
FROM THE EDITORS

Myth, rumor and conspiracy have always played a role in world politics and policy, both within and among nations, but the nature and importance of that role is the subject of debate. The very notion of myth and conspiracy as a relevant focus of inquiry has itself been the topic of discussion. Some people create myths and weave conspiracies; some analyze them searching for the truth. Other observers of world affairs and policymakers belittle the whole concept of conspiracy and myth, preferring to create and project a myth of perfect transparency. Perhaps some of the disagreement is born out of a lack of consensus as to what constitutes a conspiracy as opposed to a compilation of misinterpreted and misreported facts. In this issue of *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs*, we explore the different ways myth and conspiracy affect policymaking and World Affairs.

Neil Livingstone's article "Terrorism: Conspiracy, Myth and Reality" explores how the debate surrounding international terrorism has been distorted by myths and conspiracies. He also examines how the political ideologies and the world views of observers and policymakers influence their willingness to weave intrigues or reject them.

W. Scott Thompson's piece reflects on his years as both an academic and a government official at the height of the Cold War. During this period he describes a psychological climate of paranoia and suspicion, in which Americans abroad were perceived as more than they appeared to be. It was also an environment in which the mere rumor of CIA affiliation was known to destroy one's credibility, if not one's entire career in the diplomatic arena.

Dardan Gashi, in his article "Myth, Wild Capitalism and Democracy in Albania," explores how mythic conceptions of democracy and capitalism simultaneously undermine the development of accountable government institutions and the rule of law while they contribute to false beliefs and expectations of how democracy and capitalism function.

In an interview for this issue, Frederick Smith discusses the perception that Americans, because of their technological prowess on the battlefield, can accomplish virtually any mission, even "walk on water," as some observers comment. Although such perceptions have worked in the United States' favor in numerous instances, this overestimation may lead U.S. armed forces into proverbial "mission creep" situations.

As the Twentieth Century draws to a close, distance on the Cold War allows for reflection on the role myth, rumor and conspiracy have had in shaping world events. We hope these articles spark interest and further debate.

The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs would like to thank our contributing writers and student editors who donated their time and energy to the production of the journal. We would also like to acknowledge our Advisory Board and express our appreciation for their sound counsel. Of course, we are deeply grateful to the staff and administration of The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy for their continued support.

