In *Homeland Security*, Michael Chertoff, former Secretary of the American Department of Homeland Security (DHS), revisits his years at the helm of that controversial agency and makes the case for why an activist security policy must not be banished from the American political landscape. A substantial academic literature has come into fashion recently to criticise risk-based security planning, claiming that overzealous security measures result from the logic of mitigating risk, which cannot be mitigated, thereby endlessly escalating security efforts. However, Chertoff champions a risk-management approach to security policy that seeks to resist both the hysteria that suffocates free societies and the complacency that ignores real dangers. Chertoff lays out his argument in a methodical and systematic fashion – threat by threat, response by response – producing an easily accessible glimpse into the Junior Bush cabinet, and perhaps into the future of American security politics. Readers may be surprised at how greatly Chertoff diverges from the Bush path. Though he never criticises his patrons directly, Chertoff repeatedly insists that the best security policy is a proactive one that eliminates the sources of enemies’ grievance. He is not afraid to call for improvements and he offers a refreshingly sober, non-dogmatic defence of some Bush-era policies, arguing calmly and sensibly for the lesser-evil instead of calling his critics as poor patriots or levelling some other petty accusation.

There is a strangely compelling dualism to Chertoff’s ideas. On the one hand, *Homeland Security* is a political manifesto that brings new life to the cause of compassionate conservatism. But those who read more deeply - and continue past the clichés at the start of the book – will find many subtle, and nuanced criticisms of the idealism and overkill that characterised the Bush security philosophy before 2004. What emerges is a highly dynamic, perhaps slightly enigmatic set of prescriptions reflecting the obstinate desire to continually reduce security vulnerabilities while also maintaining the social and economic benefits of an open society. Chertoff’s thoughts on terrorism are a good example. Chertoff’s initial recommendations for combating terrorist organisations and international criminal gangs are extremely predictable: force, intelligence, allies, etc. But he later emphasises the need to expose foreigners to America by welcoming the world to the country, and he calls for a drastic increase in the amount of Americans who do humanitarian work abroad. And though his reading of Islamism is uncompromising and contemptuous, he does not incite a full-frontal confrontation with Islam. Instead, Chertoff urges readers to understand Islamist thinking, and for America to act as a credible and upstanding role model that can attract more adherents than extremism. Chertoff takes a tough stand against terrorism and presents a fairly conventional, rigid picture of terrorist groups, but he keeps the preservation of an open society at the heart of his attack policy.

1 We should not forget that Chertoff is hardly a Bush crony. After the resignation of Tom Ridge (definitely a Bush man), the administration moved to appoint long-time ally Bernard Kerik to the post, who subsequently withdrew his candidacy over allegations that he hired an illegal immigrant as a nanny. More information subsequently surfaced, and in November 2009, Kerik was sentenced to more than two years in a federal prison. Chertoff, a Justice Department lawyer, was certainly a compromise candidate.
The tension between an aggressive security policy and the undesirable effects of smothered societies features prominently in the debate over border control and immigration policy. Chertoff provides questionable evidence to justify his claim that loose border control poses a real risk to America(ns), but once we know that this is his view, his approach to the situation seems measured and balanced. Chertoff shows a nuanced understanding that border security is a wasted effort if it denies America the extensive benefits that immigrants and travellers bring. It seems that Chertoff views technology as a step towards resolving this tension. For example, Chertoff trumpets his doubling of the border patrol force, but also prides himself on the installation of ‘21st century’ surveillance technologies like radar and unmanned aerial vehicles. He plainly states that technology is no replacement for a well-trained human contingent, though he views it as a critical tool in support of the human effort – one that can harden the cordon without unduly disturbing legal travellers (p. 40-45).

*Surveillance and Society* readers will be particularly interested in Chertoff’s discussion of identity-verification technology and surveillance-based intelligence acquisition. Because intelligence is proactive, Chertoff argues that surveying individuals permits security agencies to restrain themselves from casting a wider, more invasive security net (p. 105). On these grounds, Chertoff maintains that privacy arguments cannot restrict government’s intelligence-gathering powers, for the alternatives, like physical searches and a blanket security presence, are even less acceptable. But the suitable methods of surveillance are not detailed. Chertoff says nothing about blanket electronic surveillance like the kind conducted by the National Security Agency, for example. He does however speak extensively about identity management. Though his claim that terrorists ‘can kill by pretending to be who they are not’ (p. 112) is dubious, Chertoff produces an interesting legal defence for the state’s right to survey and control international travel. Chertoff refutes claims to an ‘unconditional right to anonymity’ by arguing that individuals can protect their right to anonymity when walking down the street, but that this privilege does not apply in a very restricted number of security spaces like border crossings where the state’s responsibilities to the collective obliges government to monitor and control entry. He then proceeds to call for a biometric identification system as a single screening method that is efficient, effective, and as non-intrusive as possible. Chertoff’s claim that ‘fingerprints don’t lie’ (p. 119) may not be entirely true, but the image of security self-restraint is not one we were accustomed to seeing in the Bush cabinet.

For his international strategy, Chertoff demands that all countries agree to ‘collect and share basic information about [airline] passengers’ but only because he feels that this practice enables broader restraint. If states can be held legally accountable for terrorism launched from within their borders – much like river dumpers are liable for water quality of those – Chertoff believes that the alienation driving American unilaterism can be defused, or at least greatly reduced, leading to more moderate security policies and the end of the imperial posture.

Chertoff shows an unexpected commitment to limiting the powers of the American government even on issues like border control, immigration policy, and international relations, where many Americans are far more conservative than mainstream Republicans. Ever dualistic, he writes one chapter about ‘Why Washington Won’t Work’ as the hub of security planning but hides a reasoned and sensible defence of the state’s indispensable role in his chapter on disaster management. It is impossible to tell whether Chertoff’s conservative or progressive face is more sincere. His departure from politics may not last long; the desire to please everybody may conceal his true beliefs. But where stories of the pre-Chertoff security dialogue as told in insider accounts by Richard Clark (2004) or the damning exposé offered by Bob Woodward (2004) tell of dogmatism and the out-of-hand dismissal of undesirable evidence, Chertoff provides a reasoned defence of his views, preferring argument to mantra even though the arguments are often weak. He skilfully defends himself against critics who accuse the Bush administration of pursuing the illusion of perfect security while subtly distancing himself from the burdensome idealism that produced the more draconian measures of the Bush presidency. This face of Chertoff reminds us non-Americans of where the centre of American politics really lies. That it is located far to the right of where we are used to finding it should not blind us to the fact that the increased monitoring and control individuals in society, especially
at the border, is highly desired in the United States, and that the measures Chertoff is proposing are restrained and moderate considering the broader context of the American political discussion.

References