

ANTONIO MARIA COSTA

THE CHECKMATE PENDULUM

AEF MORINGA

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The Checkmate Pendulum

This is a work of fiction based on personal experience. The names and attributes of individual characters come from the author's imagination. Any resemblance to actual persons is unintended and coincidental.

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PREFACE

The writing of *The Checkmate Pendulum* began a quarter century ago, in the '90s when I was Director General for Economics and Finance at the EU Commission in Brussels. At that time, three related events shocked the world: the U.S.S.R. collapsed, Germany was reunited, and the EU single currency was planned. Personal notes taken during confidential negotiations associated with these developments provide some of the background material for the novel, a fictional representation of international affairs that has lost none of its actuality.

In the late '90s, as Secretary General of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) in London, I was in an ideal position to gather evidence that financial crises have common causes: bankers' greed, regulators' complacency, and politicians' ineptitude. To expose these behaviors and contain their damage, the novel publicizes the *Mammon Prize for Outstanding Greed*. As set forth in the *Mammon* bylaws, "the award brings to public attention the year's most outrageous personification of financial voracity – people who exploit public trust to enrich themselves, in money and power, beyond reasonable expectations."

The novel's epic conclusion, rich in revelations and implications, was written – and it could not be otherwise – when I served as the 'UN drug czar,' namely as the Under-Secretary General in charge of fighting drugs, crime and terrorism at the United Nations.

The only part of *The Checkmate Pendulum* that does not come from my personal experience is the military confrontation that ends the nuclear intrigue. The air battle is narrated on the basis of tactical plans designed by NATO jet-fighter pilots.

Over the years the book had different titles: *In the Name of the Fathers*, *Vae Victis*, *History Won't Forget*, *A European Drama*. The final title captures two themes that dominate world

affairs: the winner takes-all (hence, the checkmate notion) and the historical inevitability that winners and losers alternate (the pendulum).

The novel's subtitle remained unchanged throughout because I believe that the separation between *fiction* and *reality* is a value judgment. In fact, although this complex story is a work of imagination, most of its components correspond to real life. The situations characters confront, the settings they operate in, and the issues they debate, are real – as I have known them, and as they still are.

Look at the daily headlines: low growth and mass unemployment in the EU, sovereign near-bankruptcies, the preponderant role of Germany in a weak Europe, Russia's neo-imperialism, religious wars in the Middle East, the realignment of power between the U.S. and China. And much more. The book is an imaginative dive behind these realities. The protagonist, a celebrated TV journalist, has access to world leaders – and through the reporter's lenses and microphones, the reader sees these VIPs in action, understands their motives, and listens to their not-for-attribution remarks.

The interaction engineered between the financial, the nuclear and the cyber sub-plots evolved in countless versions and protracted discussions with a large number of people. Draft after draft, my mentors remained faithful to the task. In fact, their number increased with each revision to the point that what started as one person's fictional musing has evolved into a global undertaking of skills, interests and commitment.

My wife Patricia, mother and scholar, followed the project from the outset. Not only did she dissect, comment and edit the text, she tolerated the countless hours I spent writing instead of being with family, always with a smile and a word of encouragement. Cristiana, Daniele and Patrick – our children who lived through the pains of a frequently absent father – also contributed valuable observations.

My friend Scott Sullivan, *Newsweek's* former European bureau chief in Paris, worked on a very early draft of the novel. Scott's journalistic style shaped the main character's interviews and media stunts. The unforgettable Flora Lewis and Leonard Silk, of *The New York Times*, supported the project at

the outset with advice and constructive suggestions. Another late friend, Monika Forndran, provided invaluable comments on an early draft. Kathleen Millar, a former UN colleague, worked on later texts, improving the writing and the characterization. I owe Kathleen special thanks for the excellent insights she offered about global politics and international affairs. Vivi and Jean-Michel Bock read and re-read the manuscript, painstakingly correcting material errors until the very end. Between an expedition in Africa and a mission in Asia, photographer Alessandro Scotti had time to advise on how to position the novel with agents and find original angles for the media launch.

Massimo Pellegrino, Technical Director of the Feltrinelli publishing house, advised on the best way to handle the interaction between virtual and paper publication, as well as selecting the printer and the printing criteria. Massimo and Luca Zanini, of Zanini Design, imaginatively transferred the matter and the spirit of the novel into the cover and the website design. Barbara Griffini, a literary agent with B&G in Milan, commented on an earlier draft and was instrumental in my decision to publish the novel with Amazon. Kate Connelly (formerly with Vesalius College in Brussels and now with the Hong-Kong University), and John Blazek proof-read the manuscript with meticulous professionalism.

This book covers huge ground, much of it technical in nature. I'm indebted to the talented economists who sharpened the book's theoretical foundations: Jorge Braga de Macedo (Nova School of Business and Economics, Lisbon), Bruno Contini (University of Torino) and Alberto Quadrio Curzio (Catholic University, Milan). Michael Palo (Vesalius College, Brussels) commented on the geo-strategic aspects of the story, providing useful insights, and an intriguingly stylized summary. Karl P. Sauvant, a former UN colleague now at Columbia University, and Franz Baumann, a senior official at the UN Secretariat in New York, helped improve my understanding of the "German question," especially the pride and the torment of the generation that followed WWII. Franz also proved to be a formidable text-editor in four languages.

Patrizio Civili and Douglas O. Walker, other former UN colleagues and great friends, provided their experienced views of the world. Walter Kemp, former speechwriter and spokesman at UNODC, was among the first to recognize how the fictional aspects of this book were turning into reality.

Other friends followed this writing over the years, offering constructive suggestions and a vast array of expertise (chess gaming, stock market models, applied psychology, subliminal communication) and technologies (IT, filming & recording equipment, armaments, air warfare) that were never part of my professional training. Col. Giuseppe Macolino, formerly with the Italian Air Force, made sure that the plane near-crash described in the book is realistically narrated. Patrick O'Donnell, Wolfgang Schaefer and a number of former and current NATO air force pilots designed the military event in the skies over Ukraine. The imaginative, yet realistic tactics they elaborated to represent that three-way confrontation gave rise to a still current debate within NATO military circles: could an air battle really be conducted this way?

The Academy Award winning director Terry George read, commented and provided redrafting suggestions. His recommendation to turn the book into a film script is my next project. Franco Guarino, explorer, reporter and friend, as well as Fabrizio Lonis of the Italian state network RAI provided the video-clips being used for the book promotion.

This book is about people in the media – on air, on line, in print. By means of oral and written exchanges, interviews and meetings, a score of media friends influenced different parts of narrative as they relate to the main character, who is himself a celebrated broadcaster. Jim Clancy of CNN advised and contributed language for a shaper characterization of the protagonist. Christiane Amanpour and Becky Anderson frequently invited me to talk about international trafficking and money-laundering issues that are at the core of the novel. At BBC Lyse Doucet and my *Hard Talk* host Zeinab Badawi interviewed me periodically on drug and crime matters relevant to the book's story-line. Other networks, and some of their broadcasters, provided air time to debate a variety of subjects

presented in the novel: CBS 60 Minutes; RAI (Gaetano Barresi, Duilio Giammaria), Canal+ (Marianne Kerfriden of Magne-toPress); Euronews (Paul Hackett) and Radio Vaticana.

Friends from the print media have been the source of facts and commentaries. I thank some of the prestigious signatures at the *Financial Times* (Samuel Brittan, Wolfgang Münchau, Philip Stephens, Martin Wolf), *The International New York Times* (Paul Krugman, Jack Ewing), *Le Soir* (Alain Lallemand), *El País* (Quino Petit), *La Repubblica* (Daniele Mastrogiacomo, Gianpaolo Cadalanu), *l'Avvenire* (Vincenzo Rosario Spagnolo, Lorenzo Servadio), *Il Sole/24Ore* (Alessandro Merli), *Le Monde*, *L'Osservatore Romano* and the weekly papers *The Economist* and *Business Week* for their insights into contemporary politics and finance. I mention individual newspapers in the novel but no individual writers, although my intellectual debt to them is considerable.

Over the course of my career, I was fortunate to work in reputed institutions with technically competent and personally amicable professionals. I thank these colleagues anonymously because of the delicate nature of their advice. Staff at the OECD, NATO, EBRD, OSCE, ECB and its national central banks, Treasury and Finance ministries throughout Europe, the EU Commission, the EU Council, the EU Parliament, the Russian Foreign Ministry, and Sherpas from G7 countries offered honest advice, helping me while pursuing their organizations' mission. My debt towards friends and former colleagues at the United Nations, and its system of agencies, is equally enormous.

I also benefited from the opportunity to present parts of this book at:

- the Centesimus Annus Pro Pontefice Foundation Conference in Rome, 9 May 2014
- the ECAD Mayors Conference in Stockholm on 19 May 2014
- the Gruppo Etica, Cultura e Finanza in Milan on 27 November 2013
- the Drug Conference in Cascais, Portugal, on 18 October 2013
- the IPI meeting on the political economy of crime, in Vienna on 14 May 2013

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- the Ditchley Foundation Conference of 2 December 2012
- the Committee on Crime, Corruption and Money-laundering (CRIM) of the EU Parliament on 12 November 2012.
- the Chatham House Debate of 2 July 2012
- the IQ2–Google Conference in London on 13 March 2012
- the anti-corruption Symposium at the Harvard International Law Journal in Cambridge (Massachusetts) on 20 Feb 2012
- the Hearing at the House of Lords on 16 November 2011
- the Cambridge Union Debate on 2 December 2011
- the Lewis & Clark International Affairs Symposium in Portland (Oregon) on 5 April 2011.

Some of the more philosophical thoughts reflected in the book were presented in the Francesco Vito *Lectio Magistralis* at the Catholic University of Milan, in November 2009, and at the Universidad del Magdalena *Laurea Honoris Causa*, in Colombia, on February 2005.

Antonio Maria Costa
September 1, 2014

to Patricia with love

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