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IN PART B6

**From:** Jake Sullivan [redacted]  
**Sent:** Thursday, December 16, 2010 7:06 PM  
**To:** H  
**Subject:** Fwd: FW: Richard (TNR)

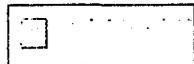
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I assume you saw this by now -- if not, it's worth a read.

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**From:** Sullivan, Jacob J <[SullivanJJ@state.gov](mailto:SullivanJJ@state.gov)>  
**Date:** Wed, Dec 15, 2010 at 1:21 PM  
**Subject:** FW: Richard (TNR)  
**To:** [redacted]

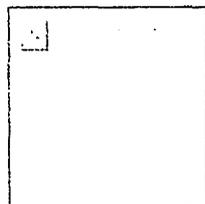
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Published on *The New Republic* (<http://www.tnr.com>)

## Richard

- Leon Wieseltier
- December 14, 2010 | 3:16 pm



Richard Holbrooke was a piece of work. He was a paradoxical man: a remarkably subtle thinker capable of the most egregious lack of subtlety, a brilliant diplomat with one of the least diplomatic temperaments anybody ever encountered. He was always cunning but never malevolent. Mentally, he was sleepless, relentlessly pondering the meanings of even the most trivial events and experiences. (An example: Decades ago Holbrooke was strolling down Madison Avenue with a friend. A man passed them and said "Hi, Dick". Holbrooke stopped in his tracks, turned to his friend, and said: "I wonder what he meant by that." Sleepless.) His powers of observation were extraordinary, the cognitive advantage of his utter extroversion; and they were matched by his massive powers of analysis, which never shut down. He was a disorderly man with an ordered mind; there was rigorous reflection at the heart of the whirlwind. He was, almost preposterously, in constant motion, a stranger to calm, a bull in search of a china shop; but in his thinking, and in his commitment to his country, he was one of the steadiest men on earth.

The legend of his career, and the flamboyance of his person, has obscured a proper recognition of his commitments. Holbrooke was not only a student of power; he was also a creature of beliefs. What he believed in most of all, I think, was in the ability, and the duty, of the United States, by a variety of means, to better the world. He was, in his cast of mind, a realist, but his cast of mind was not his philosophy: this realist—the Democrats' most accomplished Machiavellian—was always returning to first principles, to moral considerations, to the alleviation of human suffering and the spread of political liberty as goals of American statecraft. He came away from his early years in Vietnam with lessons but without a syndrome. He was unanguished about the use of American force, when it was morally justified and intelligently applied—which is to say, he was the last of the postwar liberals. Even in his most virulent criticism of what he regarded as America's military mistakes abroad, there was not a trace of the temptation to surrender a high sense of America's role in history. Isolationism disgusted him. He had a natural understanding, it was almost an attribute of his character, of the relationship between diplomacy and force. He had no illusions about the harshness of the world, and therefore about the toughness that is required for the creation of a world less harsh. His last assignment, the increasingly Sisyphean attempt to bring Afghanistan into the community of open and decent societies, was a bet on this sober and unsentimental optimism. He cared famously about what worked, and he could be brazen in his pragmatism, but Holbrooke's professional life was animated by goals and concepts that no mere pragmatist could share. American interventionism, for him, was not just a policy; it was a way of existing responsibly in the world, the measure of a national (and personal) ideal, the real greatness of a great power.

It was this rare package of means and ends, of ideas and instruments, that made possible Holbrooke's triumph at Dayton. He negotiated a peace with a villain whom he deeply despised, and thereby ended a genocide in which we, the United States, and an administration from his own party, had outrageously acquiesced. In this way he helped to restore the honor of his country after a period of disgrace. On the day that Holbrooke suffered the cataclysmic collapse from which he never recovered, *The New York Times* reported that Henry Kissinger—the Republicans' most accomplished Machiavellian—remarked in 1973 that "if they put Jews into gas chambers in the Soviet Union, it is not an American concern. Maybe a humanitarian concern." Such unforgettably filthy words would never have crossed Richard Holbrooke's lips. In government and out, not least in his groundbreaking work at Refugees International, his career was a loud and effective refutation of that chilling "maybe."

He was also an intellectual. He edited, he wrote (for my pages, too), he read. He raised a lasting institution of intellectuality in the American Academy in Berlin. His renowned attraction to journalists was not just a more or less charming campaign of spin; in his unslakable desire for the latest news and the immediate interpretation of it, he was one of their company. There was so much about which this genuinely cosmopolitan man did not need to be briefed. He had an appetite for complexity, though it never crippled him in his practice. It was Holbrooke, more than anybody else, who focused American planning upon the most disturbing contemporary complexity of all: the grim fact that the pursuit of our national security in Central Asia depends as much, if not more, upon Pakistan than upon Afghanistan. And after he edited and wrote and read, and before, and during, he talked. Holbrooke's talk was a kind of rolling chronicle of his times, a rush of concepts and gossip, brash, probing, impatient, occasionally outrageous, with a fine feeling for absurdity in the mix—the richest display of his prodigious vitality. He was faster on his feet than anybody I have ever known. It was a joy, and an amusement, to behold.

We were friends for almost three decades. He was a constant source of fascination—I had never before encountered such a union of intrigue and idealism; but mostly he inspired admiration and affection. Now the unstoppable man has been stopped, and the man who was everywhere is nowhere. If only he could have gotten the angel of death around a table....

*Leon Wieseltier is the literary editor of The New Republic.*

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