devoted more pages to laying out his case for his chosen moniker. (On a slightly related point, a considerable annoyance with the text—no doubt the fault of some “bright” creature at Podhoretz’s publisher—is that it is totally bereft of references. The author’s erudition is clearly demonstrated by his fluid mastery of a veritable mountain of sources, but few anymore indeed are those who can easily claim the same breadth.)

Podhoretz draws a parallel between the Bush Doctrine and the Truman Doctrine and finds in that similarity a cause for mild optimism.

In 1947 we accepted the responsibilities of moral and political leadership that history “plainly intended” us to bear, and for the next forty-two years we acted on them. We may not always have acted upon them wisely or well, and we often did so only after much kicking and screaming. But acting on them we did. We thereby ensured our own “preservation as a great nation,” while also bringing a better life to millions upon millions of people in a major region of the world.

In the end, however, the question is not so much whether the United States and its allies have the political will and strategic resources to take up the burdens of leadership that the
present moment demands but whether we possess the intellectual rigor and moral clarity even to recognize that a challenge has been placed before us. If the answer ultimately proves to be affirmative, then Podhoretz’s little volume, whatever its shortcomings, will likely have played no small part.

—J. Peter Pham
Member, Board of Advisers
National Committee on American Foreign Policy
Director, Nelson Institute for International and Public Affairs
James Madison University

The Great Troublemaker: Reflections on the Iranian Question
by Therese Delpech
Paris: Grasset (2007), 216 pages

As war drums beat louder over Iran’s defiance of the United Nations, all interested powers are desperately looking for ways of avoiding an armed conflict. The problem, however, is that at least as far as the major powers are concerned, there is no consensus on the precise nature of the threat from Iran. The book reviewed here presents an attempt at filling that gap.

In his first major foreign policy speech, France’s new president, Nicolas Sarkozy, singled out Iran as the center of what could become the biggest crisis on the international scene. What Sarkozy did not do, however, was try to find out why. Like most other political leaders and analysts, Sarkozy singled out Tehran’s nuclear program as the cause of the looming crisis. That, however, is both too much and not enough. It is too much because it assumes that a country’s acquisition of a nuclear arsenal—supposing Iran is really doing that—is enough to transform it into a troublemaker. However, we know that at least 8 countries already have nuclear weapons and no fewer than 20 others have the technical and scientific base needed to produce them whenever they wish. Thus the simple fact of Iran’s going nuclear should not be a cause for concern. It is in that context that Sarkozy’s analysis is not enough, for he does not pose the real question, that is: What kind of Iran might end up with nuclear weapons?

Therese Delpech, a leading French researcher and expert in nuclear weapons, poses the question in her new book. In a sense this book is a sequel to Delpech’s essay “Iran and the Bomb” published in French and English last year. In that book, Delpech examined the international response to the Islamic Republic’s violations of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) that triggered the conflict with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and thence the United Nations. In this new book, Delpech tackles the more complex issue of the motivations of the current leadership in Tehran. Why did the “supreme guide” Ali Khamenehi, adopt President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s more radical stance? Why is Ahmadinejad prepared to risk sanctions or even war to maintain the Islamic Republic’s nuclear program on course?

The common view in the West is that President Ahmadinejad is a hothead novice suffering from an acute degree of hubris and thus acting irrationally. Delpech shows that, far from being irrational, Ahmadinejad plays a cool power game designed to exploit opportunities offered to the Islamic Republic by divisions among Western powers, disarray among Arab states, and the general weakness of state structures in the region.

Delpech writes: “Contrary to most countries that try to oppose its projects, Iran has a precise idea of what it wants: becoming the major power in the Middle East of the 21st century. Tehran’s