

PASSPORT



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In this issue of *Passport*

- The Kennedy Withdrawal
- Revisting Iraq, 20 Years Later
- Requiem for a Field

...and so much more!

Passport

THE SOCIETY FOR HISTORIANS OF AMERICAN FOREIGN RELATIONS REVIEW



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President John F. Kennedy meets with the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Maxwell D. Taylor and Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara at the White House on Oct. 2, 1963. Abbie Rowe, National Park Service, in the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum.

Passport Editorial Office:

Andrew Johns
Department of History
Brigham Young University
2161 JFSB, Provo, UT 84602
andrew_johns@byu.edu
801-422-8942

SHAFR Business Office:

Amy Sayward, Executive Director
Department of History
Middle Tennessee State University
1301 East Main Street, Box 23
Murfreesboro, TN 37132
Amy.Sayward@shafir.org
615-898-2569

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Contributors
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Aaron Bateman is Assistant Professor of History and International Affairs at George Washington University. His first book, *Weapons in Space: The Rise and Fall of the Strategic Defense Initiative*, is currently in production with MIT Press.

Daniel Bessner is Associate Professor in the Henry M. Jackson School of International Studies at the University of Washington, and a Non-Resident Fellow at the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft. He is the author of *Democracy in Exile: Hans Speier and the Rise of the Defense Intellectual* (2018) and co-editor (with Nicolas Guilhot) of *The Decisionist Imagination: Sovereignty, Social Science, and Democracy in the Twentieth Century* (2019).

Moustafa Bayoumi is Professor of English at Brooklyn College, City University of New York. He is the author of the critically acclaimed *How Does It Feel To Be a Problem?: Being Young and Arab in America* (2008), which won an American Book Award and the Arab American Book Award for NonFiction, and *This Muslim American Life: Dispatches from the War on Terror* (2015), which was also awarded the Arab American Book Award for NonFiction.

Michael Brenes is Interim Director of the Brady-Johnson Program in Grand Strategy and Lecturer in History at Yale University. He is the author of *For Might and Right: Cold War Defense Spending and the Remaking of American Democracy* (2020). His next book (coauthored with Van Jackson) is titled *The Rivalry Peril: How Great Power Competition Threatens Peace and Weakens Democracy*, and will be published by Yale University Press in 2024.

Philip E. Catton is Professor of History at Stephen F. Austin State University. He is the author of *Diem's Final Failure: Prelude to America's War in Vietnam* (2002). He is currently working on a study of the population movement from North to South Vietnam in the period 1954-55.

Jessica Chapman is Professor of History at Williams College, where she teaches courses related to US foreign relations, decolonization and the Cold War, the Vietnam War, sport and diplomacy, and Cold War studies. She is the author of *Cauldron of Resistance: Ngo Dinh Diem, the United States, and 1950s Southern Vietnam* (2013) and *Remaking the World: Decolonization and the Cold War* (2023), as well as articles in *Diplomatic History*, *The Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, and a variety of edited volumes.

Elizabeth C. Charles is a historian in the Office of the Historian at the U.S. Department of State. She researches and compiles the *Foreign Relations of the United States* series, and has completed volumes on the Soviet Union, 1983-1985; the Soviet Union, 1985-1986; and the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, 1984-1989. She is currently researching in the George H.W. Bush records on the collapse of the Soviet Union. She finished her Ph.D. in modern Russian and Cold War history at The George Washington University in 2010.

Tizoc Chavez is Visiting Assistant Professor of Government at Colby College. He teaches and researches the U.S. presidency, diplomacy, and U.S. foreign policy, and received his Ph.D. in History from Vanderbilt University. He is the author of *The Diplomatic Presidency: American Foreign Policy from FDR to George H. W. Bush* (2022).

Susan Colbourn is Associate Director of the Program in American Grand Strategy at Duke University. She is the author of *Euromissiles: The Nuclear Weapons That Nearly Destroyed NATO* (2022).

Amanda C. Demmer is Associate Professor of History at Virginia Tech University. She is the author of *After Saigon's Fall: Refugees and U.S.-Vietnamese Relations, 1975-2000* (2021).

Aaron Donaghy is Lecturer in Modern History at the University of Limerick. He is the author of *The Second Cold War: Carter, Reagan, and the Politics of Foreign Policy* (2021) and *The British Government and the Falkland Islands, 1974-79* (2014). He is a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society.

Jessica Elkind is Associate Professor of History at San Francisco State University, where she teaches courses on the United States in the world and Southeast Asian history. Her publications include *Aid Under Fire: Nation Building and the Vietnam War* (2016) as well as articles in *Diplomatic History* and edited volumes. She is currently working on a study of U.S. nonmilitary involvement in Cambodia during the 1970s and an updated edition of a textbook on the history of American foreign relations.

Jacob Forward is a graduate student at King's College, Cambridge. He received his B.A. from the University of Oxford where he was named a Scholar of Keble College. He has worked for History & Policy at the Institute for Historical Research in London, and he focuses on terrorism and the state, and modern U.S. political and institutional history.

Mary Ann Heiss is Professor of History at Kent State University. She is the author of *Fulfilling the Sacred Trust: The UN Campaign for International Colonial Accountability during the Era of Decolonization* (2021) and *Empire and Nationhood: The United States, Great Britain, and Iranian Oil, 1950-1954* (1997). She serves as president of SHAFR in 2023.

William Hitchcock is James Madison Professor of History and Director of the Governing America in a Global Era program at the University of Virginia. He is the author or editor of eight books including, most recently, of *The Age of Eisenhower: America and the World in the 1950s* (2018).

Andrew Hunt is Professor of History at the University of Waterloo in Waterloo, Ontario, with a focus on modern U.S. cultural history. He is the author of *We Begin Bombing in Five Minutes: Late Cold War Culture in the Age of Reagan* (2021), of the forthcoming *Beatlemania in America: Fan Culture From Below*.

William Inboden is Associate Professor of History and Public Affairs at the LBJ School, and Executive Director of the Clements Center for National Security, both at the University of Texas at Austin.

Ryan M. Irwin is Associate Professor of History and Director of the Institute for History and Public Engagement at the University at Albany, SUNY. He is the author of *Gordian Knot: Apartheid and the Unmaking of the Liberal World Order* (2012).

Andrew Johnstone is Associate Professor of American History at the University of Leicester. He is the author of *Dilemmas of Internationalism: The American Association for the United Nations and U.S. Foreign Policy, 1941-1948* (2008) and *Against Immediate Evil: American Internationalists and the Four Freedoms on the Eve of World War II* (2014), as well as the co-editor of *U.S. Presidential Elections and Foreign Policy: Candidates, Campaigns, and Global Politics from FDR to Bill Clinton* (2017, with Andrew Priest) and *The U.S. Public and American Foreign Policy* (2010, with Helen Laville).

Osamah Khalil is Associate Professor of History and Chair of the Undergraduate International Relations Program at Syracuse University's Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs. He is the author of *America's Dream Palace: Middle East Expertise and the Rise of the National Security State* (2016) and the editor of *United States Relations with China and Iran: Toward the Asian Century* (2019). His forthcoming book examines the relationship between domestic politics and U.S. foreign policy from JFK to Biden.

Carly A. Krakow is a writer, journalist, and faculty member at NYU's Gallatin School. She is completing her Ph.D. in International Law at the London School of Economics as a Judge Higgins Scholar and Modern Law Review Scholar. Her writing has appeared in publications including the *Washington Post*, *Al Jazeera*, *The Progressive*, *Opinio Juris*, *Jadaliyya*, *openDemocracy*, *E-International Relations*, and the academic journal *Water*. You can read more about her work at www.carlykrakow.com.

Catherine Lutz is Thomas J. Watson Jr. Family Professor Emerita of Anthropology and International Studies at Brown University, where she co-founded the Costs of War Project. She is the author of numerous books on the U.S. military and its bases and personnel, including *Homefront: A Military City and the American 20th Century* (2001). She has consulted with the United Nations on sexual exploitation and abuse among peacekeepers and with the government of Guam on the U.S. military's environmental and social impact. She is past president of the American Ethnological Society and has been a Guggenheim Fellow and a Radcliffe Fellow.

Evan D. McCormick is an Associate Research Scholar at Incite at Columbia University.

Chester Pach teaches U.S. foreign relations and recent U.S. history at Ohio University. Among his most recent publications are "The Long Goodbye: Mourning and Remembering Ronald Reagan," in *Mourning the Presidents: Loss and Legacy in American Culture*, eds. Lindsay M. Chervinsky and Matthew R. Costello (2023) and "Ronald Reagan's Noble Causes," Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation and Institute, <https://www.reaganfoundation.org/reaganinstitute/scholarlyinitiatives/essayseriesonpresidentialprinciplesandbeliefs/peacerestorethemarkingofsaftyaugust181980/>.

Zaynab Quadri is a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Mershon Center for International Security Studies at The Ohio State University. She received her Ph.D. in American Studies from The George Washington University. Her book manuscript analyzes private military contracting in the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars, and in the history of the post-1945 U.S. security state. Her work has been published in *American Quarterly* and the *Journal of Transnational American Studies*.

Zainab Saleh is Associate Professor of Anthropology at Haverford College. She is the author of *Return to Ruin: Iraqi Narratives of Exile and Nostalgia* (2021), which received the 2022 Evelyn Shakir Non-Fiction Award from the Arab American National Museum in the United States. Currently, she is working on a book project titled, *Uprooted Memories: Citizenship, Denaturalization, and Deportation in Iraq*.

Jayita Sarkar is Associate Professor of Economic and Social History at the University of Glasgow. She is the author of *Ploughshares and Swords: India's Nuclear Program in the Global Cold War* (2022). Before joining Glasgow, she was Assistant Professor at Boston University's Pardee School of Global Studies.

John Sbardellati is Associate Professor of History at the University of Waterloo in Ontario, Canada. He is the author of *J. Edgar Hoover Goes to the Movies: The FBI and the Origins of Hollywood's Cold War* (2012). He received his Ph.D. from the University of California, Santa Barbara, in 2006. His current research focuses on race in American Cold War culture.

Marc Selverstone is Professor and Director of Presidential Studies at the University of Virginia's Miller Center of Public Affairs, where he also cochairs the Presidential Recordings Program. He is the author of *The Kennedy Withdrawal: Camelot and the American Commitment to Vietnam* (2022); *Constructing the Monolith: the United States, Great Britain, and International Communism, 1945-1950* (2009), which received SHAFR's Stuart L. Bernath Book Prize; editor of *A Companion to John F. Kennedy* (2014); and general editor of the *Presidential Recordings Digital Edition* (2014).

Heather Marie Stur is Professor of History at the University of Southern Mississippi and codirector of the Dale Center for the Study of War & Society. She is the author of several books including, most recently, *Saigon at War: South Vietnam and the Global Sixties* (2020). Her forthcoming book is *21 Days to Baghdad: General Buford Blount and the 3rd Infantry Division in the Iraq War* (2023).

Salim Yaqub is Professor of History at the University of California, Santa Barbara. He is the author of *Containing Arab Nationalism: The Eisenhower Doctrine and the Middle East* (2004), *Imperfect Strangers: Americans, Arabs, and U.S.-Middle East Relations in the 1970s* (2016), and *Winds of Hope, Storms of Discord: The United States since 1945* (2023).

Gail E.S. Yoshitani is Professor of History and Head of the Department of History at the United States Military Academy at West Point. She is the author of *Reagan on War: A Reappraisal of the Weinberger Doctrine, 1980-1984* (2011) and coeditor of *The West Point History of Warfare, Vol. 4, Warfare since 1945* (2015), which won the Society for Military History and George C. Marshall Foundation Prize for the Use of Digital Technology in Teaching Military History. She was awarded The Order of the Archangel Gabriel–Bronze from the United States Military Strategists Association for her contributions as a Fellow, Chief of Staff of the Army's Strategic Studies Group (2017).

Xiaochen Zhu is a graduate student at King's College, Cambridge. He received his B.Sc. from the School of Informatics, University of Edinburgh. He has worked for the Dialogue System and Machine Learning research group at Heinrich Heine University Düsseldorf. He currently focuses on the causality and explainability of large language models for better conditional generation.

ATTENTION SHAFR MEMBERS

The 2023 SHAFR election is upon us. As is traditional, *Passport* is publishing copies of the candidates' biographies and statements by the candidates for president and vice-president, as well as biographies for the candidates for Council and the Nominating Committee, as a way to encourage members of the organization to familiarize themselves with the candidates and vote in this year's elections. Additional information, including brief CVs for each candidate, will be available on the electronic ballot.

"ELECTIONS BELONG TO THE PEOPLE. IT'S THEIR DECISION. IF THEY DECIDE TO TURN THEIR BACK ON THE FIRE AND BURN THEIR BEHINDS, THEN THEY WILL JUST HAVE TO SIT ON THEIR BLISTERS."

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

"THE EXERCISE OF THE ELECTIVE FRANCHISE IS A SOCIAL DUTY OF AS SOLEMN A NATURE AS [A PERSON] CAN BE CALLED TO PERFORM."

DANIEL WEBSTER

Passport would like to remind each member of SHAFR that voting for the 2023 election will begin in early August and will close on **September 30, 2023**. Ballots will be sent electronically to all current members of SHAFR. If you are a member of SHAFR and do not receive a ballot by the beginning of September, please contact the chair of the SHAFR Nominating Committee, Kathleen Rasmussen (rasmussenkb@state.gov), as soon as possible to ensure that you are able to participate in the election.

Last year in the 2022 SHAFR election, only 286 members of SHAFR voted—the lowest percentage of voter participation in nearly a decade. *Passport* urges each member of SHAFR to take the time to participate in our organization's self-governance this year. As we know, elections have consequences.

"WE DO NOT HAVE GOVERNMENT BY THE MAJORITY. WE HAVE GOVERNMENT BY THE MAJORITY WHO PARTICIPATE."

THOMAS JEFFERSON

2023 SHAFR ELECTION CANDIDATES

PRESIDENT

MITCHELL LERNER, THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

VICE PRESIDENT/PRESIDENT-ELECT

MELANI McALISTER, GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY
JEREMI SURI, UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

COUNCIL (AT-LARGE)

BROOKE L. BLOWER, BOSTON UNIVERSITY
ALEX MARINO, UNITED STATES ARMY WAR COLLEGE

COUNCIL (AT-LARGE)

CHRISTOPHER McKNIGHT NICHOLS, THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
BRAD SIMPSON, UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT

COUNCIL (GRADUATE STUDENT)

CHRIS HULSHOF, UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN, MADISON
DANTE LARICCIA, YALE UNIVERSITY

NOMINATING COMMITTEE

JEANNETTE EILEEN JONES, UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA, LINCOLN
MARC J. SELVERSTONE, UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA & MILLER CENTER

2023 SHAFR Election

Candidate Biographies and Statements

PRESIDENT

Mitchell Lerner: I am professor of history and director of the East Asian Studies Center at Ohio State University, and a fellow at OSU's Mershon Center for International Security. Amongst other things, I have been the Mary Ball Washington Distinguished Fulbright Professor at UCDublin; a fellow at the University of Virginia's Miller Center of Public Affairs; associate editor of the *Journal of American-East Asian Relations*; and a Distinguished Lecturer of the Association for Asian Studies. I have won multiple teaching awards, including OSU's Alumni Award for Distinguished Teaching (our highest such honor) and the Ohio Academy of History's Distinguished Teacher Prize. My current work examines the relationship between African American military service overseas and the domestic civil rights movement. Specific examples of my scholarship are on my CV. However, I believe that as SHAFR confronts the significant challenges of today's academic climate, a demonstrated commitment to the organization and a successful record of service to its membership should be the most important criteria. I was the founding editor of *Passport*, a position I held for eight years. I was one of the founders of SHAFR's Teaching Committee, and served as one of its first members. I have been elected to SHAFR's Council and Nominating Committee; in that last position, I led the effort to create a council seat reserved for someone from a teaching-focused school. I have also co-directed the SHAFR Summer Institute; served on numerous *ad hoc* committees; and in 2022, had the honor of winning SHAFR's Distinguished Service Award.

VICE-PRESIDENT/PRESIDENT-ELECT

Melani McAlister is Professor of American Studies and International Affairs at George Washington University. She is a scholar of the cultural and political history of the US in the world. She is author of the award-winning *The Kingdom of God Has No Borders: A Global History of American Evangelicals* (2018, updated ed. 2022), and the widely-taught *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East since 1945* (rev. ed. 2005, orig. 2001). She is also the coeditor of four collections, including *The Cambridge History of America and the World*, vol. 4 (2021) and a special issue of *American Quarterly* on "Generations of Empire."

McAlister is Treasurer and a member of the Board of the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS). She is also on the editorial boards of the *American Historical Review*, *Diplomatic History*, *Modern American History*, and *American Quarterly*.

In 2023-24 she will be a Harvard-Radcliffe Fellow for work on a project that explores the circulation of Third World music and literature in the US in the 1970s and 1980s, tentatively titled: "The Art of Solidarity: The US Market for Third World Culture in the Late Cold War." She has previously received support from the NEH, Princeton's Davis Center, Harvard's DuBois Center (nonresidential), the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg School of Communication, and the American Philosophical Society. She has spoken widely around the country and the world, including as a keynote speaker at events in Abu Dhabi, Egypt, England, Germany, Israel, Lebanon, Palestine, Scotland, Syria, and Qatar.

We are in a time of reckoning for the role of the US in the world, with crises ranging from climate collapse to global rightwing resurgence to the threats of a new Cold War and/or another pandemic. At this moment, SHAFR historians can and should speak out. We can grow our organization, increase our public profile, and speak forcefully about the relevance of our field.

SHAFR has been my intellectual home for more than two decades. I have served as chair of SHAFR's Development Committee and a member of the Ways and Means Committee. I served twice on the conference program committee, including as cochair with Salim Yaqub in 2016, when we invited Robin D.G. Kelley to give an historic keynote. I currently serve on the editorial board of *Diplomatic History* and have served on several other committees. I am also a member of the Board of the American Council of Learned Societies, an organization devoted to tackling the current crisis in the humanities.

SHAFR has created an intellectual conversation like no other. Our organization is increasingly diverse, and that diversity is crucial if we are to help shape a global future that might be other than the past. If elected, I will support increased attention to issues such as the environment, racial capitalism, global health, and technology, as well as more resources for graduate students, BIPOC historians, and scholars from outside the US.

SHAFR is a remarkable place of encounter. I would be honored to serve as our vice-president.

Jeremi Suri joined SHAFR in 1994 during his first months in graduate school, and he has been an active member ever since. He holds the Mack Brown Distinguished Chair for Leadership in Global Affairs at the University of Texas at Austin. He is a professor in the University's Department of History and the LBJ School of Public Affairs. Professor Suri is the author and editor of eleven books, most recently: *Civil War By Other Means: America's Long and Unfinished Fight for Democracy*. His other books include: *The Impossible Presidency: The Rise and Fall of America's Highest Office*; *Liberty's Surest Guardian: American Nation-Building from the Founders to Obama*; *Henry Kissinger and the American Century*, and *Power and Protest: Global Revolution and the Rise of Détente*. His writings appear in the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Wall Street Journal*, CNN.com, *Atlantic*, *Wired*, *Foreign Affairs*, and other media. At Princeton University Press, Suri co-edits the highly regarded book series on "America in the World." He has received numerous prizes, including recognition from the Smithsonian as one of America's "Top Young Innovators," the President's Associates Teaching Excellence Award from UT, and the Pro Bene Meritis Award for Contributions to the Liberal Arts. Suri co-hosts a weekly podcast, "This is Democracy," with an audience among the top 2% in the world. During his three decades in SHAFR, he has hosted the annual meeting, co-directed one of the first summer graduate student workshops, and served on SHAFR Council, the Membership, and the Bernath book prize committees.

SHAFR has not recovered from COVID. Although the organization has returned to annual in-person meetings and membership remains strong, our community is still challenged. Rising costs have turned a healthy budget surplus to deficit. Archival closings (and reduced hours) have limited essential research opportunities. The shrinking of new faculty positions (compounding a long stingy job market) has diminished morale among the youngest, most promising, most diverse members of our field. And the nasty polarization of our society has seeped into our profession, making many valued members of our community feel vulnerable, attacked, and sometimes worse.

The rise in scholarly incivility, recounted to me by numerous colleagues, is particularly troubling. I first joined SHAFR in 1994 when the organization was small and tribal. We worked hard to make the organization larger, more diverse, and less parochial, but recent years have set us back.

Those who know me recognize that I am an optimist. The SHAFR community has the talent, energy, and goodwill to turn current challenges into new opportunities. I do not have the answers, but I am eager to work with all members to pursue initiatives that can help. I am especially concerned about the young scholars in our organization (current graduate students, recent Ph.D.s, lecturers, adjuncts, and assistant professors) who need more support navigating their early careers. I want to prioritize engagement with our membership to make SHAFR a source of renewed community and hope for scholars—all of us!—who need each other more than ever before.

COUNCIL

At-Large Seat #1

Brooke L. Blower is an Associate Professor of History at Boston University whose research focuses on American political culture, travel, and war in urban and transnational contexts. Her forthcoming book, *Americans in a World at War: Intimate Histories from the Crash of Pan Am's Yankee Clipper* (Oxford, August 2023) offers a panoramic portrait of Americans' overseas engagements on the eve of and during World War II. Other works include the award-winning *Becoming Americans in Paris: Transatlantic Politics and Culture between the World Wars* (Oxford, 2011), articles in the *American Historical Review* and *Diplomatic History*, as well as two co-edited volumes: *The Familiar Made Strange: American Icons and Artifacts after the Transnational Turn* (Cornell, 2015) with Mark Bradley, and Volume 3 (1900-1945) of the *Cambridge History of America and the World* (2022) with Andrew Preston. Her publication, "From Isolationism to Neutrality: A New Framework

for Understanding American Political Culture, 1919-1941,” *Diplomatic History* (April 2014), won the Stuart L. Bernath Article Prize. She is an OAH Distinguished Lecturer, NEH Public Scholar, and past recipient of the Bernath Lecture Prize. Her service to SHAFR includes serving on the Bernath Lecture and Book Prize committees as well as cochairing the 2015 annual conference.

Alex Marino is a Post-Doctoral Fellow in Civil Military Relations in the Department of National Security and Strategy at the United States Army War College. Marino’s research focuses on the role of race and technology in U.S.-Africa relations. His book project, *America’s Search for Allies: Liberal Internationalism, Statecraft, and Technology in Southern Africa*, is a multi-archival study of development, diplomacy, and decolonization spanning the entire twentieth century. It is an expansion of his dissertation titled, “The United States and Angola: Space, Race, and the Cold War in Africa.” He holds a Ph.D. and M.A. in History from the University of Arkansas and a B.A. in History from the University of California, Santa Barbara. Marino has regularly attended SHAFR conferences since 2014 in Lexington and volunteered at the registration table in New Orleans. He is the namesake of the Alex Marino Service Award at the University of Arkansas, which “is bestowed upon a graduate or professional student who has gone above and beyond merely performing institutional service and has made a lasting impact on the University of Arkansas and/or its broader community.” He is also cofounder and editor of the website *Historifans*, which publishes peer-reviewed articles aimed at a popular audience.

At-Large Seat #2

Christopher McKnight Nichols is Professor of History and Wayne Woodrow Hayes Chair in National Security Studies, Mershon Center for International Security Studies, at The Ohio State University. Nichols specializes in the history of the United States and its relationship to the rest of the world, with a focus on ideas and particularly isolationism, internationalism, and globalization. An Andrew Carnegie Fellow and award-winning teacher, Nichols is a staunch advocate for history and the humanities. He is also an active public commentator on the historical dimensions of U.S. foreign policy and politics. Nichols is author or editor of six books. His most well-known book is *Promise and Peril: America at the Dawn of a Global Age* (Harvard UP, 2011, 2015); two most recent edited volumes are *Rethinking American Grand Strategy* (Oxford UP, 2021), with Elizabeth Borgwardt and Andrew Preston, and *Ideology in U.S. Foreign Relations: New Histories* (Columbia UP, 2022), with David Milne. SHAFR service includes: Program Committee (2014, 2018); William Appleman Williams Committee (3 years, 2013-15, chair 2015); Volunteer Job Candidate Mentor (five times, 2014-present); 2014 SHAFR Summer Institute Presenter, Wilsonianism and the Legacy of WWI; official blogger (2011-12); writing, reviews in *Diplomatic History* and *Passport*; conference participant most years (2008).

Brad Simpson: I am honored to be nominated for a position on the SHAFR Council. I am currently Associate Professor of History and Asian Studies and History Department Director of Graduate Studies at the University of Connecticut. I began my career as a historian of US foreign relations, writing *Economists with Guns: Authoritarian Development and US-Indonesian Relations* (Stanford, 2008), and have written nearly thirty scholarly articles and book chapters on the history of development, human rights, and decolonization, and direct the National Security Archives Indonesia documentation project. I’m currently finishing my second book, *The First Right: Self-Determination and the Transformation of International Order* (Oxford, 2024), after which I will return to writing about Indonesian authoritarianism during the reign of Suharto (1966-1998).

I am a lifetime member of SHAFR (going on 25 years), and consider it my academic home. I have reviewed many books and articles for H-Diplo and *Diplomatic History*, chaired the program committee along with Petra Goedde during Marilyn Young’s presidential tenure, and recently chaired the Public Outreach Committee. I have also chaired or served on dissertation committees of a dozen students, and have a keen interest in SHAFR’s continued diversification and growth.

Graduate Student Representative

Chris Hulshof is a student in the Department of History at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, focusing on U.S. Foreign Relations in Southeast Asia with a concentration on Indonesia and a sub-concentration on Vietnam & Malaysia. His primary advisors—Alfred McCoy, Patrick Iber, and Monica Kim—are long-standing members of SHAFR. He has been a member of the organization for several years and has attended and presented at multiple SHAFR conferences. Chris’ current research focuses on the multi-focality of the tumultuous transition from European imperium to U.S. hegemony in Southeast Asia during the early Cold War. Last year, he received the Samuel Flagg Bemis Dissertation Research Grant from SHAFR,

which helped fund the early stages of his fieldwork. Chris is currently conducting further fieldwork in Indonesia with funding from Fulbright Hays DDRA and AIFISCAORC grants.

Chris has spent the last several years as the sole graduate student on the GETSEA (Graduate Education & Training on Southeast Asian Studies) Steering Committee, where he provided student insight on GETSEA business and personally spearheaded numerous initiatives, including event planning, liaising with other governing bodies, social media management, and chairing subcommittees. If elected, he hopes to provide similarly engaged service to the SHAFR Council.

Dante La Riccia is a Ph.D. student in the History Department at Yale, where he studies the U.S. colonial empire, the history of carbon energy, and the Anthropocene. His dissertation tracks the simultaneous expansion of the U.S. empire and the global hydrocarbon economy during the “American century.” His broader interests include the political economy of globalization, histories of global imperialism, environmental history, and racial capitalism. Besides his dissertation, Dante is also at work on a family history that uses four generations of his matriarchal lineage to track the decline of the Spanish and rise of the U.S. empire between the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Before arriving at Yale, Dante completed an M.A. in global history from the Free University of Berlin, where he studied as a DAAD scholar and completed concentrations in modern North American and Latin American history. His thesis, which received highest marks, focused on the reorganization of developmentalist imperatives amidst the oil shocks and energy crisis of the 1970s and early 1980s. Prior to that, Dante received his B.A. in History and Politics from New York University, where he studied the history of modern Europe and wrote an honors thesis on guest workers’ dormitories in postwar West Germany.

NOMINATING COMMITTEE

Jeannette Eileen Jones is the Carl A. Happold Professor of History and Ethnic Studies at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. She is a historian of the United States, with expertise in American cultural and intellectual history, African American Studies, and Precolonial Africa. Her research foci include the Gilded Age and Progressive Era, US and the World, and the transnational history of race and racialization. She is the author of *In Search of Brightest Africa: Reimagining the Dark Continent in American Culture, 1884-1936* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2010). Her current manuscript, *America in Africa: U.S. Empire, Race, and the African Question, 1821-1919*, is under advance contract with Yale University Press. She is Co-PI on the collaborative digital project “To Enter Africa from America:” The United States, Africa, and the New Imperialism, 1862-1919 with Nadia Nurhusein, Nemata Blyden, and John Cullen Gruesser, which will be published by Michigan State University Press.

Marc J. Selverstone is Professor and Director of Presidential Studies and Co-Chair of the Presidential Recordings Program at UVa’s Miller Center of Public Affairs. He earned his Ph.D. in History from Ohio University in 2000, specializing in U.S. Foreign Relations. He is the author of *The Kennedy Withdrawal: Camelot and the American Commitment to Vietnam* (Harvard, 2022) and *Constructing the Monolith: The United States, Great Britain, and International Communism* (Harvard, 2009), which received SHAFR’s Stuart L. Bernath Book Prize. He is the editor of *A Companion to John F. Kennedy* (Wiley Blackwell, 2014), a contributing editor to the *SHAFR Guide: An Annotated Bibliography of U.S. Foreign Relations Since 1600* (Brill, 2017-2022), and general editor of the *Presidential Recordings Digital Edition* (Virginia, 2014). A member of SHAFR since 1993, he has served on Council (2011-2013), the Web Committee (2016-1018), Teaching Committee (2010-2012), and the *ad hoc* Committee on Public Outreach (2019).

Thoughts From SHAFR President

Mary Ann Heiss

It was great seeing so many of you in Arlington for our first fully in-person conference since 2019. Thanks to Program Committee Chairs Jeannette Eileen Jones and Jason Parker, the members of the Program Committee, Conference Consultant Kaete O'Connell, Conference Assistant Sydney Snowden, and especially Executive Director Amy Sayward for working so hard to put together such an outstanding event. I know I join many others in saying I'm already looking forward to Toronto.

Among the decisions Council made at its meeting the week before the conference were two that I wanted to explain in this personal message—or at least as personal as a presidential column in *Passport* can be. Both are responses to the continuing financial challenges we face as an organization.

The first is to reauthorize a dues increase that Council originally approved in January 2020 and then promptly rescinded once the pandemic began. SHAFR dues for regular members have been \$60 for quite some time. In addition to not keeping up with even modest levels of inflation, that figure is well below the annual dues for comparable specialized societies, such as the Society for Military History and the World History Association. Beginning with the coming year (2024), dues for regular SHAFR members will be \$90. Council voted to continue our practice of reduced rates for students and contingent/retired faculty, so dues for those groups will therefore remain at \$20 and \$35, respectively (rates, by the way, that are much more generous than comparable organizations).

Second, Council also approved an increase in registration fees for the annual conference. Early bird

registration will now be \$140 (an increase of \$40), with rates for graduate students and contingent faculty remaining unchanged at \$55. Regular registration during the month before the conference will be \$165. Even with this increase, SHAFR's annual conference remains much less expensive than those of other comparable organizations.

I would also like to call members' attention to the impending conclusion of Amy Sayward's tenure as SHAFR Executive Director. Amy will wrap up ten years of service to SHAFR in this crucial position on 31 July 2025. To allow for a true transition period, we intend to have her successor named by next June. David Anderson is chairing a search committee consisting of other past SHAFR Presidents Mary Dudziak, Kristin Hoganson, Tom Schwartz, and Mark Stoler. A full job posting can be found elsewhere in this issue of *Passport*. Amy is happy to field inquiries about the position, institutional support, etc. at amy.sayward@shaf. org.

While I have your attention, I wanted to pass on date information for our next two conferences so that you can plan:

- 13-15 June 2024, University of Toronto
- 26-28 June 2025, Arlington Renaissance Capital View

Finally, I'd like to close with an appeal to indicate your interest in serving on one of SHAFR's more than two dozen committees by completing the short form available at shaf. org/volunteer. Interested volunteers are also invited to contact me directly at mheiss@kent.edu.

Response to A Roundtable on Jayita Sarkar, *Ploughshares and Swords*

Jayita Sarkar

Editor's note: Due to unforeseen circumstances, Professor Sarkar's response was not completed in time to include with the roundtable when it was published in the April 2023 issue of *Passport*. AJ

It is an honor to have my book be the subject of this roundtable. This is the kind of meticulous attention from reviewers and readers that most authors can only dream of. All four reviewers attentively read *Ploughshares and Swords*, made insightful observations about the book's contributions, and offered thoughtful suggestions for a future iteration, if there were to be one. My deep gratitude to them all. I shall take up the reviews in alphabetical order, beginning with Bill Allison's thoughtful essay and ending with Nicholas Sarantakes' provocative effort.

Allison's witty review of my book was delightful to read. He empathized with the book's arguments, set against the political backdrop of the onslaught on history and historians, and even drew my attention to the Telegu movie RRR before it gained international notoriety and won an Oscar. His is an in-depth reading and a considered critique. He is frank about his dislike of jargon and abbreviations, which most non-specialist readers likely share, but he makes some useful suggestions that I shall reflect upon here.

First, he urges me to consider "India's Sputnik moment" and the "applicability of the Sputnik analogy" with respect to the Chinese launch of an earth satellite in April 1970. Despite appearances, I do not consider that event to be India's "Sputnik moment." This is because it was only one of a series of public feats demonstrating Chinese technological advancement. The leaders of India's nuclear and space programs were already aware that their Chinese counterparts were far ahead in both nuclear weapons development and delivery vehicles. As I discuss in my book, India's political leaders, including Jawaharlal Nehru, worried about Chinese nuclear weapons even before the first Chinese nuclear explosion in October 1964.

Since then, repeated Chinese nuclear weapon and missile tests, including the 1967 hydrogen bomb tests, continuously reminded India's leaders that their country would be playing catch up for decades. What the Chinese earth satellite launch did was to stimulate public debate within India about the technology-driven gap between the two geopolitical adversaries. By contrast, the 1957 Sputnik launch caught both the U.S. government and the American public off guard and led to a spiraling arms race between the superpowers.

Second, Allison makes an important point about the industrial accident at the Union Carbide-owned pesticide plant in Bhopal in December 1984, commonly known as the Bhopal gas tragedy. The disaster killed 16,000 people immediately, while another 15,000 lost their lives over time. Allison wonders why I did not include the Bhopal incident while covering 1984 in my book. This is a ripe opportunity for me to share my choices with readers. I wanted to prioritize events directly relevant to the nuclear program while staying within Indira Gandhi's tenure as

prime minister. That led me to conclude my book in the middle of 1984, just before politics within India took a turn for the worse with Gandhi's assassination and communal riots targeting the Sikh community in the capital of New Delhi.

That said, the Bhopal gas tragedy became a cautionary tale for India and a warning about industrial impunity for environmental and anti-nuclear activists. Union Carbide (today, Dow Chemical) got away with paying the meager sum of US\$470 million as compensation in 1989. That number, which activists had long claimed was based on an undercounting of the victims of the tragedy, was approved by the Supreme Court of India. In the 2010s, memories of the tragedy and survivors' accounts and testimonies were revived by activists as the nuclear liability bill was being debated in India's parliament. When industrial negligence and insufficient regulatory oversight in the Fukushima nuclear accident became public knowledge, antinuclear activists raised the alarm, citing the Indian government's deplorable track record of holding foreign companies accountable and its pliant attitude

towards Union Carbide. In other words, the Bhopal gas tragedy's connections to the nuclear program were established just over a decade ago—not at the time. It is certainly a question I have been asked before by readers, but as authors, we all make choices. The rationale for mine is stated above.

Notwithstanding his astute assessment of the book's contributions, Allison engages in some hyperbole that is not part of the book's arguments. Instances of this include his mention of India's "bold and brazen game of realpolitik" that would have "made even Machiavelli blush" and the United States' "strategic narcissism concerning international controls of atomic energy and nonproliferation." The tensions between

Indian and American actors that form a through-thread in my book were caused neither by U.S. actors' narcissism nor the brazen Machiavellian politics of their Indian counterparts. Those tensions were simply the outcome of the pursuit of freedom of action by both sides during a time when their interests and ideals clashed.

What I found to be peculiar was that U.S. policymakers were nearly unanimous in playing down the geopolitical anxieties of their Indian counterparts. To them, it was either prestige or domestic politics that drove Indian policymakers towards nuclear weapons—rarely national security. This was not the case when U.S. officials discussed Pakistani or Chinese nuclear weapons. A pattern emerges, I believe, that might indicate that U.S. policymakers more readily identified national security as a key motivation for nuclear weapons when the country was a foe or a friend than when a country had ambiguous relations with the U.S. government, as nonaligned India did.

Jeffrey Crean has been exceedingly generous with his praise. He writes that *Ploughshares and Swords* is "certain to be the go-to book on this topic going forward." Epithets such as "sturdily researched" and "readable" in the same sentence are what most authors dream of but rarely receive from readers and reviewers.

What I found to be peculiar was that U.S. policymakers were nearly unanimous in playing down the geopolitical anxieties of their Indian counterparts. To them, it was either prestige or domestic politics that drove Indian policymakers towards nuclear weapons—rarely national security. This was not the case when U.S. officials discussed Pakistani or Chinese nuclear weapons.

I am grateful to him for his faith that this book will become the “canonical text on this topic, presumably for decades to come”—truly an author’s delight! Like Bill Allison, Jeffrey Crean also disliked some of the terminologies introduced at the beginning of the book, such as “technopolitics” and “sociotechnical imaginaries.” Similar comments had come my way when I conducted a manuscript workshop prior to submission for review to the press. Yet I decided to keep what Crean and Allison call “jargon” because I wanted to render the conceptual architecture of the book visible and at the same time tip my hat to scholarship outside of history that had enriched my understanding of India’s nuclear program: notably, science and technology studies.

I shall now take up some of Crean’s comments and critiques in greater detail. First, he calls India’s nuclear program a “failure,” which is an inference he draws, but not a claim I myself make. The reality was more complex. It was and continues to be a polyvalent cost-intensive program with multiple stakeholders and audiences. The fact that the program still exists while being shielded from criticism and after meeting only a negligible percentage of the country’s electricity needs (around 3.3 percent) is proof that it is far from being a failure. It is just that its intended goal is not to be effective in a functionalist way. It needs to exist and take up space, which it does.

Second, he raises three interconnected points about the book: (a) there is inadequate discussion of domestic politics for a book that analyzes the “intermestic”; (b) the book pays insufficient attention to anti-nuclear movements; and (c) nuclear weapons and democratic accountability are incompatible, and therefore the anti-dissent qualities of India’s nuclear program are unremarkable. I had attempted to strike a balance between foreign relations history and political history in the book, mapping their interconnections in terms of causes, effects, and processes with respect to India’s nuclear program. It is a difficult balance to strike and can leave much more to be desired. That said, my scholarship falls more within the realm of the global, thereby tipping the scales towards foreign relations while encouraging readers to think about the interconnections between the two.

Rarely are social movements such as antinuclear activism acknowledged in a book about decisions at the top level of policymaking. I considered it to be my obligation as a scholar to draw the readers’ attention not only to the technopolitics and geopolitics of the nuclear program and the leaders’ policy innovations—such as hyperdiversification through foreign partnerships—but also to the high costs of such innovation, which created cultures of unaccountability. In other words, there is no “freedom of action” for the leaders without the nuclear program functioning as an “anti-dissent machine.” That said, there is important work being done on the anti-nuclear movement in India by scholars such as Monamie Bhadra, Sonali Huria, and others, from whom we will continue to learn over the years.

As far as antidemocratic cultures and nuclear weapons go, I have heard that argument before, and I consider it to be a self-fulfilling prophecy. To have avoided drawing attention to the antidemocratic tendencies of the nuclear program would have been to normalize the exception; to overlook the pitfalls of India’s nuclear program would have been irresponsible. Nuclear technologies are not by themselves opaque, but they have been rendered so through compartmentalization of expertise, by law, and in the name of national security. Scholars like me who study

the untransparent world of “nuclear things” have an obligation to render them less enigmatic and to critique our historical actors when they try to obfuscate them.

I shall now turn to Tanvi Madan’s thoughtful engagement with my book. I have learned a great deal from her scholarship, especially her excellent monograph, *Fateful Triangle*, so it is my great honor to receive this glowing review from her. The summary of my response to Madan’s prescient review is that I agree with everything she wrote—the good, bad, and ugly (although there was not much ugly, for which I am grateful).

Madan is the only reviewer on this roundtable who discusses the book’s contribution to our understanding of India’s relationship with the nonproliferation regime. It is an important aspect of the book, but it is sometimes of greater interest to practitioners and policy-minded scholars than others. She rightly underscores that the book is a corrective to the received wisdom about prestige and status being driving factors for India’s nuclear program and domestic politics being the cause behind the 1974 nuclear explosion.

Madan also correctly points out that the book could and should have been longer. She wanted more details about the pitfalls of diversification that I addressed, particularly the “anti-dissent” dimensions of the program discussed at the beginning and the end of the book. Here I admit that as a first-time author of a monograph with a contractual limit of a hundred thousand words, I gained insights while completing *Ploughshares and Swords* that will serve me well for my next monographs. In full disclosure, I had to remove sections from several chapters to meet the publisher’s allowance of a word count up to 5 percent greater than the count specified in the contract. I can reassure her and readers of this roundtable that my next monograph will be hefty than three hundred pages!

I am also pleased that Madan considers the book to be accessible to a broader audience because it is not burdened by jargon. It was a challenge to write a book that appealed to specialists such as Madan who inhabit the same acronym-filled subfields that the book engages with as well as non-expert curious readers who might pick the book up on a whim.

Last but not least, Nicholas Sarantakes is excessively generous in his praise of my book. He calls the research for it “nothing less than stunning” and predicts that it “will likely remain the main authority on the topic for a future best measured in scores rather decades.” That is remarkably gracious of him, and I hope he is right, as any author would in my place. That said, Sarantakes’s Eurocentric vision of the Cold War—he writes that “the Cold War was going to be won or lost in Europe”—a view that scholars like Odd Arne Westad, Paul Chamberlin, and David Engerman have already debunked—is out of date. His praise of the British as being “morally . . . in the right in the Cold War” even though “British rule in India might have been exploitative” is out of context and baffling. He also misses the argument(s) in the book when he concludes that “[d]omestic Indian politics drove the decision to build a nuclear system.” Despite these quibbles, Sarantakes’ efforts to engage with my scholarship are indeed commendable.

I think I have addressed the questions and critiques raised by the four remarkable reviewers. I thank Allison, Crean, Madan, and Sarantakes again for their labor, insights, and collegiality, and Andy Johns for his consideration and patience.

A Roundtable on Marc Selverstone, *The Kennedy Withdrawal: Camelot and the American Commitment in Vietnam*

Chester Pach, Jessica M. Chapman, Tizoc Chavez, Jessica Elkind, Phillip E. Catton,
and Marc Selverstone

Introduction: "JFK/Blown Away/What More Do I Have to Say?"

Chester Pach

Sixty years after his murder in Dallas, John F. Kennedy continues to fascinate the public and intrigue historians almost as much for what he might have done had he lived to serve a second term as president as for what he actually did while in the White House. What Marc J. Selverstone calls "the great what if"—what JFK would have done in Vietnam had Lee Harvey Oswald never pulled the trigger—has shaped our understanding of Kennedy's presidency as well as the trajectory of recent U.S. history.

After U.S. combat troops began to fight, die, and falter on the battlefields of Vietnam, whispers from Kennedy insiders that "Jack would have acted differently" turned into confident assertions that JFK intended to withdraw U.S. forces from Vietnam after securing reelection. Oliver Stone amplified these claims in his brilliant but deeply flawed film *JFK*, in which Kevin Costner, playing Orleans Parish district attorney Jim Garrison, tells the jury in his closing argument, "I submit to you that what took place on November 22, 1963, was a coup d'état. Its most direct and tragic result was a reversal of President Kennedy's commitment to withdraw from Vietnam."

While many historians have embraced or challenged the Kennedy withdrawal thesis, no scholar has studied it as thoroughly or thoughtfully as Marc Selverstone. In response to Billy Joel's musical question in "We Didn't Start the Fire," Selverstone has a lot more to say about the Kennedy withdrawal, including much that is new and some that shifts our understanding of JFK and Vietnam.

Perhaps the most important conclusion he draws is that the Kennedy withdrawal wasn't Kennedy's idea after all, but Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara's. Inspired by a comment from the president, who was concerned about media commentary that Vietnam was turning into an American war, McNamara initiated planning in April 1962 to help the Saigon government develop the capability to stand on its own within three years. Selverstone shows that one plan soon turned into two, when British counterinsurgency expert Robert G. K. Thompson suggested an interim withdrawal of 1,000 U.S. military advisors by the end of 1963. Thompson and many U.S. officials who embraced his idea considered it a gesture to prove "we are winning" (113).

In some of the most valuable sections of the book, Selverstone demonstrates that both withdrawal plans rested on dubious optimism about Saigon's progress in the war. The Comprehensive Plan for South Vietnam, which top U.S. military officials devised in early 1963, rested on no more than the supposition that the Communist insurgency would be "under control" by the end of 1965 (103). White House officials, as well as U.S. diplomats and uniformed officers in Saigon, paid insufficient attention to contrary evidence. They seemed more concerned, for example, with denying, countering, or halting critical news reports about South Vietnamese military deficiencies than with investigating whether those alleged problems were real.

Selverstone also demonstrates that advocates of both plans embraced them for a variety of purposes, not all of them mutually compatible. The plan to defeat the insurgency within three years was a way to reassure the government of Ngo Dinh Diem of U.S. resolve and reliability, while withdrawing 1,000 advisors was aimed at pressuring Diem to prosecute the war more vigorously. Curtailing the number of U.S. troops and eventually bringing them home could allay congressional criticism of foreign aid, including those who worried about unending commitments to developing nations. At the same time, a short-term withdrawal that underlined the administration's careful use of available resources might somehow translate into long-term congressional support for helping Saigon eventually to defend itself. For McNamara, both plans were ways of achieving his cherished if illusory goal of systematizing defense planning and providing it with predictability and precision. As Selverstone asserts, "The Kennedy withdrawal thus emerged as a highly elastic approach to a broad range of administration objectives" (244).

The withdrawal of 1,000 U.S. advisors occurred during the first days of Lyndon B. Johnson's presidency. But Selverstone explains that it was more an accounting maneuver than a reduction of the U.S. presence. The Kennedy administration was evasive in disclosing the number of U.S. military personnel in South Vietnam, since the total exceeded limits established under the Geneva accords of 1954. Never did this phantom withdrawal "lower the absolute number of advisory troops serving in Vietnam." Many of the uniformed troops who returned home at the end of 1963 did so according to the "normal turnover cycle" (210). The Kennedy withdrawal, then, was a reality that was an illusion. When JFK took the presidential

oath there were 685 troops in the U.S. Military Assistance Advisory Group. At the end of 1963, there were 16,300.

Even though he found few of Kennedy's fingerprints on withdrawal planning, Selverstone is brilliant at analyzing how Kennedy shaped U.S. policy in Vietnam. He portrays JFK as a pragmatist, deeply concerned with retaining the freedom to make decisions about Vietnam on his terms. His goal was "to win the war," not advance democracy or protect human rights (180). For JFK, the symbolic was substantive; perception, reputation, and credibility mattered more than interests. Vietnam itself had little intrinsic value, except for its effects on U.S. Cold War policy. Although he still insisted that the war was Saigon's to win or lose, Kennedy remained determined to avoid defeat. The answer to how he would have done so died with him in Dallas.

The roundtable reviewers, all distinguished scholars of U.S. involvement in Vietnam or of presidential diplomacy, consider Selverstone's book a triumph. Tizoc Chavez praises Selverstone for his "rich, nuanced picture of the administration's planning and decision-making." Philip E. Catton lauds his "detailed and engaging narrative" and his "forensic" analysis of withdrawal planning. Jessica Elkind asserts that Selverstone's "brilliant book contributes significantly not only to the . . . withdrawal planning during Kennedy's presidency but also to . . . our understanding of the American war in Vietnam."

For Jessica M. Chapman, however, "Selverstone's laser focus on withdrawal planning veers into tunnel vision." She and Elkind would have preferred more attention to North Vietnamese political dynamics and their influence on Kennedy's policies. Chapman also wishes that Selverstone had provided a more balanced analysis of the U.S. relationship with the Saigon government, one that incorporated more Vietnamese perspectives. Despite these shortcomings, Chapman recognizes that "it would be folly to excoriate him for not writing a different book, when the one he gave us is so valuable."

Even though he meticulously analyzed a mountain of evidence, including government documents, personal papers, oral histories, and White House tapes, Selverstone is still unable to answer some significant questions about the Kennedy withdrawal. How much did some major U.S. officials, including National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy, know about the first fifteen months of withdrawal planning? The documents don't say. How did critical language about the timetable for withdrawal become part of an important White House statement on October 2, 1963? The record is uncertain. How can one reconcile McNamara's optimistic public declarations with his private forebodings about the war's perils? Even an historian as astute as Selverstone is unsure.

And what about "the great what if?" Any certain answer is impossible. We have only what Bobby Kennedy said in 1964 about what his brother would have done if faced with the imminent collapse of the South Vietnamese government: "We'd face that when we came to it" (18). But for those who revel in Camelot counterfactuals, there will always be more to say.

Note:

1. *JFK*, directed by Oliver Stone (Warner Bros., Burbank, CA, 1991).

Review of Marc J. Selverstone, *The Kennedy Withdrawal: Camelot and the American Commitment to Vietnam*

Jessica M. Chapman

Marc Selverstone concludes his new book, *The Kennedy Withdrawal: Camelot and the American Commitment to Vietnam*, with a thoughtful discussion of popular and historiographical thinking about the counterfactual question: What would Kennedy have done in Vietnam, had he not been gunned down on the streets of Dallas in November 1963? What the rest of his book makes clear is that entrants into that debate have devoted far more attention to answering this counterfactual question than Kennedy ever did to his administration's Vietnam policy.

"Kennedy's engagement with Vietnam," writes Selverstone, was "episodic at best" (158). The so-called "Kennedy withdrawal," it seems, had remarkably little to do with Kennedy, as he engaged with its planning—indeed, learned of its existence—only late in the game.

As Selverstone notes, Vice President Lyndon Johnson learned specific details of withdrawal timetables no later than mid-August 1962, but Kennedy's knowledge "is hard to discern" (88). This was apparently a direct function of the president's lack of interest in Vietnam as anything more than a domestic political liability and a potentially significant threat to U.S. credibility, which he considered essential to the successful prosecution of Cold War foreign policy.

In the final months of his life, when he did engage with plans to withdraw troops from Vietnam, Kennedy did not focus on strategic planning to win the war. In fact, he rebuffed suggestions that he take a look at the October 1963 McNamara-Taylor Report, which spelled out plans for phased withdrawals to be completed by 1965. Instead, he expressed "a desire to play it safe" (191). He proposed implementing aid cuts and troop withdrawals in a "low key" fashion to avoid publicity (186). In effect, he was "hedging his bets." His goals were to minimize domestic political backlash and to retain maximum flexibility to change course in the future (176).

Despite Kennedy's disinterest in the particulars of American involvement in Vietnam, Selverstone traces a "serious and systematic effort to schedule the removal of U.S. servicemen from Vietnam" that was undertaken by the administration between the spring of 1962 and the fall of 1963 (242). He frames his account of the administration's withdrawal planning as an effort "to trace its history, focusing more on its meaning at the time than on whether Kennedy would have carried it out" (18). Yet his conclusion about Kennedy's intentions—that "the matter is ultimately unknowable" (18) and that the meaning of withdrawal planning for Kennedy himself "remains obscure" (245)—does not prevent him from speculating.

"In November 1963," Selverstone notes, "the president seemed very much committed to remaining in the fight" (203). He claims that to the extent that Kennedy participated in planning for withdrawal, he never wavered in his assessment that Vietnam was of central importance to U.S. national security on the grounds that a loss there—or the optics of abandoning a longstanding ally—could damage U.S. credibility, with catastrophic consequences for U.S. policy around the globe. Moreover, he writes, "while Kennedy had become increasingly uncomfortable with the depth and implications of the U.S. commitment, his fealty to the broader dynamics that expanded it . . . would likely have generated cognitive dissonance were he to abandon it" (245). Indeed, the president's willingness to entertain plans for withdrawal always hinged on the premise that they

The roundtable reviewers, all distinguished scholars of U.S. involvement in Vietnam or of presidential diplomacy, consider Selverstone's book a triumph.

would serve political and diplomatic objectives without harming the overall war effort and that the substantial troop reductions planned for the future would take place *only* once optimistic projections about military progress on the battlefield were met.

Selverstone qualifies these insights by noting the paucity of sources that speak directly to Kennedy's outlook, a remarkable commentary given his exhaustive consultation of Kennedy administration materials, including the White House tapes, which reveal some of the few hints into Kennedy's thinking that do exist. I cannot help but wonder, then, why Selverstone did not make more of Kennedy's February 1963 meeting with Senator Mike Mansfield, where the president articulated the imperative of winning reelection before contemplating troop withdrawals.

If at this point Kennedy was "souring on the commitment" even as he expressed "the need to remain steadfast, at least in public," perhaps we should consider seriously the possibility that he saw the implications of the credibility imperative—and thus his approach to Vietnam as a component of his global strategic outlook—differently in the context of a second term (107–8). While Selverstone is right to note that we will never know Kennedy's intentions, he seems to have missed an opportunity here, and throughout the book, to assess the role of Vietnam within the larger context of the president's domestic political strategy. Similarly, the implications of the Civil Rights Movement enter into the narrative only fleetingly.

Selverstone's lack of attention to Kennedy's overarching domestic political strategy stems from his laser focus on the administration's planning for withdrawal, a focus that generates novel and important insights. Most importantly, he makes it clear that it was Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara who initiated plans to withdraw troops in response to a constellation of factors, including domestic political pressure, congressional efforts to rein in foreign aid, and—his personal pet project—the revamping of defense planning to enhance long-range strategy while curbing spending. Notably, these driving factors all stemmed from internal U.S. politics, only intersecting with Cold War national security considerations and South Vietnamese political and military realities as U.S. officials contemplated the development, refinement, and implementation of an internally motivated withdrawal strategy.

McNamara's advocacy of troop withdrawals, in which he was joined by other administration officials, depended entirely on optimistic projections of success on the battlefield in Vietnam and on the Government of Vietnam's (GVN) ability to assume responsibility for the fight against the National Liberation Front (NLF). By repeatedly pointing to this optimism without interrogating it, however, Selverstone's laser focus on withdrawal planning veers into tunnel vision.

The book contains very little discussion of the evolving military situation in Vietnam. Readers encounter the GVN only through the eyes of those American officials who were contemplating troop withdrawals on grounds that seemingly had little to do with Vietnam per se. And North Vietnam enters into the picture hardly at all until the final chapter, which is devoted to Johnson's reversal of withdrawal planning. Perhaps this is because events in Vietnam were of little import to those Kennedy administration officials who planned for withdrawal, but a deeper dive into to the disconnect between optimistic military projections and bleaker realities on the ground could enhance our understanding of the policymaking process, of disputes that emerged between civilian and military officials, and of the Johnson administration's eventual abandonment of withdrawal plans in favor of military escalation.

Greater attention to Kennedy's overarching domestic political outlook, more nuanced engagement with U.S. military intelligence relative to events on the ground in

South Vietnam and decision-making in Hanoi, and a more balanced treatment of the U.S.-GVN relationship might have strengthened Selverstone's narrative. However, it would be folly to excoriate him for not writing a different book when the one he has given us is so valuable. As he lays out so clearly in his conclusion, the historiography of Kennedy's Vietnam policy evolved from the "Camelot" school that maintained—on the basis of firsthand accounts—that it was his intention to get out to a more critical revisionist perspective in the 1970s and 1980s that questioned that assumption on the basis of his overall hawkishness. It finally circled back in the 1990s to the withdrawal thesis, this time on the basis of greater documentation.

In my view, Selverstone's unrivaled use of archival materials and presidential recordings from the Kennedy administration puts this lively debate to rest by demonstrating that it has been focused all along on the wrong question. *The Kennedy Withdrawal* shows that the president's "precise role remains elusive" because his role was minor, his engagement fleeting, and his intentions unmoored in the particulars of Vietnam (243). Kennedy did not have a plan for Vietnam, and when it threatened his other plans, he simply aimed to mitigate its negative effects. This may tell us something about what he would have done had he lived, but nothing that would revolutionize our understanding of the U.S. path to war in Vietnam.

What Selverstone's in-depth evaluation of the origins, process, and logic of the Kennedy administration's planning for withdrawal does reveal is the extent to which those plans rested on assumptions about military progress in Vietnam that amounted to little more than wishful thinking. He provides ample evidence that at no point did anyone involved in that planning process undergo any significant reevaluation of the strategic assumptions underpinning the U.S. commitment to South Vietnam. Within the administration, an acceptable retreat from the Vietnam conflict always required victory, by some ill-defined measure. Ultimately, "as much as it signaled an eagerness to wind down the U.S. assistance effort, the policy of withdrawal—the Kennedy withdrawal—allowed JFK to preserve the American commitment to Vietnam" (246).

In this sense, Selverstone makes a case for an underlying continuity between the Kennedy and Johnson administrations that goes beyond personnel. Johnson's rapid move away from troop withdrawals appears to have been rooted in emotions, assumptions, and political calculations similar to those that informed the Kennedy administration's withdrawal planning, save one: optimism.

Review of Marc J. Selverstone, *The Kennedy Withdrawal*

Tizoc Chavez

In his 1965 State of the Union address, Lyndon B. Johnson said that "a President's hardest task is not to do what is right, but to know what is right."¹ His predecessor, John F. Kennedy, would no doubt have agreed, and perhaps no policy area during both men's presidencies was harder to figure out than Vietnam. Continuing to fight the communists there meant spending increasing amounts of money, materials, and manpower with no guarantee of success. But leaving, they believed, would be a major Cold War defeat that would harm, perhaps irrevocably, America's international standing and security. In *The Kennedy Withdrawal: Camelot and the American Commitment to Vietnam*, Marc J. Selverstone documents the Kennedy administration's debates on withdrawal from Vietnam and produces a rich, nuanced picture of the administration's planning and decision-making.

Selverstone frames his book around the "great what if."

What if Kennedy had lived? Would he have taken the nation deeper into the quagmire of Vietnam like Johnson? Or would he have cut America's losses and pulled out all U.S. troops? As Selverstone notes, it is an impossible question to answer, though many have tried. Those in the "Camelot" or "Kennedy exceptionalism" school argue that JFK would have removed U.S. troops or taken a less forceful path than LBJ, while those in the "Cold Warrior" camp highlight the continuities between Kennedy and Johnson. *The Kennedy Withdrawal* situates itself between these two views.

Did Kennedy have doubts about America's military presence in Southeast Asia? Absolutely. Throughout the book, we see JFK questioning America's deepening commitment to South Vietnam and its leader, Ngo Dinh Diem. He evinced a particular aversion to the idea of sending combat troops. South Vietnam needed to fight its own battles. But whether it could actually perform was always the concern. At the same time, despite his skepticism and growing unease, Kennedy "never relinquished his interest in brushfire wars, nor did he dampen his rhetoric about their necessity" (245). He remained a firm believer in the domino theory and "never disowned the strategic logic" of America's commitment to South Vietnam (246).

In wading into the "great what if" question, Selverstone keeps a tight focus, centering his narrative on the Kennedy administration's plans for troop withdrawals from Vietnam and walking the reader through each stage in the process. For those in the Kennedy exceptionalism camp, the fact that planning occurred is clear evidence that JFK wanted out of the mess in Southeast Asia. Yet, as Selverstone deftly demonstrates, there was more to this planning than met the eye, as it "was conceived and implemented in the service of more complicated ends" (3). Military, economic, and domestic political objectives all influenced the administration's thinking on withdrawal (79–86, 244). Most interestingly, and perhaps counterintuitively, rather than provide irrefutable evidence of JFK's desire to extricate the United States from Vietnam, withdrawal planning enabled the nation to continue its efforts in Southeast Asia (246).

Vietnam began to weigh heavily on Kennedy soon after he moved into the White House, and during his first year in office he spent some time crafting a policy to reverse the deteriorating situation there. The result was National Security Action Memoranda number 111, which deepened America's assistance efforts. Kennedy approved sending military advisers to train South Vietnamese forces, but he stopped short of sending the combat troops some of his advisers had recommended. He remained wary of Americanizing the war and refused to declare the conflict a vital national interest.

Wary or not, in late 1961, Kennedy increased the numbers of American troops and the amount of materiel flowing into South Vietnam. Yet at the very moment the U.S. commitment was expanding, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara began to ponder withdrawal. As Selverstone shows, withdrawal planning was McNamara's "brainchild" (3). He was most likely responding to Kennedy's well-known desire to reduce U.S. involvement when feasible, but the planning "bore few of Kennedy's fingerprints" (3). Instead, it was the defense secretary who took the lead.

What eventually emerged from the planning process were two withdrawals: a thousand-man reduction scheduled for 1963 and a more comprehensive withdrawal to take place in 1965. Most of the DoD planning had been done in secret, at least until October 1963, when McNamara and General Maxwell Taylor submitted their report on Vietnam to JFK. The depth of the White House's knowledge about this planning is thus unclear, though the president

appeared to be aware of its outline (175). Such plans seem to prove Kennedy's desire to reduce America's involvement in Vietnam.

As noted, however, Selverstone shows that when one digs into the dynamics behind the administration's planning, the notion that JFK was committed to drastically altering American activities in Southeast Asia becomes exceedingly difficult to maintain. As he left for Dallas in November 1963, "the president seemed very much committed to remaining in the fight" (203). In fact, on the day of his death, he had planned to deliver a speech advocating for a continued U.S. presence in South Vietnam.

If all *The Kennedy Withdrawal* did was weigh in on the "great what if" question and further our knowledge of the Kennedy era and his Vietnam policy, that would be enough. But the book does much more. As it authoritatively walks the reader through each stage of the administration's planning (making excellent use of tape recordings from the Kennedy and Johnson White Houses), it also illustrates specific dynamics of the policymaking process that confront presidential administrations across time, including today.

One of the book's great strengths is how it highlights the role of domestic politics in foreign policy. Selverstone furthers our understanding of the nexus between the two by frequently showing that partisan concerns were never

Vietnam began to weigh heavily on Kennedy soon after he moved into the White House, and during his first year in office he spent some time crafting a policy to reverse the deteriorating situation there.

far from Kennedy's mind. During his first year in office, as his administration deepened America's commitment to South Vietnam, JFK was leery of sending U.S. troops but felt he had to do something because it was "politically necessary at home and abroad" (44). The result was a closer partnership with the South Vietnamese government, despite concerns about its leadership. The United States gave South Vietnam increased air, reconnaissance, and economic support

and sent eight thousand U.S. troops to act in an advisory capacity and train security forces. Ever wary of public reaction, Kennedy said little publicly about this enhanced effort because he believed a low-key approach would help him control the narrative (50).

However, controlling the narrative was never a simple task for the administration. It often felt that the press painted an overwhelmingly negative picture of the conflict—one that was at odds with reality. Thus, even as dynamics in Vietnam changed throughout Kennedy's time in office, "the need to tell a better story" to the American public remained a top concern (105).

Electoral anxieties were front of mind as well. As Kennedy's doubts about America's commitment to South Vietnam grew in early 1963, he decided he would not pull U.S. forces out, as he feared the political backlash. Speaking to Vietnam skeptic Senator Mike Mansfield in the spring of 1963, JFK said that he shared the majority leader's concerns but could not remove troops until after he was reelected in 1964. Otherwise, he said, "we would have another Joe McCarthy red scare on our hands, but I can do it after I'm reelected" (108).

But if Kennedy did not believe he could pull all American forces out until he had secured reelection, a token withdrawal did have political value for the administration. With the economy lagging early in his presidency, he saw a threat to both his public standing and national security. To spur growth, he pushed for a tax cut. But he had other concerns. The cost of stationing U.S. troops abroad was high and contributed to the outflow of gold, thus weakening the nation's currency. Additionally, the cost of foreign aid was coming under bipartisan attack, as many members of Congress doubted the wisdom of providing assistance—not only to South Vietnam but to other nations as well—at the levels the Kennedy administration requested. Against this

backdrop, a targeted withdrawal provided the opportunity to reduce spending on foreign aid and military assistance, help silence critics, and show that there were limits to American support (110–112).

Kennedy also made conscious decisions to help deflect criticism of himself. For example, when Secretary of State Dean Rusk suggested Republican Henry Cabot Lodge Jr. be the U.S. ambassador to South Vietnam, the president “apparently jumped at the chance.” Not only did it provide “bipartisan cover,” but the president saw the opportunity to make Lodge the scapegoat for the situation in Southeast Asia (141).

Similarly, in September 1963, when JFK decided to send Robert McNamara and Maxwell Taylor on another fact-finding mission to Vietnam, it served the purpose of not only giving the president a firsthand, on-the-ground assessment of what was going on but, more importantly, “the trip allowed Kennedy to make the case to Congress for continued prosecution of the war” (159). And after the trip, as the administration sought to publicize McNamara and Taylor’s policy recommendations, Kennedy “was most interested in hedging his bets and deflecting [criticism] from himself” (176). He wanted to distance himself to some degree from McNamara and Taylor’s report and make it clear that its recommendations were theirs, not his. Doing so would provide him with “political cover,” which was essential, “given the state of the Saigon regime” (179).

Selverstone repeatedly shows the political utility Kennedy saw in a troop withdrawal. The 1964 thousand-man withdrawal, for example, was always “an exercise in public relations” (194). Thus, though troop withdrawal was supposed to be condition-based, it became unconditional in large part because of domestic politics. Since the troops scheduled to come home did not substantially affect military operations, their withdrawal provided JFK with the “political capital” his administration needed as it fought off attacks on its Vietnam policy and foreign aid plans (173).

The book also nicely highlights the psychological dimensions of policymaking. Selverstone shows that during the Cold War, other nations’ perceptions of the United States’ resolve to stand up to communist forces and honor commitments to allies were of utmost concern. America’s reputation, or “credibility,” was paramount in Kennedy’s foreign policy decisions and a driving force in his approach to Vietnam (6). Credibility concerns influenced all Cold War presidents, but Kennedy was particularly sensitive to images of strength and vitality and their effect at home and abroad.

Being seen as weak or lacking resolve was difficult for the young president, and he believed such notions had real-world ramifications. On the one hand, the perception of weakness encouraged enemies. This concern was evident after the Bay of Pigs, which Selverstone describes as “shattering” for Kennedy. “For a president so cognizant of the power of images, the perception of him as a paper tiger posed great dangers” (23). Thus, despite difficulties with Diem, setbacks in the war effort, and doubts about how vital Vietnam was to U.S. interests, JFK considered backing down in Southeast Asia dangerous. It would have global ramifications and weaken the United States in its battle against the Soviet Union. And as an adherent of the domino theory, he believed that communist power in the region would spread if American resolve faltered, and he issued public warnings to that effect (148). Selverstone demonstrates that even as Kennedy grew frustrated by the war’s progress, he remained committed to the cause, fearing not only the military implications of withdrawal

but the psychological ones.

If Kennedy worried about dominoes falling in the future, he also worried about mistakes of the past. Different historical events imparted different lessons. As JFK crafted his approach to Vietnam during his first year in office, he refused to commit the United States to preserving an independent, non-communist Vietnam, despite the advice of top U.S. officials. His determination resulted partly from an assessment of France’s experience in Indochina, which “likely haunted him, both in what it said about militarizing a political struggle and fighting a limited conflict in Asia” (44).

At the same time, a different historical analogy made Kennedy see the necessity of helping South Vietnam. Like many postwar presidents, JFK looked to the 1930s and the lessons of appeasement. When the European nations gave in to Hitler’s territorial demands, it led only to further aggression and conflict. For Kennedy, then, the need to support South Vietnam against communist forces arose from “the need to halt aggression in its tracks, lest the psychological dominoes begin to topple” (54).

Lastly, *The Kennedy Withdrawal* is a reminder of the challenges that inconsistencies cause for both policy creation and implementation. For example, as the administration began to formulate withdrawal plans, it was riddled with conflicting assessments: “Optimists and pessimists alike populated all the key agencies and rendered contradictory judgments about the war” (95). This pattern continued throughout Kennedy’s time in office, illustrating the challenges for a president trying to craft an approach to the world. These differences of opinion were not the only inconsistencies to afflict administration planning. Throughout the conflict, Kennedy’s team was never able to reconcile the dire rhetoric forecasting the consequences of South Vietnam’s defeat with the desire for a limited commitment (70).

Conflicting views did not just exist within the U.S. government but also between the United States and South Vietnam (115). Repeatedly, the administration struggled to get the Diem government to pursue the war more vigorously and implement political reforms to enhance stability. At the same time, Diem was expressing doubts about U.S. assistance. American disillusionment was clearly evident in the administration’s consideration of a coup in August 1963, which Kennedy was willing to support as long as it was likely to succeed. Though eventually Diem would be overthrown, the August plotting fizzled, leaving the administration still grasping for ways to get better performance, “tied to a partner it acknowledged as expendable” and “openly doubting the value of the partnership” (146).

Even as withdrawal planning accelerated in Kennedy’s final months in office, the administration still did not have a plan to achieve that objective. There were lots of proposals, but none had overwhelming support. American opinion was split between applying pressure on Diem’s government and maintaining the status quo (156). Perhaps the greatest evidence that ties between the United States and South Vietnam were limited was that fifteen months into withdrawal planning, the United States still had not told the South Vietnamese government about it (160). The Kennedy Withdrawal is a reminder that myriad factors influence policy planning and that presidents often confront the same challenges their predecessors did. Indeed, as Selverstone notes in the Epilogue, when Barack Obama took office and was confronted with the challenge of Afghanistan, “The parallels in policymaking between Afghanistan and Vietnam were evident not only to the

chattering classes, but to government officials formulating policy” (240). He spent months formulating a policy, desperately grasping for the right approach. In the end, his policy had “contradictions . . . starker than Kennedy’s” (241). Obama once said that every day “I get a thick book full of death, destruction, strife, and chaos. That’s what I take with my morning tea.”² With a daily briefing like that, it is not difficult to see what LBJ meant when he said a president’s hardest job is “to know what is right.” In describing the challenges the Kennedy administration faced in withdrawal planning, Selverstone helps us see why.

Notes:

1. Lyndon Johnson, “Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union,” January 4, 1965, American Presidency Project, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/241819>.

2. “Barack Obama: The Vox Conversation,” Vox, January 23, 2017, <https://www.vox.com/a/barack-obama-interview-vox-conversation/obama-foreign-policy-transcript>.

Review of Marc J. Selverstone, *The Kennedy Withdrawal*

Jessica Elkind

Ever since John F. Kennedy’s tragic assassination in November 1963, Americans have imagined how the trajectory of the country might have been different if the young president’s life had not been cut short. Marc Selverstone’s *The Kennedy Withdrawal* addresses one of the central hypothetical questions that historians, pundits, and the American public have debated since the mid-1960s: What would Kennedy have done about Vietnam had he lived?

Selverstone tackles this “what if” by reconstructing the evolution of the Kennedy administration’s plans for withdrawing from Vietnam. Delving into an impressive array of oral histories, official documents, and media accounts, as well as JFK’s secret White House tapes, he arrives at a nuanced assessment of Kennedy’s intentions. According to Selverstone, although JFK had become deeply uncomfortable with the U.S. assistance program to Vietnam by the eve of his assassination, he and his key advisors believed that they had to sustain their commitment to South Vietnam until the communist insurgency had been defeated.

The Kennedy Withdrawal traces the arc of JFK’s presidency and then suggests why Lyndon Johnson reversed course in Vietnam during the first six months after Kennedy’s assassination. Selverstone provides a highly detailed account of administration officials’ deliberations, at times offering a day-by-day or even hour-by-hour analysis. Despite his focus on the minutiae of bureaucratic decision-making, he delivers an engaging narrative and a clear and compelling thesis.

As Selverstone explains, at the outset of his presidency, Kennedy did not consider Vietnam a top foreign policy priority. Real or potential crises in Berlin, Cuba, and Laos appeared far more pressing, as did the arms race and the ongoing rivalry with the Soviet Union. In addition, Kennedy hoped to focus on his own domestic initiatives in health care, education, and social justice. However, during his first year in office, the situation in South Vietnam deteriorated. Anti-government insurgents brazenly attacked South Vietnamese officials, troops, and law enforcement. The communist-led National Liberation Front (NLF) controlled significant swaths of territory, particularly in rural areas of the country. Meanwhile, Ngo Dinh Diem’s regime in Saigon squandered popular support by imposing draconian and repressive policies in a futile effort to maintain order.

During his first year in office, Kennedy tried to bolster

South Vietnamese defenses by drastically increasing the number of American military advisors and expanding their responsibilities. This escalation had little effect, however; the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) appeared less capable of defending the population or preventing a communist takeover than it had at the end of Dwight Eisenhower’s second term. After some of Kennedy’s top advisors made high-profile visits to Vietnam and reported their findings back home, the American press adopted their pessimistic assessments about the clear challenges posed by the conflict. To make matters worse, the ongoing civil war in neighboring Laos threatened to destabilize Vietnam further.

By the spring of 1962, Kennedy had become preoccupied with South Vietnam and sought to form a “contingency plan” that might involve the introduction of U.S. combat troops to prevent a communist victory. At the same moment, however, some of Kennedy’s advisors began searching for a way to minimize the American commitment and resist escalation. They hoped to shift the burden of fighting to South Vietnamese forces, while also reassuring leaders in Saigon that the United States would not abandon them to a communist takeover. As Selverstone explains, “just as Kennedy was asking about plans to introduce U.S. forces into Vietnam, he was learning of proposals to move in the opposite direction” (64).

Over the next several months, the administration followed these competing impulses and pursued a complicated policy. The president augmented U.S. troop levels, and members of his cabinet joined him in publicly declaring optimism about the course of the war and in speaking in apocalyptic terms about the necessity of defending South Vietnam. Behind closed doors, however, those same men expressed concern about the scope of the American commitment and admitted that defeating the insurgency would require many years of fighting. Thus, Kennedy’s advisors started looking for a way out of Vietnam and began systematic planning for a U.S. withdrawal. By early 1963, those discussions had coalesced into a comprehensive plan that included a short-term reduction of a thousand troops and a flexible end-date of 1965 for direct U.S. military involvement.

The Kennedy administration had numerous reasons for supporting withdrawal, many of which derived from political considerations. Selverstone offers a sophisticated analysis of the domestic, Vietnamese, and international factors that shaped their thinking. He shows how those factors informed policymaking, especially in the critical period from April 1962 to October 1963.

On the domestic front, proposed troop reductions would mute congressional leaders’ demands for budget cuts and streamlined military operations. Promises of withdrawal would counter criticism from the media and the American public that Kennedy was too invested in a region of peripheral strategic value and not focused enough on domestic issues such as the civil rights movement. Fewer troops in Vietnam would also limit American casualties and prevent another drawn-out conflict like Korea, with its burdensome and far-reaching financial obligations.

Perhaps equally important, withdrawal also offered benefits for the flagging U.S.-South Vietnamese partnership. The large American presence tarnished Diem’s reputation as a nationalist leader and provided fodder for claims by the NLF and Hanoi that the United States was merely another imperialist occupation force. And the Kennedy administration also hoped that the promise—or threat—of withdrawal might compel Diem to make meaningful political reforms, particularly in the aftermath of the spring 1963 Buddhist crisis.

Selverstone deftly weaves together all of these threads to show how and why the administration invested so much time and energy in preparing for a scheduled withdrawal

from Vietnam. As he explains, withdrawal planning was “a strategic response to the Communist challenge in Southeast Asia, a bureaucratic response to economic challenges at home and abroad, and a political response to policy and administrative challenges in Washington and Saigon” (244).

Ironically, one of Selverstone’s central arguments about the Kennedy withdrawal is that the president’s “precise role remains elusive” (243). Indeed, the portrait of Kennedy that emerges from this account is that of a pragmatic, patient, and cautious leader who was deeply concerned about maintaining credibility. On Vietnam and other important issues, he “seemed reluctant to act” and showed “a reticence that signaled his desire to avoid any course that narrowed his options” (158). Despite the clear evidence that Kennedy generally supported reductions in American troop levels and even inspired the original planning, Selverstone concludes that we actually know very little about his particular imprint on the policy or his intentions just before his fateful trip to Dallas in November 1963.

What we do know is that the chief architect and proponent of withdrawal was Robert McNamara, Kennedy’s secretary of defense. He declared in an October 1963 meeting with the president and his top national security advisors that “we need a way to get out of Vietnam.” He later made the case to Kennedy directly, arguing that “we must have a means of disengaging from this area. We must show our country that means” (170–71). According to Selverstone, McNamara championed withdrawal planning because he, like others in the administration, was “under no illusion about the duration of the war in Vietnam” (53). Moreover, withdrawal reinforced McNamara’s overarching interest in “cutting costs and achieving efficiencies through systematic fiscal and project planning” in defense and national security policy (243). Selverstone’s interpretation of McNamara’s role represents an important historiographical intervention. While many scholars have treated McNamara as one of the primary forces behind the war—and at one point, the secretary saw himself that way as well—few have emphasized either his restraint or his desire to minimize the American commitment.

The bulk of *The Kennedy Withdrawal* focuses on the specific details of policymaking during the early 1960s, including Johnson’s abandonment of the plan in early 1964. However, Selverstone’s fascinating and lengthy epilogue considers the mythology and mystique that developed around Kennedy after his death. Selverstone explains how members of Kennedy’s family, politicians, and a grieving American public embraced this mythology in an effort to come to terms with the assassination and the U.S. intervention in Vietnam. He highlights how questions about Kennedy’s intentions infused popular culture, notably Oliver Stone’s 1991 film *JFK*. Finally, he shows how comparisons between the Vietnam War and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as between John F. Kennedy and Barack Obama, reinvigorated debates about Kennedy’s foreign policy.

Selverstone marshals a great amount of evidence to make his case, and the book has few shortcomings. One minor shortcoming lies in his meager treatment of North Vietnam. While he effectively highlights the complicated nature of the South Vietnamese-American alliance, he offers scant information about political dynamics in North Vietnam and how those influenced American policymaking. He might have included further analysis of how the Kennedy administration viewed Hanoi and understood North Vietnamese capabilities and intentions. He could also have relied on scholarship by historians such as Pierre Asselin and Lien-Hang Nguyen, among others, to compare American and North Vietnamese deliberations and strategy during this critical period before the introduction of U.S. combat troops. Doing so would have provided a more complete picture of the context in which

American officials were operating.

Ultimately, *The Kennedy Withdrawal* offers an authoritative and convincing account of the administration’s deliberations about Vietnam. Selverstone subtly rejects both the “Cold Warrior” camp that emphasizes continuity between Kennedy’s and Johnson’s policies and the exceptionalist school that contends Kennedy would not have escalated the war. Instead, he shows how, despite Kennedy’s personal misgivings about the commitment to South Vietnam, he never abandoned the underlying logic that led to that commitment; nor did he pledge definitively to end U.S. military involvement. Selverstone’s brilliant book makes a significant contribution not only to the particular yet understudied topic of withdrawal planning during Kennedy’s presidency but also to the history of JFK’s foreign policy more broadly and to our understanding of the American war in Vietnam.

Review of Marc J. Selverstone, *The Kennedy Withdrawal: Camelot and the American Commitment to Vietnam*

Philip E. Catton

As an exchange student at George Washington University in the mid-1980s, I recall listening with rapt attention as historian John Newman, a guest speaker in one of my classes, contended that, by the time of his death, President Kennedy had laid plans to pull US troops out of Vietnam. As Newman later wrote in his 1992 *JFK and Vietnam*, “Kennedy was headed for a total withdrawal – come what may” when he made his fateful visit to Texas, but this goal died along with the president, “snuffed out on November 22, 1963.”

In his talk and subsequent book, Newman also speculated about whether Kennedy’s determination to exit Vietnam was connected with his death in Dallas, an explosive charge most spectacularly advanced in Oliver Stone’s bombshell movie *JFK*.¹ For an undergraduate student and history neophyte, the idea that Kennedy would not have taken the United States to war, and the whiff of conspiracy surrounding his death, was electrifying.

At the time, I did not appreciate that I was joining a long-running conversation about the aborted withdrawal plan and JFK’s intentions in Vietnam. As Marc Selverstone observes in the introduction to *The Kennedy Withdrawal*, the arguments began soon after the conflict’s escalation in 1965 and have continued down to the present, re-ignited in recent years by concerns about how the United States could extricate itself from new brushfire wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Selverstone notes that the “great ‘what if?’” debate – what if Kennedy had not died in Dallas and had gone on to win a second term? – has divided scholars and commentators into two basic camps: one that regards JFK as a quintessential “Cold Warrior” who was committed to the preservation of an independent South Vietnam, even if that had required the kind of full-scale conflict sanctioned by his successor, Lyndon Johnson; and the other, the “Camelot” school, which believes Kennedy had soured on the commitment to Vietnam and would have withdrawn if he had lived and won re-election in 1964.

In his forensic examination of the administration’s planning for a withdrawal, Selverstone takes a position somewhere between these two camps. On the one hand, his analysis makes it clear that the planning process, which was spearheaded by Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, was real and serious. From early 1962 onward, he writes, “the Kennedy administration undertook a sustained and systematic effort to schedule the removal of American servicemen from South Vietnam and turn the war over to the government in Saigon” (1). The goal was to wind up most of the advisory program by the end of 1965. In part at least, this effort reflected JFK’s concern about the scale and

nature of the growing American presence in Vietnam. In that sense, it accords with the “Camelot” interpretation of the president’s desire to avoid an open-ended commitment.

On the other hand, Selverstone explains that the administration’s planning was the product of mixed motives, not just worries about the commitment turning into a quagmire. Among other considerations was its interest in easing public and congressional worries about the US role in Vietnam and the general cost of foreign aid. Ironically, then, the plan to reduce the American footprint in-country was also intended as a way of sustaining domestic support for that presence, at least over the short-to-medium term. “As much as it signaled an eagerness to wind down the U.S. assistance effort,” Selverstone observes, “the policy of withdrawal... allowed JFK to preserve the American commitment to Vietnam” (246). He argues that the president never abandoned Cold War assumptions about falling dominoes or the importance of maintaining U.S. credibility and that Kennedy conditioned any withdrawal from Vietnam on continued progress in the campaign to stamp out the communist insurgency. As the author acknowledges, this conclusion ultimately puts him much closer to the “Cold Warrior” than the “Camelot” view of events.

Focused like a laser on policymaking – and, indeed, the highest levels of decision making in Washington – *The Kennedy Withdrawal* might strike some readers as a rather old-fashioned piece of diplomatic history. Given the topic, though, the focus is entirely understandable. Moreover, Selverstone’s book subjects the administration’s plans to closer scrutiny than any previous study. Drawing on written documents, oral histories, and the White House tapes with which he is so familiar from his work at the University of Virginia’s Miller Center, the author skillfully analyzes the evolution of the policymaking process and the various forces that shaped it. Individual interventions, competing bureaucratic interests, domestic political pressure, and looming economic concerns all make an appearance in this richly detailed and engaging narrative.

As readers already know the terrible outcome of Selverstone’s story, at least in general terms, the book makes for uncomfortable reading. Its examination of high-level decision making frequently exposes the Alice-in-Wonderland-quality of the process, as officials sought to shape events in a country about which they knew so little. That the withdrawal planning assumed the guerrilla war could be reduced rapidly to a manageable level is emblematic of their pie-in-the-sky thinking.

When they conceived the plan in early 1962, at a time when there were hopes that increased US assistance to South Vietnam would turn the tide of the insurgency, officials pointed to a raft of statistics to justify the proposed drawdown of US forces: numbers of South Vietnamese troops trained, enemy weapons captured, etc. By the autumn of 1963, amid a growing sense that the security situation was deteriorating, this data appeared to be a dubious indicator of the actual state of the conflict. The administration then tied itself in knots attempting to square the drumbeat of negative news coming out of South Vietnam with its announcement that progress in the war would permit the withdrawal of a thousand military personnel by the end of 1963.

The old saying, apocryphally attributed to Bismarck, that sausages and laws are things one should not watch being made, seems an apt description of the administration’s decision-making. Selverstone’s analysis of the drafting of

the McNamara-Taylor report offers a particularly damning example. In the autumn of 1963, Kennedy chose Robert McNamara and General Maxwell Taylor to lead another fact-finding mission to South Vietnam to assess the increasingly volatile situation there. After a whirlwind visit, the members of the mission completed their report, with very little sleep, during the twenty-seven-hour flight back to the United States. This method was hardly conducive to the “coherence and clarity of the finished product,” Selverstone writes (166).

The mission members also argued over the inclusion in their findings of clauses recommending a troop withdrawal, with the State Department’s William H. Sullivan telling the mission’s leaders that a promise to effectively end the US military role by 1965 was totally unrealistic. Sullivan thought he had persuaded them to remove the pledge, but McNamara and Taylor put it back in shortly after landing and just before submitting the report to the president. The drafting process seems more reminiscent of time-challenged undergraduate students rushing to complete their term papers than how one imagines the nation’s leaders decide matters of critical importance. It was “a very poor way to conduct the top business of the U.S. Government,” one member of the mission acknowledged (166).

Although titled *The Kennedy Withdrawal*, Kennedy does not in fact dominate the book’s narrative. To be sure, the issue of the president’s intentions and the “great ‘what if?’” question hang heavily over Selverstone’s story. Nevertheless, JFK was certainly not leading the charge on withdrawal planning. “No paper trail connects him to that planning, and his recorded conversations betray an ignorance of its progress and a skepticism of its merits,” the author states (243). As Selverstone frequently reminds his readers, presidents have a lot on their plates and often deal with issues only episodically. Kennedy had a particularly full plate, with other crises both at home (civil rights) and abroad (Laos, Berlin, and Cuba). Consequently, policy toward Vietnam often simmered on the White House’s backburner.

When it did come to the forefront, the president’s interest in limiting American involvement in Vietnam was evident. Equally clear, though, was his commitment to the preservation of an anti-communist southern government. Although Kennedy encouraged the plan for a withdrawal, he never appeared preoccupied with it. He also conditioned its implementation on progress in beating the insurgents. Selverstone’s detailed treatment of the issue strongly suggests that those who have interpreted the proposed drawdown of US forces as proof of Kennedy’s reluctance to escalate further, or even of his intent to pull out of Vietnam, have read too much into the historical record, making inferences and connections that do not seem to fit the facts.

As Selverstone emphasizes, the secretary of defense, not the president, was the driving force behind withdrawal planning. Ever attentive to “His Master’s Voice,” McNamara “likely took” his cue to initiate the planning process “from Kennedy’s interest in reducing U.S. involvement when the opportunity for doing so presented itself” (72). The scheme also reflected McNamara’s desire to establish a long-term plan for South Vietnam, one matching his larger efforts to rationalize the Department of Defense’s budgetary and planning procedures. He was keen to rein in the political and economic costs of an unfocused, open-ended commitment. The administration fretted about the hemorrhaging of domestic support not only for the U.S.

The book makes for uncomfortable reading. Its examination of high-level decision making frequently exposes the Alice-in-Wonderland-quality of the process, as officials sought to shape events in a country about which they knew so little. That the withdrawal planning assumed the guerrilla war could be reduced rapidly to a manageable level is emblematic of their pie-in-the-sky thinking.

presence in Vietnam but also for the broader foreign aid program. It worried, too, about the impact of expensive overseas commitments on the nation's gold reserves and balance of payments. McNamara singled out the spiraling costs of continued assistance to South Korea as the example to be avoided.

Changing the title to the "McNamara Withdrawal" would probably not secure the book as wide a readership. Yet Selverstone's McNamara appears more enthusiastic about plans for a withdrawal than Kennedy and, for those seeking an alternative history, more concerned about finding an exit from Vietnam. The author argues that, as early as 1962, McNamara had begun to exhibit that political schizophrenia which came to characterize his approach to Vietnam policy: optimistic pronouncements in public and pessimistic assessments in private. By the autumn of 1963, as the situation in South Vietnam unraveled, he seemed ready to go beyond Kennedy's vague, conditional commitment to a withdrawal and set a date for wrapping up America's military involvement, regardless of the state of the conflict.

Selverstone contends that McNamara was particularly disturbed by what he had seen and heard during his trip to Vietnam with Maxwell Taylor in September, and he describes the "desperate tones" in which the secretary of defense defended the withdrawal plan in a meeting following the mission's return to the United States. "'We need a way to get out of Vietnam. This is a way of doing it,'" McNamara pleaded (170). Selverstone does not speculate further about his motivations, but it is almost as if McNamara was looking to provide the administration with a "decent interval" justification for getting out of Vietnam: "Well, we completed our training and advisory mission, leaving the South Vietnamese with everything they needed to win the war, but unfortunately..."

Exhaustively researched, cogently argued, and elegantly written, *The Kennedy Withdrawal* is a fine work of history. It will probably not end the debate over the "great 'what if?'" question, but it is surely close to being the last word on the origins and evolution of the Kennedy's administration's planning for a withdrawal from Vietnam.

Note:

1. John M. Newman, *JFK and Vietnam: Deception, Intrigue, and the Struggle for Power* (New York, 1992), 456, 459-60.

Author's Response

Marc Selverstone

I am sincerely grateful to Phil Catton, Jessica Chapman, Tizoc Chavez, and Jessica Elkind for the time and energy they devoted to reviewing *The Kennedy Withdrawal*; to Andy Johns for thinking the book worthy of a *Passport* roundtable; and to Chester Pach for introducing the discussion and framing its particulars. I am further heartened by the reviewers' generous critiques, especially given their expertise on Vietnam and the American presidency. Although they highlight matters I might have explored in greater depth—observations I largely agree with—I am pleased that each found the book helpful in expanding our understanding of Kennedy and Vietnam, a subject that often yields as much heat as it does light.

My goal was not to write a comprehensive account of Kennedy and Vietnam but to offer a policy history of perhaps its most contentious subplot: the administration's planning to withdraw the majority of U.S. troops by the end of 1965. References to that planning or to JFK's ultimate intentions appear in virtually all accounts of Kennedy and Vietnam, but comparatively few works address the matter

in great depth. Prior to my study, the most extensive efforts had come from John Newman, Howard Jones, and James Douglass, with James Blight, Gareth Porter, and James Galbraith offering further inquiries in the form of essays, book chapters, extended commentaries, and critical oral histories. Each also advanced the argument that Kennedy was committed to enacting a troop withdrawal in a prospective second term.¹

While evidence for withdrawal planning is clear and extensive, its meaning is not—at least that was my assumption going into the project. My agenda, therefore, was to probe that meaning by situating withdrawal planning within the broader array of challenges confronting the Kennedy administration—civil rights, a sluggish economy, inequitable standards of living, the nuclear threat, the contest with international communism, and more, including efforts to reimagine planning, budgeting, and warfighting strategies at the Pentagon.

I quickly became aware that embedding a study of withdrawal within a richly textured account of Kennedy's Vietnam policy—let alone within his presidency—would far exceed the limits of the project's negotiated word count. Moreover, I thought it necessary to expand that number to account for key developments on both the front and back ends of formal planning for withdrawal, which lasted from July 1962 through October 1963. I therefore began my study by exploring the depth of Kennedy's commitment to South Vietnam through its various signifiers—presidential rhetoric; high-profile visits from military and civilian officials; administrative, economic, and military assistance; and, ultimately, the introduction of American troops—prior to the onset of withdrawal planning. I closed by charting the demise of the withdrawal policy during the presidency of Lyndon B. Johnson.

In addition, I thought it necessary to comment on Cold War national security policy and pre-1961 developments in Southeast Asia, as well as Kennedy's approach to both, in the book's introduction. And as I dipped in and out of writing the book from the late 2000s through the 2010s, it became clear that the narrative of a Kennedy withdrawal was coloring real-time debates about the use of force abroad. Hence an epilogue charting those developments, as part of a broader history of that narrative, also seemed in order.

This is all to say that what I gained in depth—at least on the specifics of withdrawal—I likely lost in breadth. As Jessica Chapman notes, my "laser focus on withdrawal planning veers into tunnel vision," crowding out a deeper exploration of the military situation in Vietnam, the experiences of North and South Vietnamese—a concern raised by other reviewers as well—and the broader history of the administration. Again, these tradeoffs were apparent at the outset of the project and became more evident as it advanced.

Nonetheless, I tried to address them where possible. While I did consult key works on communist actors during this period, I found few if any reactions in them to key elements of my study, such as the administration's withdrawal announcement of October 1963. While further reference to North Vietnamese and NLF activity might have widened the aperture on the dynamics of U.S. policymaking, Kennedy officials rarely factored enemy actions into their assessments of U.S. strategy in meaningful ways. Still, greater attention to military conditions, objectives, and maneuvers, as well as to the concerns and rhetoric of additional players, would have situated the reader more effectively in the reality on the ground and in the minds of those responsible for addressing it.

In a related observation, Phil Catton notes that I offer what some might regard as old-fashioned diplomatic history, even as he gives me a pass for doing so. Indeed, the actors in this drama are primarily senior-level policymakers, and

mostly American ones at that; moreover, I consider their actions not through sophisticated methodological lenses but through a more conventional reading of traditional sources such as embassy cables, meeting memoranda, and planning documents. While British materials shed valuable light at several junctures along the way, this story is largely an American one, told through American voices.

Nevertheless—and this is where I hope the book expands the evidentiary base—those voices literally fill in blank spots in the historical record: Of the twenty-eight conversations that Kennedy secretly recorded on Vietnam, more than half provide the only account of those meetings available for research. Several add information missing from textual memoranda, while others force a reconsideration of the memoranda themselves. I am hardly the first person to rely on the tapes for insight into Kennedy's Vietnam policymaking (though aside from Brian VanDeMark, I believe I use them more comprehensively than others, particularly the conversations just prior to the September 1963 McNamara-Taylor mission).² And scholars surely need to interrogate the tapes as they would any other document. But in their immediacy, granularity, and ability to highlight the affective and fluid dimensions of policymaking, Kennedy's Vietnam tapes—all of which are now more accessible via the *Presidential Recordings Digital Edition*—endow these actors and their decisions—familiar as they are—with greater nuance and complexity.³

Aside from matters of sourcing and methodology, Chapman wonders about my reluctance to probe Kennedy's broader political strategy, particularly in advance of a prospective second term. She cites the famous Kennedy-Mansfield meeting of early 1963 as a missed opportunity for that discussion.⁴ I take her point that perhaps JFK anticipated the credibility imperative weakening after 1965. It is an argument that runs through the literature, and not only about Vietnam, but about China and Cuba policy as well.⁵

Kennedy likely relished that opportunity for policy flexibility—who wouldn't?—and perhaps fancied himself withstanding “another Joe McCarthy red scare,” as Kenny O'Donnell and Dave Powers frame it, should he try to pull out of Vietnam.⁶ But how much flexibility would he really have enjoyed? Kennedy himself rarely speculated on the dynamics of policymaking that far out, as he recognized its contingency. That was one of the reasons his administration refrained from writing a Basic National Security Policy.

Indeed, whether Kennedy sought to appease Mike Mansfield or disclose a coming policy reversal—or both—the episode highlights a signal truth about JFK: his aspirations would always be tempered by his pragmatism. While withdrawal might have seemed both desirable and achievable, it would await the needs of the moment. Those needs included a propitious military environment, at least for JFK. That was what he conveyed to McNamara when the two were alone in May 1963 and what he told national security officials that October. As for what Kennedy might have done if Saigon was about to fall, he and his advisers would cross that bridge, as Robert Kennedy maintained in a Spring 1964 interview, when they came to it.⁷

Intriguingly, those conditions might not have held for Robert McNamara, who evinced a greater tolerance for withdrawal without a clear path toward victory. Catton's insight about the Kennedy administration moving toward a “decent interval” solution years before the Nixon administration did so is thus particularly apt. While we cannot know whether Kennedy would have implemented withdrawal regardless of Saigon's military capabilities, we can point to McNamara as that approach's staunchest

champion—a posture that grew out of the secretary's September 1963 visit to South Vietnam.

In this respect, Jessica Elkind's comment on my McNamara “intervention,” in which she notes that “few have emphasized either [McNamara's] restraint or his desire to minimize the American commitment,” is also on point. McNamara's remarkable plea to Kennedy in October 1963 that “we need a way to get out of Vietnam,” especially in the context of his embrace of the conflict seven months later as “McNamara's War,” is what drew me to the project in the first place.⁸

Finally, I would like to reframe a couple of observations and close with a thought on the great “What If”—the metanarrative at the heart of the book. Tizoc Chavez, in alluding to my arguments, writes that Kennedy “remained a firm believer in the domino theory.” I'm not sure I make that case so categorically. Perhaps I'm putting too fine a point on it, but I write that JFK “never disowned the strategic logic” on which the domino theory rested.⁹ To be sure, Kennedy espoused its elements both prior to and during his presidency and supported it explicitly and repeatedly in his September 1963 interview with NBC. Even Bobby, in his 1964 oral history, touted the domino theory as the very basis for JFK's Vietnam policy. Yet the president probably found its mechanistic application too pat, even as he feared the cascade dynamics informing it. Suffice it to say, the credibility imperative made domino logic compelling in the abstract, even if it warranted qualification in its particulars.

I would also recast, if only slightly, Chavez's description of Kennedy's November 1961 decision to expand the U.S. military commitment. His description of the “8,000 U.S. troops acting in an advisory capacity” conflates two elements of the proposals before JFK: (1) the 8,000 combat troops that Gen. Maxwell D. Taylor recommended to conduct military operations in support of area security and to provide relief from the recent flooding of the Mekong River; and (2) the introduction of troops intended to serve in advisory capacities and not in combat roles. While those advisers found their way into combat—with no initial ceiling attached to their numbers and more than a hundred of them dying during the Kennedy presidency—JFK drew the line at dispatching U.S. forces to serve as integrated fighting units. Whether the distinction would have mattered come 1965 and a second Kennedy term is, of course, at the heart of the counterfactual debate.

I deliberately avoid entering that debate in the book, focusing instead on where JFK was in November 1963. Although Kennedy went to Texas uncomfortable with the depth of the U.S. commitment, he was still intent on maintaining it. Support for the counterinsurgency remained operative; various measures, such as the extension of covert operations and the adoption of an enclave strategy, were within the realm of possibility, as was the deployment of additional advisers, especially if Kennedy deemed them necessary to stabilize the South prior to November 1964. Indeed, even Kennedy's admirers see him persisting in Vietnam, in whatever form that persistence might have taken, through the coming election cycle.

Nevertheless, I find it difficult to envision Kennedy adopting Johnson's eventual strategy and deploying half a million combat troops to Southeast Asia. It might even be a stretch to see him reaching for a congressional resolution, as Johnson did in August 1964, let alone launching contemporaneous air strikes on North Vietnamese positions. In the end, I remain impressed by Kennedy's repeated admonitions against the use of American combat

troops, as well as his public insistence that the war was Saigon's to win or lose. Whether he would have maintained those restrictions well into a second term and in light of a potential presidential run by Bobby involves considerations beyond what I had in mind.

What I did want to explore was the meaning of withdrawal planning as it evolved over the course of fifteen months, from the middle of Kennedy's time in office right up until the end. I conclude that its meaning was never static and that it served multiple purposes for those involved in the process. For Kennedy, given its public announcement in October 1963, its promise lay in its political value, as it allowed him to sustain as well as limit U.S. involvement—imperatives meant to address policy challenges and political realities at home and abroad, and particularly in South Vietnam. While he might one day have opted for new departures, that is not where he was in late 1963. Was he uncomfortable? Yes. Exasperated? Yes. Through with it all? No.

Notes:

1. John Newman, *JFK and Vietnam: Deception, Intrigue, and the Struggle for Power*. Rev ed. (New York, 2017); Howard Jones, *Death of a Generation: How the Assassinations of Diem and JFK Prolonged the Vietnam War* (New York and Oxford, UK, 2003); James K. Galbraith, "Exit Strategy," *Boston Review Online* (October/November 2003); Gareth Porter, *Perils of Dominance: Imbalance of Power and the Road to War in Vietnam* (Berkeley, CA, 2005), 165–79; James W. Douglass, *JFK and the Unspeakable: Why He Died and Why It Matters* (Maryknoll, NY, 2008); James G. Blight, Janet M. Lang, and David A. Welch, *If Kennedy Had Lived: Virtual JFK* (Lanham, MD, 2008). For a snapshot of the withdrawal literature, see Andrew Preston, "Vietnam," in *A Companion to John F. Kennedy*, ed. Marc J. Selverstone (Malden, MA, 2014), 280–84.
2. Brian VanDeMark, *Road to Disaster: A New History of America's Descent into Vietnam* (New York, 2018).
3. *Presidential Recordings Digital Edition* (hereafter PRDE) [Kennedy and Vietnam, ed. Ken Hughes and Marc J. Selverstone] (Charlottesville, VA, 2014–). <https://prde.upress.virginia.edu/content/kennedy>.

4. I am less convinced than she that the meeting took place in February 1963. The literature frequently places that meeting in the spring of 1963 without further specificity. See Kenneth O'Donnell and David Powers, *"Johnny, We Hardly Knew Ye": Memories of John Fitzgerald Kennedy* (Boston, 1972), 15–16; Don Oberdorfer, *Senator Mansfield: The Extraordinary Life of a Great American Statesman and Diplomat* (Washington, DC, 2003), 194–95; VanDeMark, *Road to Disaster*, 156–57. Dallek locates the meeting in May 1963, citing Newman, who locates it in the vicinity of Kennedy's March 6 press conference. Dallek, *An Unfinished Life*, 668; Newman, *JFK and Vietnam*, 322–23.

5. See, for instance, Fredrik Logevall, "Kennedy and What Might Have Been," in *Kennedy: The New Frontier Reconsidered*, ed. Mark White (New York, 1998), 19–63; Robert Dallek, "JFK's Second Term," *The Atlantic Monthly* (June 2003), 58–66; Mark A. Lawrence, "Kennedy's Cuban Dilemma: The United States and Castro after the Missile Crisis," in *John F. Kennedy and the "Thousand Days": New Perspectives on the Foreign and Domestic Policies of the Kennedy Administration*, ed. Manfred Berg and Andres Etges (Heidelberg, 2007), 159–74.

6. O'Donnell and Powers, *"Johnny,"* 16.

7. John F. Kennedy and Robert S. McNamara on 7 May 1963, PRDE; John F. Kennedy and National Security Officials on 2 October 1963, PRDE; Edwin O. Guthman and Jeffrey Shulman, eds., *Robert Kennedy: In His Own Words: The Unpublished Recollections of the Kennedy Years* (New York, 1988), 394–95.

8. "John F. Kennedy and National Security Officials on 2 October 1963," PRDE, "McNamara Agrees to Call it His War," *New York Times*, 25 April 1964, 2. McNamara, of course, remains a slippery figure. Aurélie Basha i Novosejt recently explored his evolution in some depth, highlighting his understanding of loyalty and his sense of professional obligation, and we await further insight from Philip and William Taubman, who are presently writing a full-length biography. Aurélie Basha i Novosejt, *"I Made Mistakes:" Robert McNamara's Vietnam War Policy, 1960–1968* (New York and Cambridge, UK, 2019).

9. Marc J. Selverstone, *The Kennedy Withdrawal: Camelot and the American Commitment to Vietnam* (Cambridge, MA, 2022), 246.

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Requiem for a Field: The Strange Journey of U.S. Diplomatic History

Ryan M. Irwin

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U.S. Diplomatic History no longer exists. Not as a hiring category in higher education, at least. About a decade ago, United States and the World History subsumed U.S. Diplomatic History. This essay is about that transformation. Why did it happen and what did it change? My goal is to identify some useable generalizations about how the field now works, so that interested readers can develop their own opinions about where we should go next.

Three claims organize this requiem. The first is that the field has tended to reflect the politics of the time. The reason is not hard to comprehend because the United States became the most powerful empire in human history at a time when history became an organized profession. At the risk of egregious oversimplification, we might use generational stereotypes to signpost how the conversation about U.S. foreign relations history evolved over time. For instance, Baby Boomers are often accused of taking their differences seriously, and that generation's scholarship generated diametrically opposed interpretations of American power. In contrast, Generation X historians shrugged off these categories, authoring a "New Diplomatic History" that was less political and more ironic. An earlier interest in social change morphed into an obsession with methodology. Now, as Millennial scholars make their imprint on the field, the conversation about American power is growing more critical. As we'll see, today's historians are attacking foundational American beliefs in ways that reflect their disillusionment with liberalism—and their apathy toward American hegemony.

The essay's second and third claims flow from these crude stereotypes. For much of its history, U.S. Diplomatic History was plural but not very diverse. This plurality arose from the fact that diplomatic historians disagreed profoundly about capitalism, leading them into camps that judged US foreign relations differently. Yet these arguments—or perhaps the fact that most participants were white middle-aged straight men—made the field cohesive. Today, the field is more diverse and less plural. Fewer diplomatic historians are white cisgender men. In fact, only a handful still identify as diplomatic historians. Yet the field's burgeoning diversity papers over the fact that its leading voices tend to see the world through the same political lens. Today, most U.S. and the World scholars treat capitalism, nationalism, and liberalism critically, and suggest that the United States should not play a role in world affairs because its track record is abysmal. In ways that are exciting—and perhaps problematic—the field now exists to criticize U.S. power.

The Past

How did we get here? Forty years ago, U.S. diplomatic historians told two different origins stories about the field.

The more popular tale focused on the exploits of those who had stormed the ivory tower after the 1950s. This story always started in Madison, Wisconsin. Working under the aegis of William Appleman Williams (1959) and Fred Harvey Harrington, a coterie of graduate students, most prominently Walter LaFeber, Thomas McCormick, and Lloyd Gardner (1976), authored a much-heralded master narrative about the tragedy of American diplomacy, and this master narrative came to dominate the field of U.S. Diplomatic History. Although historians studied diplomacy before this intervention, they did so without the pretense of synthesis. The Wisconsin school—or the New Left as it is commonly called—changed this. You could accept or reject its thesis but no one could ignore its power.

The New Left argument was simple enough. Contrary to public perception, the United States had not been dragged kicking and screaming from its isolationist ways into international politics in the 1940s. Rather the United States had sought out overseas markets greedily for over a half century, using informal imperialism to open doors for U.S. businessmen and other American interest groups. This argument denaturalized American capitalism, presenting its spread as contingent and political, and the New Left thesis struck a chord with general readers by affirming the belief that Cold War propagandists could not be trusted. Against the backdrop of the Vietnam War, U.S. diplomatic historians became truth-tellers, unafraid to skewer the shibboleths of liberals who blamed all unrest everywhere on the Soviet Union. When McCormick (1971) laid out the first formal agenda for the field in the early 1970s, he framed this kind of "structural" analysis as an antidote to the study of foreign affairs.

McCormick saw the Wisconsin school as *revising* a second, less sexy origins story, rooted not in the exploits of young boomers but in the collaboration between U.S. Diplomatic History and the U.S. government. Before the 1960s, some historians enjoyed access to American officialdom, lending their expertise to the war effort against world fascism and then joining the fight against world communism. This arrangement turned a handful of historians into philosopher kings. For example, George Kennan (1956, 1958) made strategy for the U.S. State Department before retiring to Princeton to write influential diplomatic histories about World War I. He exemplified this dynamic. Similarly, Hans Morgenthau (1948), who corresponded regularly with U.S. secretaries of state from his perch at the University of Chicago, invented the field of International Relations by presenting U.S. Diplomatic History as raw material for the "scientific" study of foreign affairs. For these collaborators, the line between history and political science barely existed since knowledge was only useful if it possessed a real-world application.

If McCormick's call to arms put these self-proclaimed realists on the defense, they did not stay there for long. To the contrary, they defended their collaboration with the U.S. government while laying claim to features of the New Left. Memorably, when Bancroft-winning historian John Lewis Gaddis (1983) announced the arrival of *post-revisionist*

synthesis, he coopted McCormick's structural approach, acknowledging the methodological merits of studying the United States as an empire. U.S. foreign relations, Gaddis argued, had to be seen holistically. However, Gaddis derided the New Left for its anti-capitalist sophism. Since all great powers were empires, he reasoned, comparison did not have to be critical, and he frequently observed that Soviet imperialism was worse than the American alternative (Gaddis, 1997). After authoring a synthesis of Cold War strategy—uprooting key features of New Left orthodoxy—Gaddis (1982, 2005) crafted a grand strategy program at Yale University that examined the difficulties facing powerful people, winning accolades from a sitting president and consternation from colleagues in higher education. By the time Germany reunified and the Soviet Union collapsed, the chasm between these rival approaches felt insurmountable because the two sides exemplified contemporary partisan discourse so elegantly.¹

It fell on Michael Hogan's shoulders to weave these perspectives into a coherent tapestry. As editor of *Diplomatic History*, the field's journal of record, he published a series of influential edited volumes that pulled together these rival origin stories, and, in the process, unfurled a longer narrative about the history of U.S. foreign relations history. For Hogan (1996; 2000; Hogan and Paterson, 1994, 2004), the disagreements between revisionists and post-revisionists originated in the earliest days of the historical profession. After all, before the social and cultural turns—before the creation of the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations (SHAHR) in 1967—*everybody* was a diplomatic historian. The field, Hogan argued, began as a conversation between nationalists and progressives at the dawn of the twentieth century, so that is where the field's true origin lay. Whereas Samuel Flagg Bemis (1926) and Dexter Perkins (1933) explored the ingenuity of early American elites by studying their diplomacy through European eyes, progressives like Charles and Mary Beard (1927) emphasized and probed the malleability of early American politics. The former approach propped up nationalism and the latter deflated its tropes, establishing the template for all subsequent scholarship.

This initial divide, Hogan believed, explained the conflict between realists, revisionists, and post-revisionists in his time. Whereas historians like Ernest May (1986) and Geir Lundestad (1986) respected elites, authoring tomes that explained how policymakers should use history, Williams and his cohort criticized elites, implying that their ambitions betrayed the spirit of the American heartland. The two sides used archives differently and disagreed on whether the past offered useable lessons or dire warnings, and Hogan, as a product of this impasse, saw potential syntheses everywhere. From his perch at *Diplomatic History*, he needed rivals like Gaddis—whom he characterized as Bemis 2.0—while championing a revolving door of “next big things” that promised to settle that day's implacable interpretative divide. For example, his initial answer to post-revisionism was corporatism. In Hogan's mind (1987), studying the way government bureaucracies aided American businessmen shed light on capitalism's efflorescence.

But synthesis was elusive. One reason was that diplomatic historians defined the subject at the center of the field differently. Some scholars focused on the state, or the individuals who designed and implemented public policy. Others looked to the nation, or the cultural and social practices that delimited group behavior by shaping self/other perceptions over time. For example, Williams's *Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (1956) was about the nation, or the invisible forces that allegedly made the United States do certain things during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In contrast, Gaddis's *Strategies of Containment* (1982, 2005) is about the state, evaluating how a series of presidential administrations implemented a single strategic doctrine

during the Cold War. Cited as exemplars of the revisionist and post-revisionist traditions, respectively, these works focused on different objects, similar enough to sustain debate—since the nation and state feel so inextricable—yet distinct enough to make consensus impossible.

Equally important was the field's Janus-face. Until the end of the Cold War, its members mostly wrote about the causes and effects of public policy, and many important policy questions could only be answered by looking at the home front. For example, when Lyndon Johnson sent half a million Americans to Vietnam, he was embroiled in political considerations, therefore many of the diplomatic historians trying to explain that act felt compelled to look for answers in Johnson's White House. However, other equally essential questions—especially those related to the effects of American policy—necessitated research elsewhere and a different kind of narrative style. The tension between these approaches was generative and baked into the revisionist and post-revisionist divide. So long as diplomatic historians continued to ask different kinds of questions, Robert McMahon (1990) explained, they would require a pluralist attitude toward the United States and the world. Lasting consensus was not as interesting as long walks on the border between rival perspectives.

Finally, revisionists and post-revisionists interpreted American motives differently. As mentioned, historians in the latter camp tended to emphasize international context to argue that the United States should be judged against the actions of its rivals. Washington was not always good, but it was better than most. Those in the former camp accentuated domestic context, measuring Washington's behavior against the country's professed values. While not always evil, the United States was rarely what it claimed to be. As the choice between these mindsets became circular—pitting students of strategy and capitalism against each other in a never-ending debate about the origins of the Cold War—adjustments became necessary. By 1980, Charles Maier (1980; Responses, 1981) was blasting the field as dull, predictable, and parochial.

If U.S. Diplomatic History emerged from a debate over its own origins, it changed when younger scholars lost interest in that past. By 1997, Elizabeth Cobbs Hoffmann (1997) could declare the emergence of an approach she called the New Diplomatic History. Like revisionism and post-revisionism, this school aspired to look systemically at the United States in the world. However, it paid more attention to nongovernmental actors and foreign influences that affected life inside the United States. The goal, Cobbs explained, was to shift attention from the way Americans influenced the world to the way the world changed Americans. This required a new “lens,” or an approach that deemphasized those who helmed government bureaucracies in the United States. Some early examples of scholarship in this vein focused on civil rights (Anderson, 2003; Dudziak, 2001). Antiracist activists traveled widely and engaged overseas audiences regularly, and their diplomacy provided a new way to see the U.S. footprint abroad. Another widely discussed topic was gender, specifically the way language shaped perceptions about masculinity and command (Hoganson, 2000). Both approaches extended the insights of Michael Hunt's magisterial *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy* (1987), which explored how American nationalism delimited U.S. interactions with the world. For Cobbs and others, Hunt's work was a torch, illuminating a historiography that took ideas as seriously as economics and politics.

Literary Studies expanded the methodological possibilities of this change. During the 1990s, *American Quarterly* emerged as an alternative to *Diplomatic History*, especially for scholars working in the field of American Studies. Amy Kaplan and Donald Pease's *Cultures of United States Imperialism* (1993) became a prism for this shift, embraced by some as coeval to Williams's *Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (1959). Kaplan and Pease presented realism as a language of power, not a reflection of the world as it is. If the nation was an artificial

intellectual container, then marginalized individuals could be imagined protagonists in a high stakes fight against cultural homogenization. Inspired by this insight, the Cultural Left pushed past the New Left's perceived limits. While the latter unsettled capitalism during the 1960s, the former now targeted nationalism, accentuating the premise that many New Left historians held on to their civic pride as they blasted U.S. elites, letting criticism of East Coast capitalists double as a defense of Midwestern virtue. In contrast, the Cultural Left implicated more people in the project of American empire by deconstructing nationalism, which suggested that the United States was motivated equally by greed, racism, and sexism. No one was innocent.

These changes bore fruit with Odd Arne Westad's *The Global Cold War* (2005), a Bancroft-winning examination of American and Soviet interventions in the Third World, which used the ideology of modernization—and a remarkable number of overseas archives—to rethink how the superpower contest affected people on the periphery of American and Soviet power. In Westad's hands, modernization theory became an explanatory catchall, and the publication of *The Global Cold War* marked a transition for the field. With wars raging in Iraq and Afghanistan, New Diplomatic History felt urgent and appropriate, and diplomatic historians began interrogating not just the actions of U.S. elites but the assumptions and institutions that buttressed U.S. hegemony. Hunt (1991)—Westad's mentor—had anticipated this shift in a prescient comeback to Maier's criticism (1980), imploring colleagues to adopt a globalist outlook that looked at the United States from the outside-in. By exploring ideology internationally, Hunt argued, diplomatic historians could liberate the field from those who would use geopolitical context to defend imperial hubris. For people ensconced in this discussion, Westad's triumph was the realization of Hunt's clarion call—and proof that the field was finally achieving its full potential.

This moment was especially exciting for those who guided SHAFR after 1967. Just before Westad published *The Global Cold War*, Hogan used his SHAFR presidential address (2003) to revisit Maier's claims (1980) explicitly. Focusing on the relationship between diplomatic history and American Studies, he singled out Kaplan, Emily Rosenberg, Nathan Citino, and Matthew Connelly for special praise, scholars who recognized the power of language and told stories with evidence from overseas archival repositories. Hogan made a humble request:

My plea is to be as open and as inclusive as possible, to further diversify [*Diplomatic History*], and to make it truly a journal of record that competes not only for the best work on traditional subjects but also for new work by scholars who have not been trained in the history of American foreign relations but who are nonetheless contributing to the internationalization of American history. (Hogan, 2004: 20-21).

Five years later, Thomas Zeiler (2009), who succeeded Hogan as one of the editors of *Diplomatic History*, unfurled a SHAFR-sized "mission accomplished" banner on the pages of the *Journal of American History*. He framed U.S. Diplomatic History as a clearing house, or a safe place to interrogate dichotomies like domestic/international, theory/empiricism, and security/culture. Multiarchival, multilingual research was the new norm, and young diplomatic historians were turning attention to the way non-American (often non-state) actors navigated the systems that American elites claimed to dominate. References to cultural theorist Edward Said, once uncommon at SHAFR gatherings, abounded now, and the study of diplomacy had become inextricably entwined with the study of race and gender. These transformations, Zeiler argued, explained why SHAFR had become a "well-endowed,

expansive organization with nearly two thousand members from thirty-four nations," and a field poised to shape new forums like H-Net, where "H-Diplo boasts over four thousand subscribers, making it one of the five largest list servers among the 180 in the [that] system." With the United States embroiled in a war against terrorism, the time had come for the historical profession to jump on the U.S. Diplomatic History bandwagon. "You are us," Zeiler announced (2009: 1054).

Many diplomatic historians recoiled from Zeiler's words, recognizing that he was eliding unresolved tensions. Whereas Hogan implored colleagues to embrace the Cultural Left—partly so that diplomatic historians remained relevant in the fast-changing present—Zeiler suggested that the wider profession, inured by cultural and social history, needed to revisit diplomacy and war, since current events highlighted the importance of both. "Yes, the field has changed in recent years," Hoganson countered, "but that does not make [U.S. Diplomatic History] the grand marshal of the parade" (2009: 1087). Similarly, Jessica C.E. Gienow-Hecht (2009) insisted that the field's rejuvenation arose from its synergy with those pushing *against* the field's traditional emphasis on war and peace. Without rejecting Zeiler's characterizations, Hoganson and Gienow-Hecht pushed a different conclusion, emphasizing that "good" scholarship explored the way Americans interacted with other people in contact zones overseas. These interactions, often ambiguous and open-ended, suggested that U.S. Diplomatic History was experiencing a renaissance because diplomacy was growing less central to diplomatic history.

Other historians attacked the premises on which Zeiler's assessment rested. For example, Fredrik Logevall (2009) asked why so many people equated progress with internationalization and diversification. In his estimation, collaboration with the Cultural Left was making it harder to talk earnestly about American politics. The field needed to recenter on domestic affairs, he argued, so that it could contribute to much-needed conversations about responsible statecraft. Conversely, Mario Del Pero (2009) lamented the field's internationalization and diversification as too slow to diminish its obsession with the United States. Despite appearances to the contrary, U.S. diplomatic historians still believed everything revolved around Washington, and this belief fueled a self-satisfied methodological regression that generated little more than dull summaries of things written by people in the past. The latest trends, Del Pero argued, were "leading in the directions of fragmentation, rigidity, and less dialogue" (2009: 1081-82), a criticism that doubled as a critique of Gen X navel gazing. With everyone clamoring after the next new thing, New Diplomatic History was stymying the emergence of a master synthesis on par with the classic scholarship of Williams and Gaddis.

This conversation came to a head quickly. In the months before the 2009 SHAFR annual meeting, H-Diplo conducted a poll that asked whether SHAFR should change its name to something less American, and Rosenberg used the conference to propose rebranding *Diplomatic History* as *Diplomatic and Transnational History*, reasoning that the later title captured the spirit of this new scholarship—and bridged the growing divide between diplomatic history and American Studies. When nothing happened, Connelly organized a riposte to Zeiler's argument at the 2010 OAH annual meeting, claiming that U.S. Diplomatic History was now thwarting the maturation of a new field about the transnational world. For this new field to thrive, U.S. diplomatic historians had to repudiate their identity as Americanists (Connelly, et al, 2011).

If Zeiler's assessment was triumphalist, Connelly's response proved divisive. "An element of silliness pervades a core aspect of this vision," McMahon wrote afterwards. After all, SHAFR had been formed to study U.S. foreign relations and border walking had generated the insights that Connelly praised. "If an object of study possesses sufficient importance to warrant an organization of scholars committed

to its investigation, then it strikes me as curious . . . to attack it for not investigating a different subject” (Connelly, et al, 2011: 7). Even Hoganson, sympathetic to all transnational things, rejected Connelly’s call to arms, and Citino astutely asked whether other scholarly communities like Middle East Studies might be inadvertently colonized by Connelly’s vision of a totalizing transnational past (Connelly, et al, 2011: 12-16). If everyone was a globalist now, could a historian have expertise in just one place—or would that work be considered illegitimate?

This impasse exposed important tensions. Controversially, Connelly was proposing a new origins story for the field. He did not care about Wisconsin’s boomers or Maier’s criticisms, nor did he see SHAFR as the field’s rightful institutional home. In Connelly’s mind, the conversation that mattered started in 1997, when faculty at New York University—led by Thomas Bender (2002)—organized the La Pietra conference to unshackle historiography from the nation. This project reflected the globalizing impulses of the 1990s, and SHAFR, which Connelly characterized as provincial (2011), had no seat at that table. To the contrary, at La Pietra and afterwards, urbane historians of migration, trade, and the environment had placed a self-consciously post-national frame around the United States, provincializing U.S. politics by casting aside disciplinary boundaries. This scholarship not only repudiated the premise that the United States was unique; it worked toward a democratic transhistoriography that encompassed everything everywhere all the time. Whereas the Cultural Left blasted American empire, this work obscured its existence, and for Connelly, a better field would materialize from this historiography—and maybe even a better world (Bayley, et al, 2006).

On the other side of the debate, two things were true. First, U.S. Diplomatic History was gone, replaced by a category called United States and the World. For those just entering the field in those years, this was a fascinating development. With employment opportunities coming under a different aegis, job candidates, especially in the United States, danced warily with job committees, each probing the other for insight into what this transmutation signified. In ways that mapped onto Citino’s observations, some departments welcomed United States and the World, squeezing new geographic breadth from aspiring faculty, but others criticized post-nationalism as a potential threat to local knowledge. Second, the line separating politics and pedagogy blurred as the United States and the World took root. By the early 2010s, almost everyone who belonged to the field embraced diversity and inclusion, yet no one seemed to know whether transnationalism could be a method of study and an object *to* study. For better or worse, organizing followed slowly from criticism, and Connelly’s prophesy of a new field did not materialize. Just as Facebook failed to bring democracy to the Middle East, post-national consciousness did not create a new profession.

The Present

Who won the debate? Probably Paul Kramer. Writing in the *American Historical Review* (2011) after the Zeiler-Connelly hullabaloo, Kramer shifted the conversation from methodology to politics. U.S. Diplomatic History, he argued, existed to critique American empire. Treating all American actions as imperial helped diplomatic historians—irrespective of their aloofness from the La Pietra conference—comprehend the United States’ true place in the world. With considerable subtlety, Kramer wrote post-revisionism out of existence by equating the field’s growth with the work of the New Left and Cultural Left. He buttressed this move with an extensive typology, outlining his preferred topics and subtopics of inquiry, and explaining why American imperialism resembled European imperialism despite claims to the contrary. Kramer’s central thesis was that the effects of US foreign relations mattered more than the semantics of its

elites. Like Hoganson and Gienow-Hecht, he equated good scholarship with the study of interactions in contact zones, since those spaces revealed how power worked in practice and how it was contested over time. By studying connections and interactions, historians might author that master synthesis that Del Pero characterized as elusive.

Kramer’s intervention struck a chord. Today, United States and the World History, the field formerly known as U.S. Diplomatic History, is defined by the study of American empire. Although empire has been the field’s central analytical tool for forty plus years, the latest work is distinguished by an emphasis on connection and interaction. Compared to a decade ago, scholars working in this historiographical space are more alive to the entropy—to the multi-directional, totalizing nature of politics—that is inherent to all claim-making. Entropy explains change and power without making either seem inevitable or simplistic. The field’s definition of contact zones has broadened from borderlands to urban spaces, international organizations, and multinational corporations. But this focus on entropy has only grown since Kramer’s 2011 intervention. The approach allows Americans to see themselves in a world they made and appreciate how fundamentally their world-making ambitions changed U.S. society. It has also pushed scholars to interrogate more and more of the concepts they take for granted. If every category is inherently entropic, no idea can be intrinsically stable, meaning that no truth exists outside a struggle for power. Everything is contested all the time.

This premise has spurred three interlocking insights about American empire. The first is about entanglement. When Americans have inserted themselves into faraway lands, they have almost always piggybacked on the efforts of others. Emily Conroy-Krutz (2015, 2022) has brought this process to life brilliantly in her histories of American overseas missionaries. Even as her subjects insisted upon the distinctiveness of their work, they expanded their reach by collaborating with the Europeans they pilloried. On the ground in far-off places, Americans borrowed ideas and goods from colonial officials and merchants, protecting white privilege as they rode these same transnational circuits. Moreover, on the ground, American influence almost always arose through relationships with indigenous peoples. While U.S. interlopers rarely exerted dominion over those they encountered abroad, they frequently changed the way locals wielded resources, fueling unrest that affected everyone differently. Invariably, this unrest spurred new kinds of (equally entangled) interventions, and a host of religious and racial hierarchies have persisted not because of their stability but because of their malleability.

A second insight is about denial. Like all imperial projects, the United States has fostered connection while asserting difference, and Americans have been unusually invested in the premise that they are unlike those they encounter abroad. Knocking down American exceptionalism—a shared pastime of the New Left and Cultural Left—has given way to work about *how* Americans denied their imperial tendencies. Daniel Immerwahr (2020) has walked this line expertly, lingering on the slippages between different regimes of liberal exceptionalism. For example, the tradeoffs (and frustrations) of an overtly racist colonialism at the turn of the last century helped energize development as a rhetoric of difference and power in the decades that followed. In turn, the contest over development—the Cold War itself—encouraged the efflorescence of a rights revolution that was then devoured by neoliberalism, and so on and so forth. These conversations, when considered up-close, were messy. They unfolded in asymmetrical settings. There were too many stakeholders to talk of beginnings and endings, and the participants often behaved in fascinatingly counter-intuitive ways. But when considered holistically, the takeaway is obvious: If entanglement explains how change happens, denial reveals why.

A third insight is about government. No institution has had more capacity for organized violence in modern times. As scholars have turned increasingly to themes of entanglement and denial, attention has shifted from the upper echelons of state authority, where grand strategy is often conceptualized, to government's middle and lower levels, where it is implemented and revised. This shift has brought a new cast of characters to the fore, and it has prompted earnest debates about previously ignored topics. Disagreements about presidents have turned into disputes about the relative authority of the State Department's legal advisor and the Justice Department's Office of Legal Counsel, and whole books are now dedicated to bureaucracies that earlier historians barely noticed. Megan Black (2018), for example, has skillfully used the Interior Department's work managing natural resources to pinpoint how Americans wielded scientific and environmental expertise to attain the benefits of empire without the burdens of imperialism. Shifting the focus from high diplomacy to mid-level rulemaking has put the mundanity of empire in sharper relief—and illuminated the worldwide reach of American bureaucratic authority.

Today, these three insights saturate the historiography. A field dominated previously by impassioned debates about republican virtue is characterized now by knotty inquiries into law, capitalism, security, migration, and transportation.

This work has rendered asymmetrical overseas relationships more complex, and it has done so by foregrounding the constancy of negotiation and debate. While unequal structures have guided the way Americans interact with each other and the world, these structures have rarely stayed still for long, mostly because the individuals helming U.S. institutions have taken such pride in their own ignorance. They refuse to see the antecedents and implications of their work. As this insight has grown familiar, an older emphasis on the design of U.S. policy has given way to a new emphasis on the consequences of U.S. power, or as Hoganson (2021) explained so beautifully in her SHAFR presidential address, transnational history has taken a spatial turn. Today, most diplomatic historians accept the premise that interactions explain change over time, and while the field covers a startling array of themes—from gender and sexuality to development and decolonization—and evinces a deep interest in spatiality—the field's leading voices talk about the processes at the heart of their work in a strikingly uniform way.

This transformation has softened older disagreements. Compared to a decade ago, SHAFR historians are quicker to acknowledge themselves as North Americanists. However, they have accepted that label without slipping into the parochialism feared by Connelly and the others. Westad's breakthrough, in retrospect, created the impression that any aspiring graduate student could pick up a half dozen languages and hop between continents to mine their archival riches, emerging with a radically omniscient reinterpretation of our planet's past. That mindset has not scaled easily, partly because it relied on an urbancentrism problematized by events and sociologists like Saskia Sasson (2001). In the past decade, declarations about stillborn fields have morphed into authentic curiosity about the places where Americans have inserted themselves. For example, historians like Lien-Hang Nguyen (2012), Pierre Asselin (2013), David Biggs (2012), Michitake Aso (2018), and Christopher Goscha (2016)—individuals who have successfully used Vietnamese perspectives to reframe U.S.-Vietnam history—have not created new fields so much as built bridges between SHAFR and Southeast Asian Studies. Their work is not post-national; it is collaborative. Arguably, they are following in the footsteps of their subjects by entangling themselves with the regions they study.

This shift has changed the way scholars examine most of the field's major themes. For example, economic development

has been a prominent topic for more than twenty years, but the conversation once unfolded in separate subdisciplines, so that Americanists like Michael Latham (2000), tackling development through the eyes of U.S. officials, rarely engaged Africanists like Frederick Cooper (1996), who used development to historicize decolonization. Today, that chasm has closed. Most historians agree that development formed from contestation on unequal terrain, and that that contestation changed every participant differently. One masterful example of the new consensus is David Engerman's (2018) history of the Cold War in South Asia, which simultaneously revealed the impact of Indian economic aid on the superpower contest while tracing how that aid changed the workings of Indian statehood. Similarly, Amy Offner (2019) has shown how collaboration between U.S. economic experts and their Latin American counterparts laid the foundation for the United States' repudiation of the welfare state. Both Engerman and Offner show that knowledge traveled multiple directions—not outward from Washington—and that interactions on the ground adjusted everyone's assumptions.

The same insight animates the work of area specialists. Priya Lal (2015) and Alden Young (2017), for instance, have engaged development from Tanzanian and Sudanese perspectives, respectively, authoring works about economic diplomacy and expertise that converge on the same processes studied by Engerman and Offner. This scholarship has shown how universal claims are used locally. Studying development in this manner has uprooted the premise that local people were passive victims of foreign oppression. The truth is more interactive. Postcolonial states, whose legitimacy often arose from international recognition (and the resources derived from apperception), wielded developmental concepts to exercise power over the people in their borders. According to Young, these actions were not that different than the imperialism displaced by decolonization. Stephen Macekura and Erez Manela's argument (2018; Macekura, 2015) that development history has now entered a second wave—when research on the origins, uses, and effects of economic knowledge mingle together—doubles as a call for more collaboration with area experts. Collaboration is the new normal.

If the history of development is entering a second wave, the history of capitalism has probably entered a third. No concept has been more foundational to the field. The New Left, inaugurated by Williams, then elaborated by LaFeber (1963, 1995), Rosenberg (1982, 2004), and Frank Costigliola (1984), among others, explained the politics of capitalism by equating U.S. foreign relations with the pursuit of new markets, cheap labor, and raw materials. When the Cultural Left denaturalized nationalism thirty years later, it did so without uprooting that earlier argument. Kaplan's point was that race and gender determined who belonged to the nation and that this difference-making process affected U.S. foreign relations as much as the pursuit of markets. The Cultural Left's critique added complexity to U.S. Diplomatic History, but it also reinscribed a culture-capital dichotomy that many historians find problematic today. For Alex Beasley (2022), Peter James Hudson (2017), Laleh Khalili (2020), and Jayita Sarkar (2022), capitalism is a cultural construct. Born from the vagaries of white settler colonialism, capitalism reinscribes settler racism by dispossessing communities and commodifying their interactions.

Like new work on development, this insight is interdisciplinary. It rests upon Nancy Frazier's reminder (2009) that while capital accumulation has always involved the exploitation of labor—the truth at the heart of Marxism—that exploitation has manifested with racialized intensity in imperial settings. Hudson's work probes this dynamic by looking at the collusion between Wall Street banks and

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American policymakers. However, he does not portray Caribbean elites as passive victims of dollar diplomacy. Like Lal and Young, Hudson shows that local elites gamed the system even as new regulations reinforced old assumptions. This same tension is central to Beasley's scholarship about the oil embargoes of the 1970s, when U.S. companies drew closer to the overseas leaders who defied the U.S. government. These corporations buttressed U.S. power haphazardly, employing anti-Arab racism at home while clamoring for more oilfields abroad. Jessica Levy (2022) uses a comparable insight to explain Coca-Cola's response to the antiracist social movements of the 1960s. On the turn of a dime, the company claimed diversity as its *raison d'être*, championing Black businessmen to prop up racial capitalism. Dispossession accelerated after decolonization because business elites co-opted diversity so easily.

The literature about gender and sexuality has evolved similarly. In 1997, Costigliola published a landmark gendered analysis of Kennan's writings (1997), arguing that emotion shaped realism, and that insight has expanded in several directions in the past decade. On the one side are scholars like Glenda Sluga (2021), Katharina Rietzler (2021), and Sylvia Bashevkin (2018). Sluga has masterfully recovered the unsung diplomatic work of women in centuries past. Despite their exclusion from official diplomacy, women often shaped the cultural spaces around diplomatic work. Rietzler, similarly, has illuminated the transatlantic philanthropic networks that supported women's international thought, and Bashevkin has studied the way women led well-funded bureaucracies like the State Department. Madeleine Albright, Hillary Clinton, Jeanne Fitzpatrick, Nikki Haley, Samantha Powers, Condoleezza Rice, and Susan Rice are inheritors of an unsung tradition and complex subjects who have wielded gender counterintuitively. Rather than opining about how men and women use power, this scholarship has further illuminated gender's fluidity and its effects on perception and interaction.

On the other side are historians like Laura Prieto (2013), David Minto (2018), Sarah Bellows-Blakely (2020). In her work on Philippines-United States relations, Prieto has employed what she calls a "glocul" approach, using gender to explain the experiences of Filipino women who interfaced with colonial structures at the turn of the twentieth century. Her work has opened avenues to consider the way women's activism abroad affected the suffrage movement in the United States. In comparable ways, Minto has traced the work of gay activists, charting the rise of a transatlantic queer public sphere that connected Europe to North America. In both places, reforms followed from transatlantic gay solidarity. However, Bellows-Blakely argues this same insight differently. Like Levy (2022), she asks why solutions to gendered discrimination have so often reinforced neoliberal capitalism, encouraging victims to "lean in" within for-profit labor markets that only ever expand. Even as international organizations welcomed new voices into the fold in the 1980s—framing conference gatherings and joint-statements as proof of solidarity—these interactions tokenized radical feminists by defanging their critiques of capitalism.

The conversation about rights has followed a comparable trajectory. In the same way Costigliola helped inaugurate a debate about gender, Samuel Moyn (2010) provoked a wide-ranging discussion about rights by attacking the premise that their history can be stretched unproblematically to the dawn of Western civilization. In truth, Moyn argued, rights have always been political. Rights advocacy has involved constant argument and our current truths rest upon the ruins of earlier utopian convictions. Although not every historian has endorsed all Moyn's conclusions, the literature is a far cry from its earlier teleological self. Thanks to Sarah Snyder (2011, 2018), we now know that rights advocacy affected the Cold War's endgame. We also know why so many foreign policy bureaucracies changed after the antiracist and antisexist social movements of the 1960s. Barbara Keys (2014),

meanwhile, has shown how rights talk changed Democrats and Republicans during the 1970s, fueling the rejuvenation of American exceptionalism after Vietnam, and Laura Belmonte (2020) has documented how gay activists interacted with other transnational rights movements. As Mark Bradley's superb synthesis (2018) underscores, today's conversation about rights is astonishingly diverse, encapsulating everything from the rights of animals to the rights of plants.

Not surprisingly, this conversation has spurred an interest in law, since rights require some legal pretense to be enforceable. In the United States, government asserts that individuals possess the right to life, property, and self-expression—the trifecta of liberal freedom—and government exists to secure and protect those rights through police action and military force. Abuse is curtailed, the argument goes, because the executive is checked by an autonomous judiciary and legislature, and law materializes from the interplay between the branches of federal government. This premise has manifested differently over time. Benjamin Coates (2016), for example, has explored how American lawyers used international law to rationalize US imperialism after the Spanish-American War. From the outset, the legal profession functioned as an incubator and insulator, bringing together lawyers to define civilization—always in terms of liberal freedom—while pushing them to believe that voluntary adjudication and international tribunals might spread civilization without colonization. While Coates uses this insight to historicize Woodrow Wilson's embrace of the League of Nations, Allison Powers (2018) lingers on the contradictory history of international arbitration. According to the legal theorists who worked inside these tribunals, foreign states did not just violate international law when they ignored treaties about war and peace; they violated international law by implementing domestic policies that limited the profitability of foreign investments. In this respect, international tribunals—and the law made therein—made US property rights universal. Yet this approach backfired, since people within the affected territories eventually used these same tribunals to scrutinize the unrest arising from US economic penetration. By claiming the civilizing mission as their own—shifting attention to their rights of life and self-expression—critics destroyed the premise that American property was always sacrosanct. A tool that legitimized capitalism turned against its maker.

The same generalization applies to international organizations in twentieth century. On the one hand are historians like John Thompson (2015), Or Rosenboim (2017), Trygve Throntveit (2017), and Stephen Wertheim (2020). After World War I, American lawyers, who often moonlighted as public intellectuals, toyed with different formulas to advance American interests through world organization, and each author has illuminated a part of that effort, probing why so many elites believed that international institutions would naturalize American national interests. On the other hand are scholars like Susan Pedersen (2015), Mark Mazower (2012), Amy Sayward (2017), Mary Ann Heiss (2020), and Ryan Irwin (2012). This effort did not work. In the same way Powers' characters turned tribunals against dollar diplomacy, international institutions functioned as entrepôts, bringing together voices that were as likely to blast American racism as reinforce American liberalism. Monica Kim's (2019) history of interrogation rooms—as intimate spaces where liberalism met imperialism—revels in this tension, as does Ilya Gaiduk's (2012) retelling of the Cold War, which explains how and why the United Nations became so central to superpower diplomacy. Despite a cycle of optimism and pessimism, law has always been a tool of U.S. power, pushing liberal notions of freedom out into the world while forcing Americans to confront their shibboleths.

Religion has been a similarly fruitful theme, fostering new scholarship that connects the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. If Ian Tyrell (2010) established Protestant

missionaries as transnational actors—showing how they explained planetary endeavors like civilization to church-going Americans—Ussama Makdisi (2008) and Conroy-Krutz (2015) have extended this insight by tracing how missionaries interacted with consular officials and local people in the places they sought to convert. Simultaneously, Andrew Preston (2012) has used religion to reintroduce a litany of powerful, lawyerly leaders as men of faith. Christianity illuminates the logic of what David Milne (2015) calls American “worldmaking,” showing how liberal freedom has cohered through supposedly existential threats like the Native Savage, the Black Jacobin, the Communist, the Terrorist. By drawing connections across epochs, religion invites scholars to reassess assumptions about change, continuity, and the cultural might of proselytization.

The most recent scholarship has only complicated this already complex tapestry. For example, Katherine Moran (2020) and Michael Cangemi (2022) have focused on Catholics rather than Protestants, reminding readers that the United States’ ascendance happened within a world dominated by Spain. Tensions between Spanish- and English-speaking Christians have shaped religiosity in the United States. Meanwhile, Lauren Turek (2020) has shown how evangelical lobbyists asserted authority over the U.S. government during the late twentieth century. Others are turning attention to the subtle ways that embassies have functioned as mediums of religious representation, guiding the ways ideas and individuals interact overseas. Christina Davidson (2020) uses Black churches to look at the transnational connections among Black Christians in the American hemisphere, and Melissa Borga (2022) has considered U.S. refugee care through a religious lens. Both Davidson and Borga employ interdisciplinary methods by probing the public-private partnerships that affect the religious lives of marginalized people. In liberal settings, a burgeoning commitment to religious diversity—to self-expression in all forms—has propped up private property and state authority by making government the de facto intermediary in debates about religious expression.

Interdisciplinarity has changed the conversation about decolonization too. Like gender, rights, and religion, decolonization is newly relevant, and a host of previously sacred assumptions have fallen by the wayside. For example, the once hard line between state and nonstate is porous, and relatively few scholars accept the premise that independence ended decolonization. The revolution against empire originated from a desire to create a world of reciprocal recognition. For those inspired by theorists like Franz Fanon, that revolution is incomplete so long as recognition is denied. Rediscovering this truth has spurred historians to reframe “postcolonial” as a political category, devoid of temporal significance, which has renewed an interest in the way juridical statehood intermingled with past sovereignties involving federations, leagues, and pan-collectives of religion, class, and race. Political theorist Adom Getachew (2019), for example, has resurrected the worldmaking ambitions of Black nationalists, while Brad Simpson (2012) has done something similar with self-determination, explaining how that concept empowered and constrained the people wielding it. Frederick Cooper (1997) once called this tension the “dialectics of decolonization,” and United Nations has become a microcosm to analyze how the south’s fight against the north elided struggles for recognition *within* the south. Solidarity was a language to oppose and exert power, and with admirable subtlety, Lydia Walker (2019) and Elisabeth Leake (2017) have brought this dialectic to life in their histories of South Asia and United Nations, showing how minorities within landed states fought against those who took control of the state after decolonization.

Interdisciplinarity has changed the conversation about decolonization too. Like gender, rights, and religion, decolonization is newly relevant, and a host of previously sacred assumptions have fallen by the wayside.

By probing this tension, recent scholarship has eviscerated the refrain that containment tragically delimited decolonization. Historians instead linger on the way leaders experimented with options larger and smaller than the nation state. The result is a tale of contestation on unequal terrain. For instance, Masuda Hajimu (2015) has shown how East Asian leaders used anticommunism to cast aspersions on sovereignty movements inside their newly won territories, shoring up their authority by stoking U.S. anticommunism. This Faustian bargain globalized the Cold War and it rarely ended well. Conversely, Cindy Ewing (2021) has used postcolonial constitutions to explain why South and Southeast Asian legal theorists nestled their claims within legal jargon inherited from Europeans and Americans. Their efforts enlarged and diversified international society but circumscribed their assertions about postcolonial freedom. Christy Thornton (2021) has rooted this story in an earlier time, studying how Mexican leaders used the League of Nations to advocate for the functional realization of their economic sovereignty, and Christopher Dietrich (2017) has examined why this tradition was forgotten and then rediscovered by postcolonial nationalists after the 1950s. Although political freedom and economic autonomy were always entwined, the relationship between these projects came in-and-out of focus as partisans jostled for influence in asymmetrical, ever-changing international institutions.

Race is yet another topic that has brought new voices to the fore. Arguably, the rise of New Diplomatic History rested on pioneering work about African American diplomacy by Carol Anderson (2003), Brenda Gayle Plummer (1996), Gerald Horne (1985), Michael Krenn (1999), Kevin Gaines (2006), and Penny Von Eschen (1997). This diplomacy, so important in the region that Paul Gilroy (1995) calls the Black Atlantic, saw individuals—from Frederick Douglass and Ida B. Wells to Louis Armstrong and Nina Simone—explain U.S. race relations to foreigners. This effort shaped the way outsiders interpreted the promise and peril of U.S. power, and interest in African American diplomacy has only proliferated in recent years. For example, Brandon Byrd (2020) has traced how African Americans interacted with the legacy of the Haitian Revolution after Reconstruction, squeezing new complexities from Black international thought during the Jim Crow era, and Keisha Blain (2018), focusing on Black nationalist women in the mid-twentieth century, has shown how alliances among people of color were established and maintained across national borders. John Munro (2017) has recovered the intellectual labor of Black communists, Nicholas Grant (2017) has done the same with Black antiapartheid activists, and Sean Malloy (2017) has put the Black Panther Party in transnational context. In some respects, the Black Lives Matter movement is an extension of this tradition, and a reminder that African American activists have a long history of explaining American racism overseas.

This scholarship has enriched our understanding of the transnational color line. Seminal work by Marilyn Lake and David Reynolds (2012) explained how and why white supremacy manifested throughout the English-speaking settler world. As Bob Vitalis (2017) argues, African Americans were among the first to recognize this system for what it was. Race was not a propaganda tool or afterthought in debates about money; it was foundational to white nationalism, white knowledge, and white power. As such, race determined U.S. foreign policy. Yet the slippages matter as much as this fundamental truth. The same African American diplomats who championed antiracist Pan-Africanism tried to uplift indigenous Africans in name of American modernity. Lingering on this contradiction, Blain (2018) has noted that antiracism did not always serve anti-imperialism, and

Desmond Jagmohan (2022) has recovered the hard-nosed calculations of leaders like Booker T. Washington. Since nonwhite people experienced most interactions as a form of warfare in the United States, contesting white power involved performance, deception, and discipline. In this respect, the color line was a system of power and a thinking tool that generated both freedom claims and marshal virtues. The mutually constitutive nature of these projects suggests why some freedom fighters became authoritarian in victory.

If African American Studies has informed new work about race, Asian American Studies has affected scholarship about migration similarly. Much of the recent work has humanized imperial entanglements by looking at intimate social spaces. Jana Lipman (2020), Ji-Yeon Yuh (2004), Catherine Choy (2003), Kori Graves (2020), Deborah Kang (2017), and Ellen Wu (2013) have created subtle portraits of Korean wives and children, Filipino nurses, Vietnamese refugees, and Chinese activists. Others like Carl Bon Tempo (2022) and Amanda Demmer (2021) have focused on government efforts to rationalize the flow of people over borders. The premise that individuals needed documents while traveling was not a foregone conclusion in the mid-nineteenth century, and this tradition took root differently in the transatlantic and transpacific worlds (McKeown, 2008). As Madeline Hsu (2000) has argued, migration and exclusion were flip sides of a larger story about state capacity in North America and East Asia. Whereas the Civil War and Meiji Restoration created centralized governments in the United States and Japan, the Opium Wars and Taiping Rebellion did the opposite in China, establishing the context around Chinese migration in the Pacific world. For Mae Ngai (2021), this tale historicizes racial capitalism. The same gold rushes that gave Anglo-Americans so much financial power fueled the racialization processes that led to Chinese exclusion in white settler societies. Capitalism generated the unrest it sought to control, and this unrest coalesced into a global language about citizenship and exclusion, all unfolding against the backdrop of the Qing dynasty's decline.

These histories of race and migration have changed traditional topics like strategy and diplomacy. Synonymous once with great power politics, strategic history now includes nonstate actors whose politics defied government authority. In their recent volume about American grand strategy, Elizabeth Borgwardt, Christopher Nichols, and Andrew Preston (2021) frame the fight against disease as coeval to the fight against communism, an insight that resonates in the context of the recent Covid-19 pandemic. Meanwhile, Susan Colbourn (2022), Aileen Teague (2019), and Emily Whalen (2020) have elaborated the style of diplomatic history that Westad pioneered twenty years ago. Their work lingers on the implementation of foreign policy in Europe, Latin America, and the Middle East. Just as Colbourn reintroduced the North Atlantic Treaty Organization as an interactive political space—one that changed Americans and Europeans equally (albeit differently)—Teague and Whalen have explored Mexico and Lebanon as borderlands where multiple grand strategies intermingled. Within these places, well-crafted plans crumbled because relationships were so entangled. Yet strategists kept strategizing, and their efforts changed communities in unexpected ways.

New scholarship about war has relied on these same tropes. Military history, which used to study force on the battlefield, now lingers on the way militaries interface with societies. Recent scholarship has looked at base towns, testing sites, exchange programs, and nontraditional battlefields, and scholars have folded legal, intellectual, and cultural history together in excitingly original ways (Heefner, 2012; Mitchell, 2021). For example, Brian Delay (2008) has looked at the Mexican American War through indigenous eyes and he is now using the arms trade to rethink how Americans make war. Aaron O'Connell (2012) has used culture to reinterpret familiar military institutions, tossing aside the hard line that used to separate soldiers and noncombatants. Aaron Hilter

(2020) and Zach Fredman (2022) have blown up narratives about the Second World War—a conflict that truly launched the United States' worldmaking ambitions—by looking at noncombatant American soldiers in the United States and China. This work creates a new way to see U.S. power at home and abroad. At the same time, John Krige and Naomi Oreskes (2014) have used war to reexamine the material sinews of American hegemony, untangling the relationship between the military industrial complex and scientific advancement, and Kate Epstein (2014) has used command technology—weapons produced in a fraught relationship between the state and private sector—to explain how knowledge has been produced and disseminated. And Mary Dudziak (2012) has taken on the most fundamental question of all: How can a country so committed to waging war be so aloof to its costs?

This question organizes what Stuart Schrader (2019) has called *anti-security studies*. If the New Left and Cultural Left problematized capitalism and nationalism—in that order in the 1960s and 1990s—this new project has set its eyes on liberalism. So long as liberals equate freedom with life, property, and self-expression—and use the state to actualize this trifecta—the United States will be an instrument of endless warfare everywhere. The problem arises from the pairing of rights and security in the liberal mind, and the fact that that pairing has always existed in the context of capitalism. Schrader has studied this process by explaining military-police partnerships during the Cold War, extending earlier insights from Alfred McCoy (2009), and Tej Nagaraja (2020) has asked hard questions about the New Deal. So often celebrated by historians, the New Deal safeguarded liberal freedom by inventing social, farm, and financial security, which presaged national security's emergence as the ballast of the Free World. The warfare state did not *betray* the welfare state—the former emerged from the latter—and once freedom and security metastasized as one project, life outside the capitalist ambit became a conceptual impossibility for liberals. In other words, most Americans are aloof to the costs of war because their understanding of freedom is a form of warfare.

The Future

What is next for the field? The claims that felt radical in Kramer's 2011 manifesto are now part of the air we breathe, and, not surprisingly, the latest scholarship remains focused on the American empire. For example, many historians are starting to build bridges with scholars of Indigenous America. Considering foreign affairs through indigenous eyes situates the critique of liberalism in a longer history about settler colonialism, allowing the field to think outside the twentieth century. For Aziz Rana (2010), the processes detailed by Schrader and Nagaraja have their true origins in the U.S. Constitution. The freedoms enjoyed by American citizens have spurred relentless expansion because liberal rights have historically inhered through the creation or reformation of states on a supposedly barbarian frontier. This project may have reached its apex after the 1940s, when U.S. leaders embraced world supremacy as a reasonable policy objective, but the history of indigenous Americans reminds us that these contradictions arose from colonial settlement. Over the centuries, U.S. state-making has relied on exclusion and subjugation, as well as universal law, universal development, universal institutions, and universal rights. One argument has united every epoch: Since Americans possess freedom—defined as life, property, and self-expression—their government must reorder societies so others can be more like them.

If indigeneity puts this argument in context, environmental history suggests its effects on the planet. This is another area where the field might grow. The United States fueled its ambitions by removing massive amounts of lumber and carbon from nature, and it has employed an array of technologies—from canals and railways to dams and drills—to help its citizens realize their freedom. In the shadow of

American empire, farmland has been standardized, and enormous metropolises have brought people together within sprawling for-profit marketplaces supported by unfathomably complex commodity chains. This system often feels too complex to comprehend, and it now defies the control of any one government. Yet scholars like Laleh Khalili (2020) are making inroads by charting the infrastructures that move technology, capital, people, and cargo around the world. Similarly, Julia Irwin (2021) is using disaster relief to trace this project's haphazard spread. For better or worse, the United States has been a symbol for all those who believe that true autonomy follows from nature's subjugation, and more than any other entity, the US government has nurtured a legal and economic environment that equates the dominion of land with freedom. The net result has been a world war against biodiversity—resulting in the elimination of non-commodified space from the planet. With climate change now posing an existential threat to humanity, the consequences are apparent.

Perhaps this planetary crisis will energize the field. Or maybe it will pull us apart. If you listen closely, you can hear some anxiety along the edges of United States and the World History. While historians employ a strikingly uniform vocabulary to talk about entanglement and power today, Del Pero's synthesis is as elusive as ever. In fact, the concept now offends some scholars. For example, when Immerwahr proffered his synthesis of the field, exposing the hidden history of U.S. empire, Kramer's clapback was unforgiving. Immerwahr, he wrote, was reinscribing the ignorance of empire by treating denial as a topic worthy of discussion, committing a sin called "nationalist transnationalism." In Kramer's words, "If going 'global' simply [means] enlarging U.S. national histories . . . then U.S. historians could venture 'abroad' without ever really leaving 'home.'" The "best histories of the United States in the world" must be "generated by scholars positioned either 'outside' of U.S. history or in the rich interstices between the United States and the rest of the world." (Kramer, 2018: 930-931; Immerwahr, 2019)

The claim isn't new, and the field's leading voices have tended to explain the stakes by revisiting the great debate of 2010. For Erez Manela (2020), most disagreements prove that Connelly was right all along; SHAFR's myopic emphasis on the United States has kept scholars from historicizing an object he calls "international society." On the other side of this claim, Logevall and Daniel Bessner (2020) continue to defend the centrality of the United States. Because the American nation-state is not going anywhere—because it has only gotten stronger in the past half century—historians are obliged to recognize its existence. Like the rivalries of yesteryear, these opposing sides answer big questions differently: Whose politics matters most? Which institutions constitute national identity, which ones subvert it, and how does one's perspective determine one's perception of the choice? However, equally interesting is the fact that the partisans now see themselves responding to changes in a marketplace they do not control. For all sides, the objective is self-preservation. Whereas Connelly once implied that transnationalism would prime a better world into existence, Manela's argument comes with a healthy dose of *realpolitik*, and Logevall is unapologetically defiant: If historians no longer care about wise diplomacy and good government, they are complicit in the alternatives.

In this respect, the field's lingering tendency to see itself methodologically has obscured a fundamental change. U.S. and the World History has moved U.S. Diplomatic History to the left. Arguably, the field has become an incubator for what Paula Chakravartty calls "radicalism without consequence" (2021)—an epitaph that could easily double as a moniker for the decade just past. The Millennial Left has eviscerated liberalism as an instrument of racial capitalism, exposing American institutions as cladding for American imperialism. However, unlike their midcentury counterparts, today's Left has not tried to posit an alternative philosophy of power. Like

characters from a Thomas Wolfe novel, speaking truth is always enough. This approach may prove problematic since the apparatus buttressing so much of the recent scholarship does not differentiate consent from coercion. When power is conceptualized as inherently malevolent, the only options on offer become acquiescence or annihilation, which suggests that Logevall might have a point. Many of his colleagues *do* see wise diplomacy and good government as oxymoronic fictions of an unjust status quo. Logevall's critics might retort that a post-liberal future is better than our neoliberal present—but that assumption could be wrong. And if the field's historiography reflects the era in which it is written, our future colleagues might surprise us: They might have something positive to say about American hegemony.

The End

U.S. Diplomatic History emerged because of the timing and the political climate in the United States after the Second World War, but the field's growth cannot be separated from the simple fact that the American empire—at its height—was the most powerful political entity in human history. It made the world we live in today, and its past is implicated in most of the problems we will face tomorrow. Since the mid-twentieth century, scholars have interacted differently with this fact. The field rocketed to prominence because the New Left challenged U.S. exceptionalism during the 1960s. When the Soviet Union collapsed, a younger cohort invented New Diplomatic History, dabbling with an assortment of sources, methods, and perspectives that remade SHAFR as a welcoming depot for all those writing about the United States and the world. In the context of the War on Terror, U.S. and the World History then pulled off an unhostile takeover of U.S. Diplomatic History, and historians have adopted a surprisingly uniform vocabulary to talk about American empire since the early 2010s.

Today, entanglement and denial dance together thematically on canvases saturated by different kinds of bureaucratic authority. Regardless of the topic, the American empire's rule-making power is almost always presented as ubiquitous and contested. As historians have gotten better at writing about entropy, they have attacked American power writ large, exenterating liberalism with the same enthusiasm past generations reserved for capitalism and nationalism. The field's future will probably depend on where the American empire goes next. Again, scholarship has tended to reflect the politics of the time, and with the effects of climate change more apparent every year—with the accumulated legacies of racism and sexism growing ever more noxious—it is easy to imagine a future like our present, where historians bundle imperialism-racism-capitalism-liberalism together to argue the United States as an instrument of forever war.

Yet it is also possible to imagine a different future, especially in the context of the insurrection at the U.S. Capitol and Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Authoritarianism is becoming unhinged. Rights are a problematic basis for freedom, but if Isaiah Berlin can rehabilitate Niccolò Machiavelli as the herald of pluralist tolerance, liberals can surely defend their assumptions from critics on the Left. Timothy Snyder (2015), Adam Tooze (2015), Jill Lepore (2018), and Stephen Kotkin (2014, 2017)—even "traditional" diplomatic historians like Melvyn Leffler (2017)—are fascinating because of the steps they have made in this direction. The beauty of historiography is that individual voices matter. Ultimately, the conversation we choose to have as colleagues will determine the road we travel together as a field. We will become whatever *you* decide.

Note:

1. For a fuller picture of postrevisionist tradition, see Geir Lundestad (1986) and Melvyn P. Leffler (1992).

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JOB ADVERTISEMENT: SHAFR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations (SHAFR) seeks to appoint a new Executive Director. This part-time position will officially begin on 1 August 2025, but will include a one-year stint as assistant to the current Executive Director, beginning on 1 August 2024, in order to facilitate the transition. The term of appointment is five years with the possibility of renewal, and compensation will be commensurate with skills and experience.

Candidates should be SHAFR members and have experience or demonstrated aptitude in these areas: embracing SHAFR's research and teaching missions; administering a program or organization; managing budgets, finances, and business procedures; supervising conference and event planning; embracing intellectual diversity and dynamic change; and handling both routine and sensitive communications with SHAFR members and others.

Because the SHAFR Business Office will be located at the candidate's home institution, the successful candidate will need some form of institutional support from their home university, including dedicated workspace and permission to engage in paid external work; other arrangements, such as course reduction and conference travel funds, are highly desirable.

The core duties of the Executive Director include:

- Facilitating the work of the SHAFR President and governing Council, including planning two or more Council meetings per year; setting the meeting agenda and advising Council members on issues; implementing Council decisions; and drafting minutes of Council meetings.
- Managing all finances, including administering SHAFR checking and savings accounts and disbursing funds appropriately; working with SHAFR's bookkeeper and accountant to provide safeguards for SHAFR funds ensuring proper accounting of all transactions; registering all deposits and payments; monitoring the endowment in consultation with the Ways & Means Committee and the Endowment Liaison; and preparing annual and mid-year reports for Council meetings.
- Administering legal matters, including working with a professional CPA to complete tax forms and other mandatory paperwork; consulting legal counsel as needed; impartially administering SHAFR By-Laws; and proposing amendments to Council and overseeing procedures for making amendments.
- Administering annual elections, including consulting with the Nominating Committee; overseeing elections; and communicating results in accordance with the By-Laws.
- Facilitating communications and outreach, including working with the editor of *Passport*; overseeing the website in consultation with the IT Director and Electronic Communications Committee; sending regular e-blasts to membership; and liaising with other professional societies.
- Overseeing the distribution of grants, fellowships, and prizes, including the facilitation of presidential appointments to various prize committees; briefing committee members on their duties; notifying winners and preparing prize checks, certificates, and plaques; and organizing awards ceremonies.
- Planning events, including Council meetings; collaborating with SHAFR's Conference Consultant, President, Program Committee, and Local Arrangements Committee on all aspects of the annual conference; advising officers on appointment of Conference Consultant and of Program and Local Arrangements Committees.
- Directing staff, including but not limited to the Assistant to the Executive Director, Conference Consultant, IT Director, and ad hoc contractors
- Performing other duties deemed by the elected officers as essential to the success of SHAFR; maintaining necessary records; and generally working to ensure the smooth and efficient operation of the organization.

Interested applicants should submit a letter of interest, CV, and the names of three references to: Search Committee Chair David L. Anderson at danderson@csumb.edu. Review of applications will begin on **15 January 2024** and will continue until the position is filled. Please direct any questions to the search committee chair or current Executive Director Amy Sayward at amy.sayward@shaf.org.

A Roundtable on Susan Colbourn, *Euromissiles: The Nuclear Weapons that Nearly Destroyed NATO*

Jayita Sarkar, Heather Marie Stur, Elizabeth C. Charles, William Hitchcock, Aaron Bateman, and Susan Colbourn

Introduction to Roundtable on Susan Colbourn's *Euromissiles*

Jayita Sarkar

Susan Colbourn's *Euromissiles* powerfully exemplifies the complex history of transatlantic relations during the latter half of the Cold War, underscoring the importance of nuclear weapons in US foreign and military policies in Europe. In the present moment of the Ukraine War, that should surprise no one. However, she powerfully argues that Euromissiles are misunderstood and forgotten more than other notable episodes of twentieth-century international history involving nuclear weapons, such as the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Colbourn's book is a *tour de force*. It provides a much-needed archive-based corrective to our understanding of the late Cold War, particularly the complexities of transatlantic relations the reverberations of which are palpably felt till this day. She remarkably straddles multiple historiographical worlds from diplomatic and political history to social history, presenting an in-depth vertical story where the top-down and the bottom-up perspectives are effectively interweaved. Rarely has a book on transatlantic relations also presented a clear-eyed analysis of anti-nuclear peace movements that had gripped civil society in Europe and North America at the time. Kudos to Colbourn for presenting her actors in their own light, whether those were striding across the corridors of power or jostling on the streets to protest the powerful.

Euromissiles joins a new body of historical scholarship on Euro-American relations, particularly alliance politics, during the Cold War. Colbourn's monograph exemplifies this shift: this body of scholarly work eschews a predominantly US-centric approach, presenting European actors' interests and goals in interactions with those of their American counterparts.¹ It thus presents multiple sides of the story, expanding the lens of analysis horizontally and vertically. Naturally, all four reviewers on this roundtable have showered high praise on *Euromissiles* and Colbourn's penmanship.

Aaron Bateman calls the book "a meticulously researched and masterfully written history of one of the most significant periods in the Cold War transatlantic alliance." He highlights the depth and nuance with which Colbourn analyzes non-American and non-elite actors. The predominance of the "power of perception" irrespective of technical realities stand out to him.

Elizabeth Charles' beginning anecdote about her smart neighbor's lack of awareness of NATO only drives home

the significance and timeliness of *Euromissiles*. Like myself, Charles also found the "stories of antinuclear activists and protests" in the "Deploy" section "most intriguing." As I highlighted at the beginning of this introduction, the emphasis on popular protests against nuclear weapons make the book stand out in the midst of other books on NATO, transatlantic relations, and alliance politics.

Heather Stur's essay reminds the readers how palpable the threat of nuclear weapons was in 1984 through the BBC television film, *Threads*. Unlike *Dr. Strangelove* and *Failsafe*, both released in 1964 while the world was still reeling from the Cuban Missile Crisis, *Threads* was about the devastation of people's lives by nuclear war— not a techno-scientific dystopia of a mad scientist and a trigger-happy general, or a military operator's decision to stick to the nuclear war manual against revised orders from the top. Stur thus underscores the role of fear that permeates Colbourn's "engaging and highly readable" account.

William Hitchcock, while praising the book's innovative approach and emphasis on contingency, "regrettably" notes that the author "did not work in French archives," leading to France being "largely absent from the book." Hitchcock finds that Colbourn's ability to draw various strands of analysis from NATO, US, British, Canadian, and German archives a strong contribution to the historiography and our understanding of the events of the period. His essay underscores the timeliness of the book and Colbourn's "wise" decision to end the book in 1989 during the pivotal moment of the beginning of the end of the Cold War.

In her thorough response, Colbourn attends to Hitchcock's point about French primary sources. France being a unique case among NATO countries, thanks to its Gaullist policies in the 1960s but improved though measured relations with the United States in the 1970s and 1980s, is already the subject of many excellent studies by scholars based in France and elsewhere. The absence of French sources does not diminish the significance of Susan Colbourn's excellent monograph. Hers is a true transatlantic history of the late Cold War years through a close reading of recently declassified documents from North America and Western Europe.

Rightfully, there is broad consensus among the four reviewers that Colbourn's *Euromissiles* is a thoughtful and in-depth study of the role of nuclear weapons in relations between the United States and its allies in Western Europe— a subject that has grabbed headlines with the ongoing tragedy in Ukraine, but not fully understood in presentist media analyses. I share the reviewers' admiration for Colbourn's book and am looking forward already to her next book, which she hinted at in her response.

Note:

1. See for example, Timothy Andrews Sayle, *Enduring Alliance: A History of NATO and the Post-War Global Order* (Cornell University Press, 2019).

Review of Susan Colbourn, *Euromissiles: The Nuclear Weapons That Nearly Destroyed NATO*

Heather Marie Stur

In 1984, a year after the United States began deploying Pershing II missiles to U.S. Army bases in West Germany, the BBC released a terrifying movie called *Threads*. Set in Sheffield, *Threads* begins with ordinary citizens going about their days as military aircraft soar across the sky and television news programs report on increasing tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union over Iran. As the reports become more alarming, municipal government officials in Sheffield put disaster response plans into action, encouraging citizens to stock up on food and build bunkers at home if possible. But the residents of Sheffield, and British citizens in general, soon learn that no preparedness plan can cushion the blow of nuclear weapons. As a NATO ally, Britain in *Threads* bears the fallout, literally, of war between the United States and the Soviet Union.

Susan Colbourn's engaging and highly readable *Euromissiles* provides the historical context for nuclear apocalypse films like *Threads*. Colbourn tells the story of the U.S.-Soviet arms race and negotiations to limit weapons from the perspective of America's NATO allies, the countries where the United States deployed the missiles pointed at the Soviet Union. It was the latter issue that made Western Europe nervous. That might seem counterintuitive, but Colbourn's impressive research in six countries beyond the United States makes it clear how anxious NATO members were as American and Russian leaders made plans to downsize their arsenals.

The negotiations didn't include the subject of Western European security. As the superpowers agreed to work towards weapons parity, West German leaders and other NATO allies lost confidence in America's willingness to defend them against the Soviets. Early negotiations sought to limit weapons that could harm the United States, but the Soviet Union could still keep missiles trained on Western Europe.

At the end of 1979, the United States and NATO offered Warsaw Pact nations their "dual-track decision." In an effort to sway the Soviet Union to remove its missiles from Europe, the United States offered to continue arms limitations talks while also threatening to deploy more weapons to Western Europe if the Russians failed to comply with arms control agreements. The dual-track decision emerged partly in response to Soviet SS-20 Sabers, intermediate-range ballistic missiles with a five-thousand-kilometer range that put the capitals of Western Europe within striking distance.

When talks broke down in the early 1980s, the United States positioned five hundred ground-launched cruise missiles and Pershing II missiles in NATO countries, triggering a wave of anti-nuclear protests throughout Western Europe. Soviet disinformation campaigns fueled Western European anti-nuclear sentiment (70). Colbourn's writing deftly evokes the tension of the era, and *Threads* depicts what might have happened had the "Euromissiles crisis" gone beyond the brink and erupted into nuclear war.

Euromissiles is a Cold War story, but it highlights continuities in international relations regarding balances of power and alliance politics. The notion of parity in nuclear weapons harkens back to the Congress of Vienna and the idea that a balance of power would secure peace in the post-Napoleonic world. In 1814, the "great powers" were Austria, Britain, Prussia, and Russia, with France

consigned to nominal great power status because of Napoleon's actions. Lesser powers, including Sweden, the Netherlands, Denmark, Spain, and Portugal, sent delegates to Vienna but did not have the bargaining power of the big five. Yet not long after the meeting, old antagonisms chipped away at the resolve of the great powers to maintain balance in foreign affairs. The Crimean War, the Franco-Prussian War, and the Great Game in Central Asia reflected the breakdown of the Congress of Vienna's ideals.

The final break occurred in June of 1914, when World War I began. Hoping once again to end all wars, the great powers, this time with President Woodrow Wilson leading the charge, attempted to establish a framework for collective security with the League of Nations. While the league did not necessarily emphasize a balance of power, its focus on negotiation rather than war to solve differences was the latest expression of the desire for peaceful international relations.

Peace remained elusive, however, as the world erupted in war for the second time in two decades in the late 1930s. When World War II ended in 1945, only two great powers remained: the United States and the Soviet Union. The postwar division of Europe into eastern and western blocs was a nod to the balance of power idea, as was America's policy of containment. Under this doctrine, first articulated in the Truman administration, the United States would seek to contain communism within its existing borders, preventing its spread but not trying to roll it back.

Neither the Iron Curtain nor containment made Americans feel secure. In the spring of 1949, the United States and its Western European allies formed the North Atlantic Treaty Organization to bolster collective security against Soviet aggression. Later that summer, the Soviet Union tested its first atomic bomb, eliminating America's nuclear advantage and creating the first example of parity in the arms race. In 1955, the Soviet Union brought its East Bloc satellites into the Warsaw Pact. It was another type of balance, but it was built on mutual suspicion and was thus a reflection of the tension that marked the early Cold War world.

Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev took the world to the brink of war twice in the early 1960s, with the Cuban Missile Crisis and the building of the Berlin Wall. In the aftermath of those events, the superpowers experienced a cooling of tensions, and as the United States moved to adopt the policy of flexible response, both powers began focusing again on achieving balance in weapons holdings and on arms limitations. Viewed from their perspectives, negotiations aimed at nuclear parity looked like efforts to maintain world peace. But Colbourn shows that from the viewpoint of America's NATO allies, U.S. acceptance of nuclear equality with the Russians left them feeling vulnerable in the face of the Soviet missiles threatening them. Colbourn notes that Western Europeans had reasons beyond Russia's weapons arsenal to worry about Soviet aggression. In pursuit of their goal of being a dominant world power, the Russians had built up their navy and aided revolutionary activities around the globe, including in Angola, where they joined forces with Cuba (51).

By giving voice to America's NATO allies on the subject of nuclear arms limitations, Colbourn adds another layer of legitimacy to the post-revisionist school of Cold War historiography. While Cold War revisionists place the blame for the era's tensions and insecurity on the United States and what they deem America's imperialistic adventurism, Colbourn confirms the findings of John Lewis Gaddis and other post-revisionists that the Russians were also involved in military expansion and power grabs aimed at establishing global hegemony.

Like the great powers of the nineteenth century, the superpowers of the twentieth century acted in self-interest in times of tension and times of détente. In the

arms limitations talks of the 1970s, American and Russian officials considered the options that seemed best suited to their own national security, but when the United States did not take the security of its NATO allies into account, Western Europeans had cause for concern about Soviet militarism. Not only did talks not limit Soviet troops, missiles, or nuclear weapons positioned in Europe, parity looked like the United States had lost ground. If Soviet missiles were no longer in range of the United States, would the Americans defend Western Europe if Russia attacked it? In a broader sense, if there were separate security arrangements for the United States and the Soviet Union versus Europe and the Soviet Union, then what was the point of NATO?

The dual-track decision was meant to assure Western Europe that the United States could support nuclear parity while also standing firm on its commitment to the defense of NATO countries. It proved untenable after just four years, and the arms race escalated when the United States deployed missiles to Western Europe in 1983. The world seemed once again to be on the brink of nuclear war. Although the U.S. missiles were meant to project America's willingness to defend NATO allies against Russia's nuclear proliferation, Western European citizens protested their deployment. In England, members of the Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp formed a fourteen-mile-long human chain of about seventy thousand protesters that extended from a Royal Air Force base storing nuclear weapons to an ordnance factory in Burghfield, West Berkshire. As it turned out, more missiles did not make citizens feel more secure.

In 1986, the United States and the Soviet Union returned to the bargaining table, and in December of 1987, President Ronald Reagan and Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev signed the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, which banned missiles with launch ranges of up to five thousand kilometers. If both parties adhered to the terms of the treaty, the world might be relieved of the tension that had weighed on it since 1945. With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the Cold War appeared to be over.

The reason for NATO's existence was gone, but the alliance did not die with it. On the contrary, NATO membership expanded as former Warsaw Pact nations clamored to join the security collective. Colbourn brings *Euromissiles* to a close in the twenty-first century with a grim reminder that weapons proliferation is still a source of friction between the United States, Russia, and NATO. In August 2019, then-Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced the U.S. withdrawal from the INF Treaty, and Russian authorities declared the treaty "formally dead" (266). Then, in February of 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine. At the time of this writing, that war still rages.

It may be unintentional, but one of the most intriguing contributions Colbourn makes with her superb book is that she induces readers to question the concept of a periodization of the Cold War. The United States and the Soviet Union emerged from the ashes of World War II in 1945 as the only remaining great powers, but their struggles over security, hegemony, and alliances were not very different from previous great power antagonisms. NATO was founded to defend against Soviet expansion, but at its core, it is a military alliance like many before it. Neither NATO nor U.S.-Soviet animosity disappeared after 1991. President Vladimir Putin justified his country's war in Ukraine on the basis of security, just as Joseph Stalin justified the Soviet Union's control of the Eastern Bloc. The great power politics and alliances of the post-1945 time period remain part of international relations in 2023. Only a shift in who the great powers are will signal the dawn of a new era.

Review of Susan Colbourn, *Euromissiles: The Nuclear Weapons that Nearly Destroyed NATO*

Elizabeth C. Charles¹

Picture it. Alexandria, Virginia. Late February 2022. I have a very smart neighbor with a Masters in Public Health. She is 30. Vladimir Putin invaded Ukraine a few days earlier. We were out walking our dogs, and she asked me what NATO was and why it mattered. To be fair, she knew NATO had something to do with Europe and U.S. foreign policy, but she didn't have much context for what was happening. We had a long history lesson that afternoon on our dog walk.

For those who might not have a neighbor who specializes in Cold War history, a copy of Susan Colbourn's new monograph, *Euromissiles: The Nuclear Weapons that Nearly Destroyed NATO*, will serve them just as well. This book provides an approachable history of NATO during the Euromissiles crisis that details how the alliance dealt with threats from the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact. Writing the history of NATO is a complex task. Colbourn explains the fissures in the alliance and the imbalance in members' influence and shows how these issues affected strategic considerations like flexible response; the Euromissiles crisis and the 1979 dual-track decision (whereby NATO would modernize its missiles in Europe but would not deploy them if arms control talks succeeded); and the Reagan administration's push for the zero option (the elimination of all INF missiles by both sides). She analyzes individual interests of NATO stakeholders and explains how the missile deployments affected alliance members in different ways.

Colbourn's concise book details the complexity of the "transatlantic history of the Euromissiles, from the arms race's origins in the early 1960s to the final days of the Cold War" (3). She draws numerous threads together to tell a compelling history of how NATO, the United States, and the Soviet Union grappled with the Euromissiles, anti-nuclear protests, internal political debates, and the negotiations that eventually resulted in the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty in December 1987. She does an excellent job of synthesizing what mattered most to different actors at the various stages of the Euromissiles crisis. In her introduction she writes that her book is a "history of diplomacy and alliance politics, of social movements, and of strategy; it is about nuclear weapons and nagging fears, and about politics, both high and low" (4).

Unlike the more fragmented accounts of the dual-track decision, Colbourn's story of the Euromissiles crisis, which uses material garnered from extensive multi-archival research, weaves together stories from different perspectives. She writes about various issues, from protesters like the Greens' Petra Kelly to West Germany's struggles over deployments and security, NATO's fears about the loss of U.S. strategic protection and the decision-making of the Reagan administration, and how Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev reached an accord on INF missiles. Her analysis of the interactions between these actors and their struggles to protect their nations' interests, from the genesis of the Euromissiles crisis to its resolution and the end of the Cold War, is her book's most important contribution to the scholarship in this field.

Colbourn's book goes beyond great stories with compelling historical narratives, however. It also provides us with an in-depth look at the complexities of strategic decision-making, including the confrontations between and political compromises made by the United States and its NATO allies. In hindsight, we know how much Europe and the world changed from the dual-track decision in 1979 to 1989 and 1991. But when the Soviets replaced their aging

missiles with the SS-20s, no one anticipated that the NATO response would dominate strategic decision-making until the INF Treaty was signed in 1987. Nor did anyone participating in the debates about the dual-track decision in the late 1970s envision the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

Colbourn divides her book into three parts, each with a concise preamble and conclusion. Each chapter is then smartly divided into subsections, enabling the reader to connect all the threads running through the narrative. The first part, "Decide," provides a foundational history and an understanding of how NATO decided to counter the Soviet SS-20s and how, after much wrangling and compromise, it arrived at the dual-track decision in December 1979. This section provides a firm understanding of how NATO "struggled to find a balance between detente, arms control, and defense policies" from the 1960s through the 1970s (14).

The discussion of how NATO's policy of flexible response evolved and enabled NATO to carve out "a political role as an alliance dedicated to more than deterring and, if needed, defending against Soviet aggression" demonstrates the complexities of NATO history. Flexible response meant different things to different groups. While the goal of countering a growing Soviet nuclear arsenal aimed at the heart of Western Europe pushed some toward *détente*, others believed that "providing a range of escalatory options added to the importance of nuclear weapons deployed in Europe, or theater nuclear forces, as an essential link between conventional troops and the strategic arsenal of the United States" (31). The state of a country's economy and the size of its defense budget also played a significant role in policymaking, as did the issue of burden-sharing.

The chapters in the "Decide" section also cover the Nixon-era SALT talks with the Soviets and how they affected European security. The chapter rightly titled "Fiasco!" deals with the neutron bomb in the Carter administration. Colbourn links how these issues impacted decision-making over the dual-track to broader security and defense concerns involving both nuclear and conventional weapons.

Chapter 5 covers the complicated deliberations of the NATO High Level Group and the Special Group in the lead-up to the dual-track decision. These groups determined what types of systems should be deployed to counter the Soviet SS-20s, how many missiles were needed, where they would be based, and how to pursue arms control while simultaneously planning for deployments. By September 1979, both groups had produced reports. The "High Level Group recommended a deployment program with a mix of 572 Gryphons and Pershing IIs to be stationed in five countries: Belgium, the Federal Republic of Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom, beginning in 1983." The Special Group set parameters for arms control negotiations, with the goal of "avoiding unconstrained competition, reducing the significant disparity between NATO and the Warsaw Pact in the long-range theater systems, and adopting tangible and realistic proposals in order to combat the anticipated Soviet efforts to use the vague promises of disarmament to throw a spanner in the works" (99–100). By December 1979, the NATO countries had agreed to the dual-track decision, even in the face of domestic political constraints and protests. The political support of all members, from the weakest to the strongest, was necessary to show "that NATO remained undaunted and undivided" in the decision to modernize to counter the Soviet SS-20 threat (108–9).

Part 2, "Deploy," explores the antinuclear protest movement and the political and strategic controversies that surrounded the decision to deploy the U.S. Pershing II and cruise missiles to NATO allies in November 1983—missiles that would be deployed only if negotiations with the Soviet Union failed. Colbourn writes that "as the

Western allies tried to preserve sufficient support to see the planned deployments through, they confronted a growing conversation about the central tenets of their security policy: the nature of the Soviet threat; the protection afforded by the United States; the wisdom of defending themselves with weapons capable of unimaginable destruction; and the likelihood their constituents would continue to live with this system" (112). The debates around these major concerns plagued the four years between the decision and the deployment of the Euromissiles.

What I found most intriguing about the "Deploy" section is how Colbourn weaves the stories of antinuclear activists and protests throughout these chapters to help address the different political considerations various NATO countries faced. More broadly, these protest stories and the sheer, record-breaking numbers of people in Europe and the United States who demonstrated against nuclear weapons in the 1980s are astonishing. The deployment debates also brought into question the "core principles" of NATO's existence: "the wisdom of relying on the United States for protection, the severity of the Soviet threat, and the logic and morality of nuclear deterrence" (154). Perhaps most importantly, the debates spread to "pundits, former policymakers, and sitting officials," entered the mainstream media, and raised questions about the fundamental basis of the NATO decision. The negotiation position within the dual-track decision provided political cover for Western leaders to move ahead with the November 1983 deployments even as hundreds of thousands of people in Western Europe and the United States remained opposed.

The final section, "Destroy," examines the period between the Soviet walk-out at the INF negotiations in Geneva in November 1983 and the signing of the INF Treaty in Washington in December 1987 a mere four years later. These chapters explain how Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) impacted Thatcher's concerns over the tenets of nuclear deference and how Shultz worked to start new arms control talks with the Soviets, which began in March 1985. They also address the sweeping arms control proposals at the Reykjavik Summit in October 1986 and what NATO and Western European security might look like if the zero option succeeded and the U.S. missiles had to be removed and destroyed.

While many historians have discussed the Reagan-Gorbachev and Shultz-Shevardnadze summits and the Nuclear and Space Talks, Colbourn does an excellent job of building on the archival record to provide an analysis of why all of this mattered to NATO members. Gorbachev's role in the story, she argues, was instrumental, as were the various levels of skepticism and concern with which U.S. and Western leaders assessed Gorbachev's arms control proposals. With Gorbachev's decision in March 1987 to untie the Soviet arms control package, making concessions that the Soviet military leadership pushed against, and proposed a double zero on INF, "Western European governments panicked. A double zero solution, removing both shorter-range and longer-range INF, could easily be the first step toward the complete denuclearization of Europe" (231).

Gorbachev's double-zero offer placed West Germany in a particularly difficult position. Helmut Kohl hoped that even with the INF Treaty, "some shorter-range missiles would remain. But that outcome was hardly politically viable" (232). Colbourn examines how Kohl's government would deal with "the seventy-two Pershing IAs owned and operated by the West Germans but fitted with US-owned nuclear warheads. Kohl hoped to keep these missiles outside of the superpowers' talks, even as the Soviets pressed for their inclusion" (233).

While U.S. and Soviet negotiators continued to work out INF treaty specifications in Geneva, the West German government pondered how to handle these

weapons. By August, Kohl had agreed that if the United States and Soviet Union came to terms on the INF weapons, the West Germans would give up the Pershing IAs as well. With this resolution, and inspection protocols in place, Gorbachev traveled to Washington in December 1987 with much fanfare, and he and Reagan signed the INF Treaty eliminating an entire class of nuclear weapons.

The final chapter of *Euromissiles* deals with the complicated question of the modernization of short-range nuclear forces (SNF) based in West Germany. With the INF Treaty, weapons with a range of 500 to 5500 kilometers were set to be eliminated; but a small number of weapons with a range under 500 kilometers remained in NATO territory “to ensure the continuation of the alliance’s strategy of flexible response” (241). From 1988 to 1989, SNF issues dominated NATO discussions and again divided the alliance.

Colbourn adeptly tackles these big issues, explaining the different positions and the centrality, politically and geographically, of the Federal Republic of Germany. Margaret Thatcher argued for modernization because SNF were “critical to ensuring that NATO remained a nuclear alliance in Europe.” German vice chancellor Hans-Dietrich Genscher, on the other hand, believed that “modernization could jeopardize the prospects to remake relations with the Soviet Union, and with it, the entire European order.” The fissures in the alliance, similar to those in the debates in the late 1970s over the dual-track decision, emerged again. Could and should NATO modernize and preserve its nuclear deterrent and its dependence on the United States for strategic security?

While NATO members debated these issues in an attempt to have a resolution by its fortieth-anniversary summit in Brussels in May 1989, events in Eastern Europe made some of these concerns moot. As Colbourn explains, “the pace and scope of the transformations sweeping across Europe weakened the arguments in favor of modernizing NATO’s short-range nuclear forces. How could the United States justify the deployment of short-range missiles equipped with nuclear warheads aimed at countries undergoing massive political changes like the German Democratic Republic, Czechoslovakia, and Poland?” (257–8). After the Berlin Wall fell and the Cold War started to recede, NATO would need to redefine its strategic considerations and security concerns.

To circle back to my conversations with my neighbor: how does one explain to current college students or Generation Z or Alpha, who grew up in a post-Berlin Wall, post-Cold War world, how real and tangible the desperate fear of nuclear war was in the 1980s? As a child of the 80s, I remember the palpable feelings of distress about possible nuclear war. We are the generation of *War Games*, *Spies Like Us*, *The Day After*, *Red Dawn*, *The Hunt for Red October*, *Top Gun* and the like. Yet such popular culture disseminated and reinforced ideas about a nuclear apocalypse and the Soviet menace, so college students who read Colbourn’s new monograph are certain to understand the context in which decisions about nuclear missiles were made. And they would enjoy her stories of protesters and antinuclear activism, which provide a compelling account of the people who pushed to stop INF deployments to Europe in 1983 and why they worked so diligently against the nuclear arms race.

Since the unprovoked invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 by Putin, understanding the history and context of NATO, with all its complexities and contradictions, is more important than ever. The concerns over European dependence on the United States for security are resurgent, and this book provides much-needed historical context on how this system emerged and why it has lasted. Colbourn provides an astute analysis of how the alliance dealt with the Euromissiles, and in doing so provides broader historical perspectives about the significance of NATO

alliance politics, decision-making, and cooperation and conflict within this coalition.

Note:

1. Elizabeth C. Charles is a historian at the Office of the Historian at the U.S. Department of State. These views are her own and not those of the Department of State or of the U.S. government.

The Club Everyone Wants to Join

William Hitchcock

Susan Colbourn’s excellent, nuanced, and timely account of the Euromissiles crisis of the 1980s makes both a historiographical and methodological contribution to Cold War history. Its argument—that the deployment of intermediate-range nuclear missiles to Europe nearly wrecked the very alliance the missiles were intended to defend—adds to recent transatlantic scholarship on NATO and the last phase of the Cold War.¹ The book’s method, too, is instructive: when considering the demise of the Cold War order, Colbourn insists, historians must recover contingency and context and avoid the enormous temptation to read the decade through the lens of the fall of the Berlin Wall. In the robust competition among historians to explain why the Cold War ended, we sometimes forget that the political actors of the era had no idea how close they were to the transformational events of 1989. We must recover the fears and anxieties leaders felt then and acknowledge the risks and daring political choices they took in that decade, unaware of how their policies might influence the course of history.²

Colbourn emphasizes this point early and often. “This book is about fear” (8), she writes; and though the book certainly goes deep into the intricacies of inter-allied negotiations and the technical details of arms control, that sense of fear never lifts. The stakes of the Euromissiles debate seemed enormous to the policymakers involved, and although we know how the story ends—with the remarkable superpower treaty of 1987 that abolished intermediate-range nuclear weapons and marked a tectonic shift in the Cold War landscape—this outcome was beyond imagining when the story began in the late 1970s.

While it might have been tempting to tell the story of the Euromissiles deployment as one of Western cohesion, overcoming domestic opposition to the missiles while compelling the Soviets to admit defeat in the strategic arms race, Colbourn rejects that approach. Her analysis emphasizes the fragility of the Western alliance, its permanent state of internal crisis, and the near-death experience of NATO during the Euromissiles dispute. She makes a powerful case that the path from the 1979 decision to deploy the missiles, to the INF Treaty of 1987, and finally to the end of the Cold War two years later, was not a straight one. In fact, it was not even visible to those who felt their way along it in real time.

The book lays out the narrative in three substantial sections. Part 1 reveals the enormous role German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt played in bringing the alliance to face the strategic challenge presented by the Soviet deployment in 1976 of a new intermediate-range missile, the SS-20. Schmidt, who had long considered himself a strategic thinker, feared that by expanding their nuclear arsenal and achieving not just parity with the Americans but superiority in “theater” nuclear weapons, the Soviets would make the price of a nuclear war far too great for the Americans ever to contemplate, and this in turn would allow the Soviets to use their enormous conventional military might to intimidate and bully the Western Europeans into some kind of neutralism or accommodation with Moscow.

Coming in the waning days of détente, Schmidt's October 1977 speech in London calling for a redress of the strategic balance triggered a major debate that would shape the alliance for the next decade. Colbourn's attention to the Germans is valuable here, as we see that NATO could never be called simply an American-dominated alliance. It was a partnership in which key member-states, especially the Germans, could force the pace and direction of strategic planning. The contentious road to NATO's 1979 "dual-track" decision, which committed the alliance to start deployment of Pershing II and Gryphon missiles while also offering the Soviets a wider range of arms control negotiations, led the alliance into a major storm it did not at all expect.

Part 2 provides perhaps the most innovative chapters, for it knits together the parallel stories of the transatlantic anti-nuclear movement with the domestic and intra-alliance politics of getting the member-state parliaments to approve the deployments of the new weapons. Here Colbourn returns to her theme of fear, which gripped Europeans as they contemplated a widening of the nuclear arms race and the deployment of missiles that had the express purpose of destroying European cities. Deeply concerned about the possibility that the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the election of Ronald Reagan portended a deterioration of superpower relations, many European activists concluded that more missiles in Europe could only increase the likelihood of a catastrophic war.

Yet for all the genuine power of the peace movement and the entirely understandable anxiety of millions of Europeans about the possibility of nuclear war, by 1983, the German, British, and Italian governments had all managed to win—just barely—parliamentary support for the deployment of the missiles, having successfully made the case that without them, NATO would fall to pieces, the Americans might withdraw their shield from Europe, and the Soviets could dictate terms to a much-weakened Europe. "At the ballot box," Colbourn writes, "the center held" (194).

In part 3, Colbourn links the Euromissiles crisis to the story of the end of the Cold War. She shows how, having twisted themselves into knots getting the Pershings and Gryphons into place, the Western allies found themselves in a rapidly changing political landscape. Ronald Reagan had not turned out to be the warmonger many feared, while in March 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev emerged as a new kind of Soviet leader: humane, intelligent, and willing to negotiate a halt to the arms race in good faith. While the road to the INF Treaty, signed in late 1987, is well-known, Colbourn wisely carries the story through to 1989, showing that the problem of nuclear weapons in Europe, and especially in Germany, posed yet another major problem for NATO: should a nuclear doctrine designed for the Cold War be scrapped entirely now that the Cold War was over? That debate has yet to be resolved.

This is by no means the first book on the Euromissiles and the consequences of the prolonged inter-allied debate that surrounded them.³ We have long known the basic narrative of events. But this book, drawing on NATO, U.S., British, German, Canadian and non-government sources, brings together various strands of analysis. In particular, it highlights the major role of the West Germans in shaping the policy outcomes of the Western alliance; it brings into clear relief the impact of anti-nuclear social movements in raising the stakes of the deployment decision; and it demonstrates the crucial role of individual leaders like Helmut Schmidt, Helmut Kohl, Gerald Ford, Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, and Mikhail Gorbachev across the years of the crisis. Regrettably, Colbourn did not work in French archives. France, a nuclear power in its own right, and its president in these years, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, are largely absent from the book. And the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact states are treated here chiefly through the

eyes of Western actors, using Western sources. These are gaps that still need to be filled by future scholarship.

Nonetheless, *Euromissiles* does a great service by placing this particular crisis within the larger context of NATO's tumultuous history. NATO has been in a state of perpetual crisis more or less since its founding in 1949, from divisions over the question of German membership in the 1950s, to arguments over flexible response and France's partial withdrawal in the 1960s, to the tangled issues of détente and Ostpolitik in the 1970s, all the way to NATO expansion in the 1990s. In this sense, the Euromissiles debate formed just another chapter in the ongoing Western strategic disagreement over essential questions. Should NATO ever use nuclear weapons to "save" Europe, even if such weapons would kill millions of Europeans? What was the right balance between détente and deterrence? Did NATO strengthen the European member states or weaken them by making them too reliant on an American nuclear shield? Was NATO in fact a democratic alliance at all if so many members of the public opposed the nuclear arms race and the deployment of American soldiers and bases across Europe? Arguments over these questions have defined the NATO alliance for much of its seventy-five-year history.

And yet the very fact that NATO member states could engage in these strategic debates is a sign of the alliance's resilience—and good fortune. Without a real war to fight, the member states had the luxury of occasionally treating NATO like a highbrow think-tank. That luxury vanished on February 24, 2022, when Russia unleashed a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, dramatically escalating its ongoing war, which had begun in 2014. Suddenly, NATO had a war to wage. And it has withstood the test, so far. Though Ukraine is not a member of NATO, the alliance saw Russia's invasion as a dire and imminent threat to European security and acted accordingly. NATO states have channeled enormous amounts of weapons to Ukraine, helped train Ukrainian armed forces, and most of all provided a firm and united front to oppose any expansion of Russian aggression in, for example, the Baltic states.

Some have argued that NATO is somehow responsible for the Russian invasion because it expanded into Eastern Europe in the 1990s and early 2000s, thereby provoking Russia into taking merely "defensive" actions to protect its periphery.⁴ This interpretation willfully refuses to explain why Russia's desire for security requires the abduction of thousands of Ukrainian children, the cold-blooded torture and murder of Ukrainian civilians, the officially approved use of rape as a form of warfare, the incessant shelling of schools, apartment blocks, and residential neighborhoods, the violation of every norm and law of war on the books, and the menacing of Russian's neighbors with nuclear threats, cyberwar, and invasion. Perhaps something other than the NATO membership of, say, Bulgaria might be at work.

Paradoxically, the bestial Russian aggression in Ukraine has given NATO a new lease on life, and in April 2023 it welcomed long-neutral Finland into its ranks. Sweden will follow soon. NATO is the club everyone wants to join. Since 2022, an alliance known chiefly for internecine quarrels and strategic disputes has been compelled to join a real fight. We may only hope, for all our sakes, it wins through.

Notes:

1. Two important recent books on NATO, its crises, and its expansion are Timothy Sayle, *Enduring Alliance: A History of NATO and the Postwar Global Order* (Ithaca, NY, 2019); and Mary Sarotte, *Not One Inch: America, Russia, and the Making of Post-Cold War Stalemate* (New Haven, CT, 2021). Earlier work includes Ronald Asmus, *Opening NATO's Door: How the Alliance Remade Itself for a New Era* (New York, 2004); and Lawrence Kaplan, *NATO Divided, NATO United: The Evolution of an Alliance* (Westport, CT, 2004).
2. For an elegant statement on the uncertainty of historical perception see Francis J. Gavin, "Thinking Historically: A Guide

for Strategy and Statecraft," *War on the Rocks*, Nov. 19, 2019, <https://warontherocks.com/2019/11/thinking-historically-a-guide-for-strategy-and-statecraft/>. An excellent example of centering contingency during the end of the Cold War is Mary Sarotte, *The Collapse: The Accidental Opening of the Berlin Wall* (New York, 2014). 3. Jeffrey Herf, *War by Other Means: Soviet Power, West German Resistance, and the Battle of the Euromissiles* (New York, 1991); Leopoldo Nuti et al., eds, *The Euromissiles Crisis and the End of the Cold War* (Stanford, CA, 2015); Christoph Becker-Schaum et al., eds., *The Nuclear Crisis: The Arms Race, Cold War Anxiety, and the German Peace Movement of the 1980s* (New York and Oxford, 2016). 4. The most notorious but not the only statement of this view is John Mearsheimer's "Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault: The Liberal Delusions That Provoked Putin," *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 93, no. 5 (Sep/Oct 2014): 77–89. For an interview with Mearsheimer, see Isaac Chotiner, "Why John Mearsheimer Blames the U.S. for the Crisis in Ukraine," *The New Yorker*, March 1, 2022. Mearsheimer repeated his belief that "the United States is principally responsible for causing the Ukraine crisis" in a lecture last year. See "The Causes and Consequences of the Ukraine War," lecture at the Robert Schuman Centre of the European University Institute in Florence, Italy on June 16th, 2022, <https://www.eui.eu/news-hub?id=john-mearsheimers-lecture-on-the-causes-and-consequences-of-the-ukraine-war>.

Review of Susan Colbourn, *Euromissiles*

Aaron Bateman

Russia's heinous invasion of Ukraine has forced NATO leaders to face head-on very difficult questions concerning European security. Today, the alliance looks stronger than ever, but there is much uncertainty about the future. Certainly, there are divergent transatlantic views on what a resolution to the war in Ukraine would look like and how support for Kyiv could be sustained over the long haul. Weighty political decisions concerning these topics will, of course, not be made in a vacuum. NATO leaders will have to closely consider the wants and desires of their respective voting populations. Consequently, old fault lines in the alliance could quickly become apparent. NATO has long been a fragile alliance that has experienced many crises of confidence. As policy practitioners and scholars consider the future of the alliance, it is an opportune time to look back at the Euromissiles Crisis of the 1980s to understand how and why the alliance ultimately prevailed in what became one of the most significant inflection points in NATO's history.

Susan Colbourn's new book, *Euromissiles: The Nuclear Weapons that Nearly Destroyed NATO*, is a meticulously researched and masterfully written history of one of the most significant time periods in the Cold War transatlantic alliance. Impressive does not even begin to adequately describe her archival work, which spans collections in Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Britain, the Netherlands, and the United States. Weaving together a narrative that is simultaneously diplomatic, social, and political history was no easy feat. The book is divided into three well-organized sections: Decide, Deploy, and Destroy, taking the reader through the complexities of détente and the decision to deploy intermediate-range nuclear forces in Europe in response to the Soviet SS-20s, and ending with the dramatic shifts in the 1980s that led to the dismantlement of these weapons with the INF Treaty.

Colbourn vividly explains how the Soviet Union's deployment of SS-20 road-mobile intermediate-range ballistic missiles (IRBMs) spawned a crisis in Europe over the so-called Euro-strategic balance and NATO's flexible response nuclear doctrine. When contemplating the deployment of U.S. Pershing-II IRBMs and ground-launched cruise missiles (GLCMs), Western European politicians had to weigh not only strategic-military and political considerations associated with the American security

umbrella, but also the growing anti-nuclear movements in Europe. Consequently, the road to arms control was a long and winding one, and Colbourn introduces much depth and nuance to the role of European politicians and non-governmental actors in what would ultimately become the INF Treaty of 1987. Hers is an invaluable addition to the growing body of scholarship on Cold War arms control.

Perhaps most importantly, the book expands the narrative of the Euromissiles crisis, which is oftentimes truncated to the period between President Jimmy Carter's dual-track decision in 1979 and the signing of the INF Treaty in 1987. Colbourn shows that the tensions in Europe surrounding the Euromissiles ran much deeper. Going back to the Harmel report of 1967, NATO members had to delicately balance the pursuit of détente with the need for defense. Pursuing the former without threatening the latter became a difficult task. And prospective arms control agreements oftentimes exacerbated European fears about a decoupling of American security from that of its allies across the Atlantic. Since NATO's purpose was to "keep the Soviets out, the Americans in, and the Germans down," broader European fears of West Germany losing confidence in the transatlantic security framework served as a consistent source of anxiety in alliance affairs.

Relaxation of tensions with the Soviet Union in the form of détente created fundamental challenges for the justification of NATO's continued existence. Colbourn points out that the allies' relationship with the Soviet Union was one of the dilemmas that defined NATO's structure of crisis through the Cold War, because if "the threat posed by the Soviet Union appeared to wane, so too would the case for NATO" (5). In the wake of the 1967 Harmel report, NATO's mission was succinctly defined as defense, deterrence, and détente. However, improvement of relations with the Soviet Union made it difficult for European politicians to secure popular support for defense capabilities needed for deterrence.

Moreover, arms control, a key element of détente, held the potential to undermine the alliance's strategy of flexible response that, officially, included a range of escalatory options from conventional, tactical nuclear, and strategic. Colbourn points out that flexible response was not truly "flexible" when it was introduced; nevertheless, nuclear weapons in Europe played a *visible* role in coupling Europe with the U.S. strategic nuclear arsenal. Thus, *Euromissiles* is an important reminder of the power of perception, oftentimes divorced from technical reality, in Cold War nuclear matters.

American acceptance of parity through détente only exacerbated European anxieties about the credibility of the U.S. nuclear guarantee. The severity of this situation became more apparent when in 1977 West German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt decided to air his concerns about the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) in public. Clearly, Schmidt believed that President Jimmy Carter and his immediate predecessors had ignored European security concerns about SALT. In this context, the Soviet deployment of a new class of Soviet IRBMs in Europe threatened to further erode extended deterrence.

Schmidt's speech in 1977 is a key element in the genealogy of the dual track decision of 1979 and the origins of the Euromissiles Crisis. By elucidating the significance of these political upheavals in the 1960s and 1970s, Colbourn points out that the tensions surrounding the deployment of intermediate-range nuclear forces in Western Europe in the 1980s were not unique in alliance affairs. Rather, the difficulties between the Reagan administration and Western Europe concerning the security of the latter were only a continuation of longstanding issues surrounding the very foundation of NATO's strategy.

The decision to deploy intermediate-range nuclear weapons in Europe while simultaneously pursuing arms

control to limit them in no way diminished the growing anti-nuclear opposition in Europe. It is perhaps easy to forget that the early 1980s were a time of widespread and intensifying nuclear anxieties. Even if NATO leaders could reach something approaching a consensus on nuclear matters, they would still have to contend with constituents who were vehemently opposed to the introduction of any new nuclear weapons in Europe. Colbourn explains that contrary to statements in the 1980s, there was not a single, homogenous peace movement. Rather, a wide swath of society in the United States, Canada, and Europe mobilized because of a fear of nuclear war. These anti-nuclear movements could not be ignored by politicians making critical decisions about arms control and the deployment of nuclear forces in Europe. Consequently, public diplomacy became a vital tool for both Washington and Moscow in trying to convince Europeans of their respective arms control positions.

In the context of growing anti-nuclearism, Colbourn shows that U.S. defense planners were considering a range of emerging technologies that “seemed to offer a silver-bullet solution that might solve the perennial dilemma of how to craft a strategy that was affordable and acceptable” (156). Although it is only a brief section in the book, she sheds light on U.S. defense planners’ delicate balancing act between drawing attention to Air-Land Battle (a new high-tech U.S. operational concept) and not leading people to believe that this new doctrine could somehow reduce the importance of nuclear weapons in Europe. The 1980s were a transformational period not only in arms control and nuclear forces, but also in the enhancement of U.S. military power. New developments in space technologies used for communications, intelligence, and navigation as well as the information revolution were shaping the views of American, and allied, defense officials on the future of warfare. However, nuclear weapons in Europe remained important not only for practical strategic-military considerations, but also for the political objective of maintaining a cohesive transatlantic alliance.

This political reality aside, technological and doctrinal transformations in this time period would visibly play out on the battlefield during the First Gulf War and what would be labeled the Revolution in Military Affairs. Colbourn elucidates the significance of these developments within the context of debates over nuclear weapons and arms control in the 1980s. These strategic shifts remain a topic that is ripe for greater historical inquiry as relevant documents in the United States and Western Europe are increasingly available.

The prospect of improving East-West relations looked bleak early in Ronald Reagan’s first term, when it appeared to many observers that the new administration was vehemently opposed to arms control in all forms. With no progress in negotiations over INF forces, the United States and its allies moved forward with Pershing II deployments in West Germany, prompting a Soviet suspension of arms control negotiations. Yet not even two years later the Soviet Union would be back at the negotiating table—a development due, at least in part, to substantial Soviet fears of Reagan’s Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), a large-scale missile defense program. SDI became a significant stumbling block to forward momentum in nuclear arms talks between Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev. Famously, in Reykjavik in 1986 Reagan and Gorbachev seriously talked about eliminating *all* of their nuclear weapons, but this

groundbreaking proposal fell apart due to disagreements concerning SDI.

To break through the U.S.–Soviet arms control stalemate over SDI, Gorbachev de-linked it from INF negotiations, paving the way for the INF Treaty of 1987. This episode once again raises a longstanding question in the Cold War historiography: what exactly was SDI’s role in superpower relations? Colbourn observes that the Soviets untied the arms control package—i.e., de-linked SDI from INF—because of concerns about Pershing IIs and for economic reasons. She is quite right, but advisors to Gorbachev had also concluded that the Soviet Union could develop asymmetric measures to counter a deployed strategic defense system.

Nevertheless, key Soviet officials were still concerned about SDI after the signing of the INF Treaty, and it remained a contentious issue in START negotiations into the early 1990s. Implicit in Colbourn’s observations about SDI and arms control is that there was not one homogeneous Soviet view of SDI. Rather, Soviet officials held a range of views concerning SDI’s technological feasibility and its potential impact on the military balance—just like their American counterparts. Moreover, in explaining Gorbachev’s rationale for accepting such an imbalanced treaty, skewed in the United States’s favor, Colbourn compellingly argues that the deal was the product of the Soviet Union’s economic challenges, Gorbachev’s own struggles with

alliance management, and Soviet officials rethinking Moscow’s place in the world. These factors were as important as the deployment of U.S. INF forces in Europe.

The landmark INF Treaty in 1987 was not, however, the end of the saga of nuclear crisis in NATO’s history. Alliance leaders quickly turned their attention to the prickly issue of short-range nuclear forces (SNF). Officials questioned whether Bonn would continue to accept the deployment of SNF on German territory. If it did not, what would be the implications for NATO? However, the fall of the Berlin Wall and German reunification would largely push anxieties about SNF to the sidelines. This time period would not, of course, be the last test of alliance cohesion.

Finally, Colbourn adds much depth to our understanding of the level of complexity and contingency in the events leading up to the INF Treaty in 1987. She points out that policymakers have recently treated the popular narrative of U.S. INF weapons deployments forcing the Soviets to the arms control negotiating table as a replicable model for dealing with adversaries today. However, she compellingly argues that the true INF story is far more complex, which provides an important, and *needed*, caution for policy practitioners who are looking to Cold War history to find a formula for addressing current geopolitical challenges. In sum, *Euromissiles* is a must read for diplomatic historians, scholars of the Cold War, students of alliance dynamics, and policymakers.

Author’s Response

Susan Colbourn

Since submitting the final manuscript for *Euromissiles*, I have often quipped that I would never read any of the reviews. These four reviews are a reminder why that was never—and could never be—more than a passing joke. It is a wonderful experience to see how others read and

respond to a book you have spent so much time working on, especially when they are scholars for whom you have a great deal of respect.

I am grateful to Aaron Bateman, Elizabeth Charles, William Hitchcock, and Heather Marie Stur for taking the time to be part of this roundtable, and I am flattered to see that they found so much to like about *Euromissiles*. Thanks also go to Jayita Sarkar for penning the introduction and, of course, to Andrew Johns for making this roundtable happen. It is a particular joy to have this roundtable appear in the pages of *Passport*. SHAFR has been my professional home since graduate school, and this project—including (or perhaps, more accurately, *especially*) my focus on NATO as more than a U.S.-led institution—has been shaped in critical ways by conversations I have had in and around SHAFR.

The history of the Euromissiles is rather curious. It is a story that is well known, yet almost entirely forgotten. For a generation that lived through raucous public debate over the Euromissiles and widespread nuclear anxiety fueled by films like *Threads*, the stakes seem obvious and the significance clear, even if individual perspectives lead people to wildly different conclusions about why this “last battle of the Cold War” mattered.¹ For those who came of age later, someone like Charles’s smart, dog-walking neighbor or a student in my classes at Duke, the Euromissiles are virtually unknown.

To be sure, major episodes in the story are staples of courses surveying twentieth-century U.S. foreign relations or international history post-1945. I am not about to suggest that the diplomacy of Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev is understudied or fading from public memory. But it is often stripped of critical context, including why and how those missiles ended up there in the first place, before Reagan and Gorbachev signed the historic 1987 agreement to get rid of them. Why it all mattered is even less obvious to a younger generation not already intimately familiar with the implicit logic that underpinned so much of the Cold War and how it was waged in Europe.

I wrote *Euromissiles* primarily with that younger audience in mind. I wanted to take a piece of history that is immensely complicated, bogged down in acronyms and technical jargon, and make it accessible. Put another way, I wanted to explain the history of the Euromissiles and why it mattered in a way that any interested person could follow even if they didn’t have a clue what NATO is, let alone what a Euromissile is or what the heck extended deterrence is. For that reason it is especially gratifying to have *Euromissiles* described here as “engaging and highly readable” and “approachable.”

Because my target audience is so young, *Euromissiles* often follows a basic narrative familiar to those who already know what a Euromissile is. Much of what I cover, as Hitchcock rightly notes, is well-trodden historical ground and draws on the work of earlier writers, be they journalists, analysts, political scientists, or historians. I am hardly the first person, for instance, to suggest that the chain-smoking West German chancellor Helmut Schmidt played an integral role in shaping how this history unfolded! But even as I recount familiar episodes, *Euromissiles* pushes back on the conventional chronology and scope of how we often understand that story, something I was happy to see Bateman highlight in his review.

Euromissiles is not, I should be clear, a comprehensive history of the so-called “Euromissiles Crisis.” It is a transatlantic history, revolving around NATO. That is not a commentary on how significant I think the Soviet Union or the Warsaw Pact is in the story. If anything, that choice reflects the opposite feeling. The Warsaw Pact’s side of the story deserves equal treatment, with the same probing of strategy-making, of disagreements between allies big and small, and even of the role played by public

opinion and popular sentiment, which took on different forms east of the Iron Curtain, where there were many more state-imposed constraints. I quickly concluded that I was not the person to do that archival work and to do it justice, certainly not on my own. Luckily, I happen to know someone working on related questions. Simon Miles and I are currently gathering archival material for a co-authored history of NATO and the Warsaw Pact in which we plan to tease out the dynamics at play between the two alliances, their strategies, and their force postures, including in this tumultuous period.

Before turning to the present, I want to briefly discuss three items that arise in the four reviewers’ comments. The first is about the role that antinuclear protestors play in my narrative, particularly in part 2. I am pleased to see Charles and Hitchcock highlight this as one of the book’s “most innovative” features. It mattered to me to give these protestors voices of their own and to break out of some of the old ways of characterizing the “peace movement” as monolithic or always in opposition to politicians and other elites in the transatlantic policy space. As I show in part 2, challenges to NATO’s existing strategy came from a variety of places and often featured improbable alignments. It is a message that dovetails with other, even more recent work, like Stephanie Freeman’s *Dreams for a Decade*, that collectively, I hope, will reframe some of the debates about who is responsible for the end of the Cold War and whether that is the question we should be fixated on.²

The second item is Hitchcock’s lament that there is not more about France in the pages of *Euromissiles*. For any historian of NATO grappling with the period post-1966, France is a difficult beast. How do you deal with a player that is both in and out, a country with successive governments interested in the diplomatic equivalent of having their cake and eating it too? In *Euromissiles*, I do incorporate material from the French foreign ministry archives, along with the diplomatic memoirs of leaders like Valéry Giscard d’Estaing, though there could easily have been much more. (I am happy to pledge that my next book will include more French material, and that I will endure the hardship of spending more time in Paris to make good on that promise!) But the fact remains that France was unusual in many ways that bear directly on the story of the Euromissiles.

France did not belong to many of the allied committees in which decisions were made, an organizational fact that meant discussions sometimes switched committees to make sure the French were – or were not – in the room when something was debated. When France did engage the issue, policymakers often did so in channels outside of and distinct from NATO. For instance, Frédéric Bozo has written about the fascinating discussions between French and West German officials in the 1980s to see how Paris’s nuclear deterrent might offer extra protection to the Federal Republic of Germany to augment that of the United States.³

Implicitly, Hitchcock points to another challenge of writing the alliance’s history that is only getting harder as NATO adds new members. If you decide to write NATO’s history as an international story, as I did, there are always tough choices about where you draw the line. Which country’s perspectives and priorities do you incorporate and foreground? And which end up on the cutting room floor as victims of word counts or narrative cohesion? Hitchcock might have made a similar critique that there is not enough Belgian, Dutch, or Italian material in *Euromissiles*, let alone other non-basing countries whose perspectives I discuss only in passing.

As someone who is committed to challenging stereotypes of the alliance as nothing more than an extension of U.S. foreign policy and who intends to write more about NATO in the future, I think about how to incorporate the viewpoints of the various member states a lot. How do you

do justice to the diversity and complexity of experiences of thirty-one different member states (and counting) while also acknowledging that all members of the alliance were not created equal? And, as a writer, how do you do so in a single narrative package that is compelling, engaging, and easy to read?⁴ If I wrote a history of NATO that had as much Iceland as the United States, it would probably seem more than a little off.

The third item I want to address is Stur's reference to periodization and how we understand the Cold War. One of the bizarre things about writing a book is how much your thinking can sharpen and crystallize long after publication. Stur highlights implicit ideas about chronology and continuities that are almost certainly the early inklings of my next book project: an international history of efforts to transcend the Cold War division of Europe. Its basic premise starts from a thought experiment. What happens to our understanding of Europe's post-1945 development if we put 1989 at the center of a historical narrative, not at the beginning or the end of two distinct periods?

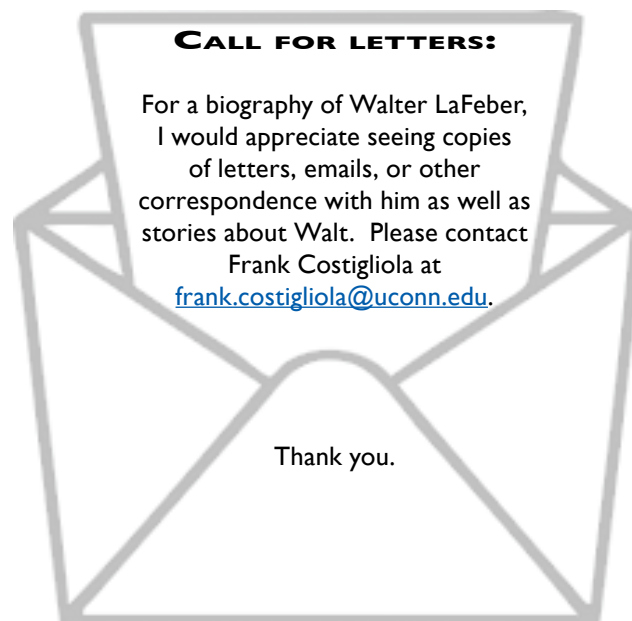
It is perhaps most telling that all four reviewers devote space to Russia's war against Ukraine, particularly its most recent phase following the full-scale, gruesome, and war-crime-laden offensive launched by Russian forces in February 2022. The questions I deal with in the book are not historical trivia or problems relegated to the past; we are seeing both their consequences and continuations play out in real time today. Once more, NATO has been galvanized because the threat from Moscow is real and palpable.⁵ The fact that Russia has waged a brutal war against Ukraine—not a NATO member state, despite the alliance's vague promises to one day let Kyiv in—but avoided targeting allied convoys and depots is a prime illustration of old debates about when, where, and how deterrence might work.

In the handwringing over what to supply the Ukrainians, we see familiar disagreements about escalation risk and how to strike a balance between achieving objectives and avoiding unimaginable and horrific outcomes like nuclear war. And in the conversations over the much-lauded but perhaps non-existent *Zeitenwende* are the legacies of decades of diplomatic efforts to harness German power without risking a repeat of the first half of the twentieth century. It is for all of these reasons that I don't intend to stop writing the alliance's history any time soon. NATO's past still has plenty to tell us about the present—and the future.

I worry, however, that the history of the Euromissiles will be seen not as crucial pre-history and context to help make sense of European security today. Instead, it seems more likely to be revived and repackaged in the context of Great Power Competition (a term, it seems, that has been all but trademarked by official Washington) with the People's Republic of China. On this issue, I hope the message *Euromissiles* sends is a note of caution. I hope my obsession with contingency and uncertainty, conforming as it does to age-old stereotypes about historians, highlights the risks of believing that the Euromissiles offer a convenient script for the United States to rerun in the Pacific against Beijing.

Notes:

1. Maynard W. Glitman, *The Last Battle of the Cold War: An Inside Account of Negotiating the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty* (New York, 2006).
2. Stephanie L. Freeman, *Dreams for a Decade: International Nuclear Abolitionism and the End of the Cold War* (Philadelphia, PA, 2023).
3. Frédéric Bozo, "The Sanctuary and the Glacis: France, the Federal Republic of Germany, and Nuclear Weapons in the 1980s (Part 1)," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 22, no. 3 (Summer 2020): 119–79; and Bozo, "The Sanctuary and the Glacis: France, the Federal Republic of Germany, and the Nuclear Factor in the 1980s (Part 2)," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 22, no. 4 (Fall 2020): 175–228.
4. On this particular challenge of being a historian of NATO, see my response in "Seven Questions on . . . NATO History," *Passport: The Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations Review* (Jan. 2023), 29.
5. In the context of Russia's war against Ukraine, I have fleshed this argument out in Susan Colbourn, "Putin's Aggression Toward Ukraine May Boost NATO," *Washington Post*, February 9, 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2022/02/09/putins-aggression-towards-ukraine-may-boost-nato/>, and in Susan Colbourn, "The Kremlin Saves NATO (Again)," Cornell Press, February 17, 2023, <https://www.cornellpress.cornell.edu/susan-colbourn-kremlin-saves-nato-euromissiles-nuclear-weapons-blog-02-2023/>. The idea of a waning threat from Moscow as particularly damaging to NATO's structures—and my thinking on that chronic challenge—draws heavily on Timothy Andrews Sayle, *Enduring Alliance: A History of NATO and the Postwar Global Order* (Ithaca, NY, 2019). For the 1960s as a prime illustration of this phenomenon, my thinking has also been shaped by Michael Cotey Morgan, *The Final Act: The Helsinki Accords and the Transformation of the Cold War* (Princeton, NJ, 2018).



CALL FOR PAPERS

2024 Conference of the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations

University of Toronto, Toronto, Canada, June 13-15, 2024

The Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations (SHAFR) invites proposals for its 2024 annual conference. The deadline for proposals is **December 1, 2023**.

SHAFR is dedicated to the study of the history of the United States in the world, broadly conceived. This includes not only foreign relations, diplomacy, statecraft, and strategy but also other approaches to Americans' relations with the wider world, including (but not limited to) global governance, transnational movements, religion, human rights, race, gender, trade and economics, immigration, borderlands, the environment, and empire. SHAFR welcomes those who study any time period from the colonial era to the present. Given that the production, exercise, and understanding of U.S. power takes many forms and touches myriad subjects, the Program Committee welcomes proposals reflecting a broad range of approaches and topics.

Proposals

SHAFR is committed to inclusion and diversity, and invites proposals from all, including members of groups historically under-represented within the organization. We particularly encourage proposals from women, scholars of color, colleagues residing outside of the United States, junior and contingent scholars, and scholars working in other disciplines. Strong proposals will include a diversity statement describing how your presentation will advance SHAFR's commitment to inclusion (broadly construed).

Graduate students, international scholars, and scholars whose participation might expand the organization's breadth are encouraged to apply for SHAFR travel grants to subsidize the cost of attending the conference. Please see below for details.

The Program Committee welcomes panels from across the humanities and social sciences that transcend conventional chronologies, challenge received categories, or otherwise offer innovative approaches and fresh thinking.

The Program Committee welcomes proposals for panels presented in new or creative formats, roundtables, complete traditional panels, and individual papers. New formats might include a fishbowl conversation, a lightning round presentation of six or more individuals' work, or a role-playing demonstration. Roundtable discussions are usually composed of a chair and three or four participants. Traditional panels typically include three papers plus a chair and commentator (both roles can be held by the same person). Individual paper proposals may be placed on a traditional panel or in one of the new formats.

Although all proposals will receive careful evaluation, the committee will give preference to those that offer innovative or interactive formats. The program co-chairs are happy to consult on new or innovative sessions. Complete panels that choose a new presentation format should describe it briefly in the proposal.

Those seeking to create or fill out a session proposal should Tweet #SHAFR2024 and/or consult with the executive director to help identify scholars with similar interests. The Program Committee will also develop a pool of potential commentators/chairs for panels constructed from individual proposals. If you are interested in volunteering for this pool, please contact the program co-chairs, Meredith Oyen and Christopher Fisher, at program-chair@shafir.org.

Policies

All proposals and funding applications should be submitted via the procedures outlined at <https://shafir.org/shafir2024>. Applicants requiring alternative means to submit the proposal should contact the program co-chairs via e-mail at program-chair@shafir.org.

No participant may appear on the program more than two times. Any special scheduling requests (e.g., that a panel not take place on a particular day) must be made at the time of application and be included in your proposal.

Generally, annual membership in SHAFR is required for those participating in the 2024 meeting. The president and Program Committee may grant some exceptions to scholars whose specializations are outside the field. Enrollment instructions will be included with notification of accepted proposals. Everyone appearing on the program is required to register for the conference.

SHAFR and the media occasionally record conference sessions for use in broadcast and electronic media. Presenters who do not wish for their session to be recorded may opt out when submitting a proposal to the Program Committee. An audience member who wishes to audiotape or videotape must obtain written permission of all panelists. SHAFR is not responsible for unauthorized recording. SHAFR reserves the right to revoke the registration of anyone who records sessions without appropriate permissions.

Divine Graduate Student Travel Grants

SHAFR will award several Robert A. and Barbara Divine Graduate Student Travel Grants to assist graduate students presenting papers at the 2024 conference. The following stipulations apply: 1) no award will exceed \$500; 2) priority will be given to graduate students who receive no or limited funds from their home institutions; and 3) expenses will be reimbursed by the SHAFR Business Office upon submission of receipts. The Program Committee will make decisions regarding awards. A graduate student requesting travel funds must make a request when submitting the paper/panel proposal. Applications should include: a 1-page letter from the applicant and reference letter from the graduate advisor that also confirms the unavailability of departmental travel funds. The two items should be submitted via the on-line interface at the time the panel/paper proposal is submitted. Funding requests will have no bearing on the committee's decisions on panels/papers, but funds will not be awarded unless the applicant's submission is accepted by the Program Committee in a separate decision. Application deadline: December 1, 2023.

SHAFR Global Scholars and Diversity Grants

SHAFR also awards Global Scholars and Diversity Grants to help defray travel, lodging, and visa expenses for the 2024 conference. These grants are aimed at scholars whose participation in the annual meeting helps to diversify the organization. Preference will be given to those who have not previously presented at annual meetings. The awards are intended for scholars who represent groups historically under-represented at SHAFR, scholars who offer diverse and complementary intellectual approaches, and scholars from outside the United States. "Scholars" includes faculty, graduate students, and independent researchers. To further integrate grant winners into SHAFR, awards include one-year membership that includes subscriptions to Diplomatic History and Passport. Applicants should submit a copy of their individual paper proposal along with a short cv (2-page maximum) and a 2-3 paragraph essay addressing the fellowship criteria (including data on previous SHAFR meetings attended and funding received). Please submit your application via the on-line interface. Funding requests will have no bearing on the committee's decisions on panels/papers, but funds will not be awarded unless the applicant's submission is accepted by the Program Committee in a separate decision. Application deadline: December 1, 2023.

Other Conference Events

The 2024 conference will include mentoring workshops and teaching programs. Those interested in participating can indicate this on the online conference submission form (although it is not necessary to be a panelist to participate).

For more details about the conference please visit the main conference web page, <https://shafr.org/shafr2024>.



Seven Questions on...

the Nexus of Foreign Policy and Domestic Politics

*Daniel Bessner, Michael Brenes, Amanda C. Demmer, Aaron Donaghy,
and Andrew Johnstone*

Editor's note: "Seven Questions On..." is a regular feature in *Passport* that will ask scholars in a particular field to respond to seven questions about their field's historiography, key publications, influences, etc. It is designed to introduce the broader SHAFR community to a variety of perspectives for a given field, as well as serving as a literature and pedagogical primer for graduate students and non-specialists. AJ

1. What drew you to this field and inspired you to focus on your specific area of domestic politics and foreign policy?

Daniel Bessner: I became drawn to the field in a similar way to many scholars in my generation: the Iraq War. I was a first-year in college when the Bush Administration invaded Iraq, and this spurred my general interest in U.S. foreign policy. I had always been interested in history (at one point in high school, I was carrying around Shirer's *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* from class to class) but the folly of U.S. foreign policy in the early years of the Global War on Terror pushed me in a particular direction. During my senior year of college, I interned at the Council on Foreign Relations, and the rest, as they say, is history.

Michael Brenes: I became intrigued with the relationship between social movements and U.S. foreign policy as an undergrad. I found it fascinating how the Cold War both limited and opened possibilities for domestic reform—I had a particular obsession with McCarthyism, the civil rights movement, and why fears of communism determined what was possible in both U.S. domestic politics and foreign policy.

I planned to write something on this topic when I entered graduate school. This was 2007, the year before Barack Obama's election and at a time when American conservatism seemed on the wane. Commentators were writing about "the death of conservatism." Then the Tea Party movement emerged during my second year of coursework, ending that line of argumentation. The growth of the Right during the Obama years made me interested in conservatives' views of government—how conservatives came to believe in "big government" on national defense, but little else. This is not a contradiction, but something that I felt had to be worked out in historical terms; and again, it spoke to my interest in the interconnections between domestic politics and foreign policy. My dissertation project evolved from there, and I ended up writing more about American liberalism than American conservatism, but these were the initial motivations.

Amanda C. Demmer: I started graduate school as an Early Americanist. I spent most of my early years—my entire M.A. and the first eighteen months or so of my Ph.D.—reading about and researching what our colleagues at SHEAR call the Early American Republic. I originally envisioned writing a dissertation exploring early U.S. diplomacy from the Jay Treaty to the annexation of Texas.¹ And then, for reasons I won't get into here, I ended up writing a dissertation and then a book about the Vietnam War that explores the American approach to U.S.-Vietnamese normalization from 1975 to 2000.

I had always been interested in American history, but I did not take a formal course on U.S. foreign relations until my first semester in graduate school. It was like someone turned on the lights. The domestic political history that I had learned about since elementary school made so much more sense, and I was hooked. In the persuasive works that I read and to my own mind, studying early U.S. foreign relations required centering U.S. domestic politics. The lines between the two were so blurry in the first decades after 1776 that to ignore one or the other was to miss a major part of the story. Beyond that early era, if there is one quintessential topic that seems to prove the rule that domestic politics matter to other conduct of U.S. foreign relations—that they really matter and can be decisive—it is the Vietnam War. So, as an early Americanist who jumped forward 200 years at the 11th hour to study of all things the Vietnam War, perhaps I had it coming.

For me, studying the role of domestic politics in U.S. foreign relations felt like not so much of a conscious choice but a necessity. The ties between the two seemed so strong and so obvious that neglecting the importance of U.S. domestic politics meant, to my mind, failure to fully understand U.S. foreign relations. I'll confess that it wasn't until I attended the 2015 SHAFR Summer Institute dedicated to this theme that I realized that it was possible to talk about centering domestic politics in U.S. foreign relations as "a field," and that the very premise of that field might be controversial to some.² My scholarly interests, institutional affiliations, and so much about my life have changed since then; my convictions about the necessity of examining domestic politics to understand U.S. foreign relations have not.

Aaron Donaghy: I have had a keen interest in foreign affairs ever since my early teenage years, when I watched a wonderful six-part BBC series called *The Death of Yugoslavia*. It charted the bloody destruction of that nation in the early 1990s, sprinkled with interviews from a range of political heavyweights, Balkan and Western. Quite apart from the sheer gravity of the conflict, I was struck by the power that politicians wielded and how policies were crafted. Why

were certain decisions made? Could the war have been avoided, or resolved sooner? What informed or motivated a particular course of action? However, my interest in international affairs really took off as an undergraduate, when I got the opportunity to devour books on the history of war and peace—I was particularly interested in the Cold War and the Second World War. The tragic events of 9/11 had taken place in my first week on campus, and the question of military intervention in Iraq and Afghanistan was soon looming large.

Domestic politics was placed second behind foreign affairs in terms of my initial scholarly interest. I chose the Falklands dispute between Britain and Argentina as my Ph.D. dissertation topic, with the aim of studying British diplomacy in the critical years prior to the 1982 War. I had expected to write a thesis framing the dispute within the context of global decolonization, the retreat from empire, British-Latin American relations, and pressure from the United Nations (the “international community”). Yet early in the course of my research it became abundantly clear that virtually every major decision taken by respective British governments during the 1960s and 1970s (whether Labour or Tory) was driven by domestic political concerns—the primacy of parliamentary and public opinion, influential lobby groups, electoral politics, and even the role of the media. I am sure that this informed my methodological approach as an early-career scholar. I have since concentrated largely on the history of American foreign relations, where presence of domestic politics is ubiquitous. My convictions on the importance of the foreign-domestic nexus have been reinforced by my recent research on the Cold War, and the administrations of Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan.

Andrew Johnstone: While I’m not “domestic politics” in the sense of conventional party politics, the overarching theme through all of my work has been an examination of the concept of public opinion and how it is understood, represented and manufactured.

But I guess I stumbled into it by accident. I have been interested in U.S. history since I was at school. When I was an undergraduate, I took a course on the presidency of Franklin Roosevelt and I was particularly fascinated by the debate over American entry into World War II. When I started my Master’s, I knew I wanted to do my thesis on that period, and I found a footnote in Warren Kimball’s book on Lend-Lease—*The Most Unsordid Act* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1969) p.126, note 11—that said more work was needed on public opinion during this period, especially “interest groups and their influence.” I wondered if that was still worth investigating and my supervisor said why not e-mail Kimball and see if he still thinks that’s true. So I did. I was mildly terrified at the prospect of e-mailing a big-name professor, especially as it was probably the second e-mail I ever sent (it was 1997). But he very graciously replied. My Master’s thesis was on the debate over Lend-Lease and I went back to that period for my second book.

While working on the Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies for my last book, one thing that leapt out at me was the fact it used a public relations firm to help plan strategy, hone its message, and even staff its office. That got me interested in the relationship between public relations firms and U.S. foreign relations more broadly in the twentieth century, on which I’m just completing a book manuscript.

2. Which scholars do you see as having laid the groundwork for the study of the nexus of foreign policy

and domestic politics in U.S. foreign relations?

DB: Many scholars have laid the groundwork for the study of the nexus of foreign relations and domestic politics, so I’ll just state the books that have been most influential on me: Michael J. Hogan’s *A Cross of Iron*; Mary Dudziak’s *Cold War Civil Rights and War Time*; William Appleman Williams’ *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*; Joy Rohde’s *Armed with Expertise*; Joan Hoff’s *A Faustian Foreign Policy*; John Lewis Gaddis’ *Strategies of Containment*; Ira Katznelson’s *Fear Itself*; Ron Theodore Robin’s *The Making of the Cold War Enemy*; and Fred Logevall’s and Campbell Craig’s *America’s Cold War*.

MB: In my view, the origins lie in the revisionist school of historiography on the origins of the Cold War—scholars like William Appleman Williams, Lloyd Gardner, and Walter LaFeber. I see my own work as trying to respond to this tradition, although moving beyond its methodological limits and determinism—domestic phenomena do not determine all history, but they have priority in the topics I study. I also appreciated the “revisionists” efforts to connect politics and political economy to U.S. foreign policy.

In terms of my own work, in addition to the “revisionists,” my first inspirations came from scholars working on the relationship between the civil rights movement and U.S. foreign policy. Some scholars that come to mind include Mary Dudziak, Brenda Gayle Plummer, Penny Von Eschen, Thomas Borstelmann, Jonathan Rosenberg, and Michael Krenn. Further in grad school, I found the scholarship of Fred Logevall, Jeremi Suri, Alex Roland, KC Johnson, and Julian Zelizer particularly important. I also identify as a historian of U.S. political history as well, so I count some political historians as inspirations too: Lisa McGirr, James Sparrow, Jennifer Mittelstadt, Mark Wilson, and Judith Stein. I would also add political scientists like Ann Markusen and Rebecca Thorpe.

ACD: Instead of a strictly chronological response, I’ll instead describe how I encountered the field, given the trajectory I described above. I see groundwork as having been laid in two mutually supportive, but not always mutually aware, directions. There are those who identify as scholars of U.S. foreign relations who insist on the inescapable importance of domestic politics (these tend to individuals who study the 20th century, but not always), and scholars who study domestic politics but insist on the centrality of wider geopolitical and diplomatic contexts (who tend to be scholars who study pre-20th century topics, but not always).

Scholars who begin with what is usually perceived as a “domestic” event or topic and make persuasive arguments about the centrality of international contexts are wide ranging. A few that made a very strong impression on me are Peter Onuf’s “A Declaration of Independence for Diplomatic Historians,” Erika Lee’s “The Chinese Exclusion Example: Race, Immigration, and American Gatekeeping,” and Howard Jones’ *Blue and Gray Diplomacy*. After I switched topics/eras to studying U.S.-Vietnamese normalization, existing works like Michael Allen’s *Until the Last Man Comes Home* and Edwin Martini’s *Invisible Enemies* persuasively argued that domestic politics superseded nearly all other considerations.

AD: I will confine my answer here to my own lifetime, while acknowledging that scholars have long examined the foreign-domestic nexus in a broader sense. Revisionist historians such as William Appleman Williams (*The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*) typically focused their attention

on the internal sources of policy, or economic motives, rather than looking at American politics per se. Fredrik Logevall has pioneered the study of the foreign-domestic nexus in U.S. foreign relations over the past quarter-century. His excellent book (cowritten with Campbell Craig) titled *America's Cold War: The Politics of Insecurity*, explained, clearly and persuasively, the reasons for much of America's external behavior in the post-1945 era, as well as the militarization of U.S. political culture. I am interested in causation and agency—the how and why questions of history—so I found this work highly instructive. Logevall's early research on U.S. policy toward Vietnam (particularly his first book, *Choosing War*) demonstrated how domestic politics and personal credibility were of paramount concern to President Lyndon Johnson during the critical phase of 1964-65, when the fatal decisions on military intervention were being made. More recently, Logevall has called on scholars to “recenter” the United States in the historiography of American foreign relations, in order to better understand the history of the U.S. in world affairs.

The late Walter LaFeber published a large body of work on U.S. foreign relations history, which often combined international analysis with a keen appreciation for the domestic political context in the United States. When writing of the post-1945 era, in particular, he emphasized the need to treat America as a unique actor in global affairs, rather than casting it as merely one nation among others on the international stage. Julian Zelizer has produced fine analyses on the close relationship between domestic politics and foreign policy, particularly the role of electoral strategizing and lobby groups. Thomas Schwartz and Jussi Hanhimäki have published excellent essays on the foreign-domestic nexus as a methodological approach, articulating the reasons why scholars must pay heed to developments at home and abroad when writing about the history of American foreign relations. More recently, Robert David Johnson has conducted outstanding work on the role of the U.S. Congress during the Cold War. Andrew Johns, meanwhile, has penned a series of fine studies on the influence of domestic politics with respect to U.S. decisionmaking and the Vietnam War, building on Logevall's earlier work.

AJ: I don't want to get into a detailed literature review here. But for me, the work of Robert Divine has been hugely important. His book *Second Chance: the Triumph of Internationalism in America during World War II* (New York: Athenium, 1967) was invaluable for my Ph.D. The way it examined the interplay between Franklin Roosevelt, Congress, interest groups, and the broader public set a standard for me. His other books on the Roosevelt years remain useful despite their age, notably *The Illusion of Neutrality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

When my friend Andrew Priest asked me back in 2011 if anyone had published a book on elections and foreign policy, we didn't think anyone had, only to find that Divine had in fact published a rather overlooked two volume project called *Foreign Policy and United States Presidential Elections* (New York: New Viewpoints, 1974) back in the 1970s. That set an example for our 2017 book *U.S. Presidential Elections and Foreign Policy*. Whenever I think of a new idea, I usually double check that Robert Divine did not have it first.

3. Discuss how the field has evolved to include different approaches to analyzing the nexus of domestic politics and foreign policy.

DB: The field, I think, has in the last three or so decades become much more conscious of itself in terms of the geographical scales it adopts. Put another way, the paradigm

wars of the 1980s revisionists versus post-revisionists, those who emphasized bureaucratic politics versus those who emphasized ideology, etc. have been displaced by a focus on geographical scale i.e., transnational, international, domestic. I believe a major goal for the field in coming years should be to integrate these various scales with a mind toward explicating what each scale illuminates and obscures, and how each relates to each other in terms of explaining why certain events/phenomena proceeded as they did, always keeping causality and the construction of causal hierarchies in mind.

MB: I think the field is best served by minimizing the demarcation between the “domestic” and the “international.” Daniel Bessner and I are editing a forthcoming collection of essays on the relationship between domestic politics and foreign policy, and many of the scholars identify with the transnational turn but are also doing work that is grounded in domestic politics in some form. I'm thinking of scholars like Amanda Demmer, Vivien Chang, and Sarah Miller-Davenport, three of our contributors. As we say in our introduction, and as Bessner and Fred Logevall have stated in their article for *Texas National Security Review*, it is better to focus on the causal significance of domestic politics, when domestic politics have priority in U.S. foreign policy making and when they do not, rather than seek a study of domestic politics as the “alternative” to the transnational turn. I don't think the latter serves us well at a time when historians of U.S. in the World, however they identify as scholars, face a myriad of challenges given the state of the profession.

I'll add too that I think the field is simply ignoring this demarcation; there doesn't seem to be an altogether conscious effort to challenge the transnational turn through a domestic lens. This is a good thing. The academic books I've enjoyed the most in the past couple years focus on domestic politics, but also study transnational phenomena such as the role of migration, gender, or ideology in U.S. foreign policy. Here I'm thinking of scholars like Amanda Demmer, Amy Rutenberg, Stephen Wertheim, or David Allen.

ACD: One interesting point of evolution arises from the difficulties inherent in defining what we mean by “domestic.” In part, this is a geography question. Daniel Immerwahr and Brooke Blower problematize this issue brilliantly.³ It is also a methodological question insofar as human beings often never fully conform to our categories of historical analysis.

The field has greatly benefitted, for instance, from the acknowledgment that domestic political actors can also act internationally and transnationally. For this reason, the label “domestic” is often replaced with “non-state” in more recent scholarship, especially in the fields that I know best, including human rights and postwar reconciliation.⁴ This approach is very illuminating. Not every project requires (or can feasibly undertake) every type of methodology, but many human rights scholars embrace an inclusive approach, integrating research methodologies that we would identify with the international or transnational turns—research in foreign archives, using foreign languages when necessary—and using and foregrounding domestic political sources. This has been extremely profitable.

I'll share how this functioned in my own work on U.S.-Vietnamese normalization. Two of the most important advocacy groups I write about are the Families of Vietnamese Political Prisoners Association (FVPPA), an NGO run by members of the Vietnamese diaspora, and the Aurora Foundation, a human rights organization. Both

groups were founded by individuals born abroad who migrated to the United States. Both organizations utilized transnational networks to obtain information about those currently and formerly held in so-called “reeducation camps” in Vietnam. Both the FVPPA and the Aurora Foundation established close ties with U.S. policymakers, published widely read reports, and, I argue, exerted a definitive influence over U.S. policy regarding reeducation camp detainees, a population that did not garner a great deal of attention among the general U.S. public after 1975. By acting and working transnationally and internationally the FVPPA and the Aurora Foundation exercised a formidable, if focused, influence on U.S. policy. Scholars have shown many other groups operated in a similar fashion with equally significant results.

AD: The trend toward “bottom up” research has seen a number of excellent studies emerge on subjects such as human rights movements in the United States, as well as antiwar and antinuclear activism, and how they have shaped national identity. There has also been important work published in recent years on subjects such as ethnic lobby groups and the military-industrial complex. This is all to the good, and has informed my own research. However, in my opinion there has been a dearth of historical research on other critical aspects of the foreign-domestic nexus: partisan politics, the role of Congress and key committees, various special interest groups, and how electoral considerations shape foreign policymaking.

AJ: While there may be those who want to see more focus on politics in a traditional sense—parties, elections—I think the definition of domestic politics has broadened considerably in recent years. You can see the different approaches to it, and its influence on foreign relations, in books such as *The Cold War at Home and Abroad: Domestic Politics and US Foreign Policy since 1945*, edited by Andrew L. Johns and Mitchell B. Lerner (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2018). With chapters on Congress, elections, public opinion, religion, lobbying, human rights, and more, it shows the number of ways that domestic impulses help to shape U.S. foreign relations. I know Daniel Bessner and Michael Brenes are putting together a similar volume at the moment.

4. What are some of the challenges faced by scholars working in the field?

DB: The major challenges faced by scholars working in the field is the collapse of the humanities generally and the historical discipline specifically. We are in a serious moment of crisis, and if we don’t band together as a field and disciplinewith workers across the university, both those who teach and those who do notI believe that our profession is doomed.

MB: The main challenge is the absence of fulltime, academic jobs that pay a living wage. It is hard for any historian to have their work read and respected if they cannot find work in the academy, or in a field that allows them to produce scholarship on a regular basis. Full stop.

ACD: The one that I suspect everyone participating in this forum will mention is that in many respects researching the influence of domestic politics sends scholars looking for the one thing that policymakers are (usually) loathe to admit on the record: that they are motivated by something else than pure “national interest.” Barbara Keys has persuasively dismantled the idea. Adhering to/acting in solely the “national interest” never was (or is) ever obtainable, which I think opens space for context and other priorities and/or affiliations to help carry the burden of proof.⁵ Whether

it is acknowledging that nearly every foreign policy elite in the early republic was also a slaveholder, or that the early party system evolved partially but very explicitly about preferences for a specific approach to foreign policy/national alliances, scholars have shown that perhaps we’ve been looking for the smoking gun in the wrong places.

A second challenge to researching in this field is that greater attention to domestic politics often requires more focus on Congress. Even though Capitol Hill has often acted as a major player in foreign affairs (sometimes, perhaps, by omission), the papers of former members of Congress do not find their way into traditional diplomatic history archives. Congressional materials are decentralized, often housed in university libraries or state historical societies scattered throughout the country, which makes them harder to access both logistically and financially. At the same time, however, especially for scholars working in the United States, these materials might also be more accessible than those housed abroad.

AD: The field of U.S. foreign relations history has long been dominated by international-based studies to the comparative neglect of domestic politics. The respective turns toward international history, transnational history, and global history have been met with great enthusiasm in the academic arena, as scholars scour the globe in search of untapped foreign archives. Much of the work that has emerged has been excellent, and I frequently avail of it in my own research and teaching (the global Cold War, decolonization, and transnational human rights movements, for example). By contrast, political history has been somewhat marginalized. By “political history” I refer to the literal, not the abstract—almost any subfield of history is at least to some extent “political.” For example: the study of decisionmakers, policymakers, Congress, party politics, elections, and how they pertain to foreign policy. Indeed, as Fredrik Logevall and Daniel Bessner recently noted, academic historians have largely ceded this terrain to political scientists. It is a development that is both regrettable and ironic, given the deep partisan divisions that exist within America today, and the importance of looking to the past in order to better understand the world we now live in. Since 1945, the United States has been the dominant actor on the international stage by virtually every conceivable measurement. As events in recent years have shown, its political structures matter enormously—not only to Americans, but to those of us living in different parts of the globe.

In addition, there are certain logistical and methodological problems that confront scholars who are seeking to explore the foreign-domestic nexus. In my opinion there has not been nearly enough historical research conducted on Congress, key committees, leading senators, and their role in the foreign policy process. I suspect that part of the reason for this is the sheer time and cost involved. For example, senators typically donate their personal papers to their alma mater, which are spread across the entire nation (e.g., Frank Church at Boise State University, Bob Dole at the University of Kansas, Tip O’Neill at Boston College) and are usually not digitized. Younger academic researchers may not have the requisite funds to travel to far flung locations, not to mention the additional costs of accommodation. Moreover, the lack of academic positions in the political/diplomatic history subfield is unquestionably a major concern and one that has been well documented over the past few years. This has doubtless served as a deterrent to postgraduate students contemplating a Ph.D. dissertation on the foreign-domestic nexus—particularly a “topdown” study that focuses on presidential or administration decisionmaking.

Sources and methodology can also present challenges for historians examining the relationship between domestic politics and foreign policy. Perhaps having learned from the Johnson and Nixon years, latter-day presidents and policymakers are extremely reluctant to leave documentary evidence of personal, partisan, or electoral motives in shaping a foreign policy decision. Yet, I firmly believe that this challenge can be overcome by sheer perseverance and hard work. Mining the records held at presidential libraries, the Library of Congress, and other private papers can—and frequently do—reveal startling information (if not always necessarily that one “gotcha” moment). The papers of the Chief of Staff, pollsters, key political advisers, and the Office of Congressional Liaison, for example, provide vital domestic context that can help us to better understand why certain policies were chosen at a particular time. (In my own research on the Carter and Reagan administrations, for example, I highlighted three key interrelated themes: risk, timing, and credibility.)

AJ: The biggest methodological challenge for those working on the biggest questions of power is probably the same one that it’s always been: finding causal evidence. The old line “nobody’s talking about it, but it’s on everybody’s mind” is the problem here. No policy maker wants to openly admit that their foreign policy might be driven by domestic political calculations. Foreign policy matters—especially those of war and peace—are supposed to be above that. So finding evidence is always going to be a challenge. For those working on public opinion, showing that public opinion matters, and why it matters (or is perceived to matter) is relatively easy. Assessing its importance and its influence is much more difficult.

I think the biggest broader challenge at the moment is the perception—perhaps the reality—that a focus on the influence of domestic political factors is unfashionable. In the aftermath of transnational and international turns, a focus on domestic politics seems to be swimming against the tide. For examples of criticism of the approach, see some of the responses to the 2020 piece by Daniel Bessner and Fredrik Logevall in the *Texas National Security Review* on re-centering the United States in the historiography of American foreign relations. I saw concerns that a focus on domestic politics will leave it as the only factor influencing American foreign relations, that it will lead to histories that support U.S. hegemony, or that it signifies American exceptionalism. I don’t think a focus on domestic politics necessarily does any of those things. OK, maybe it could, but it certainly doesn’t have to. A lot of the newer work in the area makes that very clear.

5. What are some of the significant questions in the field that you feel need to be addressed in greater detail or, alternatively, which questions need to be reconsidered by contemporary scholars?

DB: The most important questions that I think the field needs to address are the ones I gestured to in the third question above: how can we integrate transnational, international, and domestic histories to tell a larger story about the history of U.S. foreign relations, and how can we determine how the scales relate to each other in constructing causal hierarchies?

MB: I still think we need more work on the national security state and U.S. political economy, on the material foundations of U.S. foreign policy. Foreign policy making is concentrated in the hands of a few individuals in Washington, D.C. and is outside the purview of the public. Foreign policymakers often avoid accountability for their bad decisions—in fact, they are rewarded for them with new

appointments in subsequent administrations. Why do we allow this to happen as a democratic society? What are the structures, individuals, and networks that insulate foreign policy making during and beyond the Cold War? How have individuals and movements challenged the power of the national security state? Why does the United States continue to spend so much on national defense? How did the national security state expand in the post-Cold War period when it arguably should have retracted? Are there alternatives to the foreign policy “blob?” These are just a few of the questions I’ve asked myself over the years and I don’t think we have enough answers yet.

ACD: Based on the premise that a full understanding of virtually any topic requires attention to domestic politics, I’ll list some books that I would like to read that either don’t exist or are topics that haven’t been revisited in quite a while. The field would benefit from a more robust history of Washington, D.C.-based think tanks. Such projects might explore these organizations’ role in U.S. foreign relations and examine the often-revolving door between their ranks and policymakers. There is also much room for further investigation into the role of private citizens as diplomats. Here I’m thinking of everything ranging from military specialists acting as consultants to foreign governments to celebrities and other influential individuals spearheading U.S. initiatives abroad. I also think there is room to revisit most of the early U.S. treaties. The scholarship that exists is quite good but most of it is decades (often 50+ years) old and could certainly benefit from some fresh perspectives.

Thankfully, other scholars have been quite explicit in calling our attention to areas that need further study. I was recently reading the excellent bibliography George Herring wrote for his *Superpower Transformed* and he proposed a variety of ideas there as well (when in doubt, quote/reference George Herring). In their recent article, “Recentering the United States in the Historiography of American Foreign Relations,” Fred Logevall and Daniel Bessner also list quite a few areas that they see as needing further research. I’d encourage scholars, especially graduate students, to mine these resources for potential avenues of study.

AD: Firstly, I think it is vital to recognize that the American political system is, and has always been, fundamentally different (perhaps unique) to the rest of the world. Nowhere among major Western democracies is a political system so decentralized, where national security or foreign trade impact upon congressional districts across the country. Representatives and senators, career politicians, cater to the interest of their constituents as it pertains to foreign policy (e.g., an economic group, ethnic lobby, or industry), often with little regard for events overseas. Equally, the openness of the U.S. system facilitates the development of major grassroots (or “bottomup”) movements, which can find relatively easy access to political elites, compared, for example, to the parliamentary democracies of Western Europe. Additionally, there is no comparable nation that has an executive branch whose external policies operate against such legislative oversight—even if there has been some diminution in the powers of the various congressional committees post-9/11.

All of which means that we must pay close attention to the intertwined relationship between domestic politics and foreign policy. As I have already mentioned above, we require more historical research on the role of Congress in U.S. foreign policymaking (for better and worse). We also need a clearer understanding of key variables such as the rise of special interest groups and the military-industrial complex which ought to be fertile ground for historians working on the post-1945 era. Above all, though, I believe

we need to pay closer attention to the role of partisan politics and elections in shaping American foreign policy. Here, too, the United States is fundamentally unique, for the campaigning literally never stops. The perpetual electoral cycle has long made it incumbent upon candidates—both presidential and congressional—to grapple with the domestic implications of foreign affairs. For presidents who are seeking reelection, for example, election season often lends an urgency to craft of foreign policy. Lyndon Johnson, Richard Nixon, Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, and Bill Clinton—all are good examples of presidents who have consciously sought to adjust U.S. foreign policy on key issues as their reelection approached. Presidents and policymakers embark on course correctives, devise ways to reduce vulnerability, and attempt to align policy with the broad public mood. Studying the relationship between partisan politics, elections, and foreign policy will enable us to better understand the actions of those who wield power, and bring us closer to explaining the history of U.S. foreign relations. Perhaps nowhere is this element more important than on the issue of military intervention, especially in the post-1945 era, when America has been the world's foremost power.

AJ: Following on from the last question, Bessner and Logevall's *TNSR* piece listed seven different areas where a domestic perspective is especially illuminating, one of which was a focus on domestic politics in its narrower sense. But I would highlight two others because of the way they incorporate nonstate actors. First, they note the "peculiar evolution of the U.S. national security state" and the way that state was a "creation of a network of parastate institutions." As someone who has worked extensively on nonstate actors, it will surprise no one that I would encourage more work on how that network developed to provide a vast supporting cast for the U.S. government.

Second, they note how historians "have not explored fully the concatenation of political, economic, cultural, and ideological factors that have encouraged the United States to engage in what [Andrew] Bacevich has pungently referred to as 'permanent' or 'endless' war." To do so requires engaging (as they note) with the work that has come out of the cultural turn, and with a broader definition of politics. My current work on PR probably fits into this category.

6. For someone wanting to start out in studying the nexus of domestic politics and foreign policy, what 5-8 books do you consider to be of seminal importance—either the "best" or the most influential titles?

MB: This is tough, but if I was making a graduate syllabus and we only had 8 books to assign, I would say the following: Walter LaFeber, *The New Empire*; Mary Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights*; Fredrik Logevall and Campbell Craig, *America's Cold War*; Daniel Bessner, *Democracy in Exile*; Gretchen Heefner, *The Minuteman Next Door*; Amy Rutenberg, *Rough Draft*; Andrew Friedman, *Covert Capital*; and Jennifer Mittelstadt, *The Rise of the Military Welfare State*.

These books cover a lot of ground, but still scratch the surface.

ACD: A fantastic place to start is Fred Logevall's "Domestic Politics" chapter in the 2016 edition of *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations*. That chapter and Melvin Small's *Democracy & Diplomacy: The Impact of Domestic Politics on U.S. Foreign Relations, 1789-1994* (1996) are great overviews into the field. I see Small's book as particular pivotal, even twenty-five plus years on, insofar as it traces this theme over the full sweep of U.S. history, transcending the early-modern divide and pointing toward moments of

continuity and change.

Read together, Small's book and Logevall's chapter and excellent starting points. Beyond that, my recommendations would vary significantly by one's temporal/thematic interests. I'd welcome further conversations about this topic with any of my SHAFR colleagues.

AD: Some excellent introductory studies on the foreign-domestic nexus include: Campbell Craig and Fredrik Logevall, *America's Cold War: The Politics of Insecurity*; Julian Zelizer, *Arsenal of Democracy: The Politics of National Security From World War II to the War on Terrorism*; James Lindsay, *Congress and the Politics of U.S. Foreign Policy*; Melvin Small, *Democracy & Diplomacy: The Impact of Domestic Politics in U.S. Foreign Policy, 1789-1994*; Walter LaFeber, *The American Age: United States Foreign Policy at Home and Abroad since 1750*; H. W. Brands, *The Devil We Knew: Americans and the Cold War*.

AJ: Here are four books on that survey the relationship between foreign relations and domestic politics, the public, Congress, and elections. It also includes three articles from the 2000s that all made the case for the importance of domestic politics.

Melvin Small, *Democracy and Diplomacy: The impact of Domestic Politics on U.S. Foreign Policy, 1789-1994* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996)

Ralph Levering, *The Public and American Foreign Policy* (New York: William Morrow, 1978)

Robert David Johnson, *Congress and the Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006)

Andrew Johnstone and Andrew Priest (eds), *US Presidential Elections and Foreign Policy: Candidates, Campaigns, and Global Politics from FDR to Bill Clinton* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2017)

Jussi M. Hanhimäki, "Global Visions and Parochial Politics: The Persistent Dilemma of the 'American Century,'" *Diplomatic History* 27/4 (2003), pp. 423-447.

Fredrik Logevall, "A Critique of Containment," *Diplomatic History* 28/4 (2004): 473-499.

Thomas A. Schwartz, "'Henry, ... Winning an Election Is Terribly Important': Partisan Politics in the History of U.S. Foreign Relations," *Diplomatic History* 33/2 (2009): 173-190.

7. For someone wanting to teach a course on the nexus of domestic politics and foreign policy or add these considerations to an existing course on U.S. foreign relations, what core readings and/or media would you suggest?

MB: It depends on the course, but I would say that including any of the books I mentioned would be great for a graduate class. I think if it is a course for undergraduates, it would be fun to teach it through primary sources, fiction, songs, and movies. Sources would include President Dwight Eisenhower's speech in 1957 announcing that federal troops would protect the "Little Rock nine"—Eisenhower essentially says it is a national security imperative, in addition to being a constitutional action. *Dr. Strangelove* is also a necessary movie, as would be Errol Morris' documentary, *Fog of War*. Novels by Graham Greene or Don DeLillo might also work. You could also teach this course through protest music from Woody Guthrie to Rage Against the Machine.

Now you have me thinking about possible courses to offer.

ACD: My answer would change dramatically depending on the temporal and thematic parameters of the course, and whether we're talking about an undergraduate or graduate course. I teach the Vietnam War regularly, as do many SHAFR members, so I'll grab a few titles off that syllabus, but, once again, I'm happy to chat with any SHAFR colleagues about these issues further.

While I draw my lectures from a variety of sources that consistently emphasize the connection between domestic politics and U.S. foreign relations, here are some readings that I regularly assign to students (undergraduates):

James Westheider, "African Americans and the Vietnam War," in Marilyn B. Young and Robert Buzzanco, eds., *A Companion to the Vietnam War*

Heather Marie Stur, "'She Could Be the Girl Next Door': The Red Cross SRAO in Vietnam" from her *Beyond Combat: Women and Gender in the Vietnam War Era*

Chester Pach, "'We Need to Get a Better Story to the American People': LBJ, the Progress Campaign, and the Vietnam War on Television," in Kenneth Osgood and Andrew K. Frank, eds., *Selling War in a Media Age: The Presidency and Public Opinion in the American Century*

David L. Prentice, "Choosing 'the Long Road': Henry Kissinger, Melvin Laird, Vietnamization, and the War over Nixon's Vietnam Strategy," *Diplomatic History* 40/3 (2016): 445-474.

Ken Hughes, "Fatal Politics: Nixon's Political Timetable for Withdrawing from Vietnam," *Diplomatic History* 34/3 (2010): 497-506.

Truong Nhu Tang, *A Vietcong Memoir: An Inside Account of the Vietnam War and Its Aftermath* (1986). I assign the entire memoir in my classes, but on U.S. domestic politics mattering not just to the USG but to the NLF/PRG, see especially 145-147

I also just recently read/reviewed Carolyn Woods Eisenberg's *Fire and Rain: Nixon, Kissinger, and the Wars in Southeast Asia*. The book is a treasure trove for many things, including the intersection of domestic politics/US foreign policy, and I will definitely be adding chapters to future iterations of my syllabus.

AD: In addition to the seminal works listed above in response to question 6, the following readings delve into certain key aspects of the foreign-domestic nexus: Eugene Wittkopf and James McCormick (eds.), *The Domestic Sources of American Foreign Policy: Insights and Evidence*; James Lee Ray, *American Foreign Policy and Political Ambition*; Andrew Johns and Mitchell Lerner (eds.), *The Cold War at Home and Abroad: Domestic Politics and U.S. Foreign Policy since 1945*; Robert David Johnson, *Congress and the Cold War*; Michael Armacost, *Ballots, Bullets and Bargains: American Foreign Policy and Presidential Elections*; Andrew Johnstone and Andrew Priest (eds.), *U.S. Presidential Elections and Foreign Policy: Candidates, Campaigns, and Global Politics from FDR to Clinton*; Aaron Friedberg, *In the Shadow of the Garrison State: America's AntiStatism and Its Cold War Grand Strategy*; Michael Brenes, *For Might and Right: Cold War Defense Spending and the Remaking of American Democracy*; Andrew Johns, *Vietnam's Second Front: Domestic Politics, the Republican Party, and the War*. For those interested in the late Cold War era there is also my own book: Aaron Donaghy, *The Second Cold War: Carter, Reagan, and the Politics of Foreign Policy*.

AJ: It depends on the course, obviously. The suggestions for the previous question would work well to address the concept in a broader sense. The suggestions below focus on particular historical periods that I teach—entry into World War II and the Vietnam War. These suggestions below vary from the broad to the more focused. But there are also numerous useful speeches that can be used in class. So much of Roosevelt's rhetoric from 1940-41 attempted to sway public opinion. Regarding Vietnam, I particularly like teaching Nixon's 8 May 1970 press conference and his visit to the Lincoln memorial the following morning.

Robert Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy, 1932-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979)

Stephen Casey, *Cautious Crusade Franklin D. Roosevelt, American Public Opinion, And the War Against Nazi Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001)

Richard Moe, *Roosevelt's Second Act: The Election of 1940 and the Politics of War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013)

Margaret Paton-Walsh, *Our War Too: American Women Against the Axis* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002)

Melvin Small, *At the Water's Edge: American Politics and the Vietnam War* (Chicago: Ivan Dee, 2005)

Fredrik Logevall, *Choosing War: The Lost Chance for Peace and the Escalation of War in Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999)

Andrew L. Johns, *Vietnam's Second Front: Domestic Politics, the Republican Party, and the War* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2010)

Sandra Scanlon, *The Prowar Movement: Domestic Support for the Vietnam War and the Making of Modern American Conservatism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2013)

Notes:

1. Research on this topic resulted in: Amanda C. Demmer, "Trick or Constitutional Treaty?: The Jay Treaty and the Quarrel Over the Diplomatic Separation of Powers," *Journal of the Early Republic*, 35/4 (Winter 2015): 579-598.
2. This Summer Institute led to the publication of: Andrew L. Johns and Mitchell B. Lerner, eds., *The Cold War at Home and Abroad: Domestic Politics and U.S. Foreign Policy since 1945* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 2018).
3. Daniel Immerwahr, *How to Hide an Empire: A History of the Greater United States* (New York, 2019); Brooke Blower, "Nation of Outposts: Forts, Factories, Bases, and the Making of American Power," *Diplomatic History* 41/3 (2017): 439-59.
4. On human rights, see Sarah B. Snyder, *Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War: A Transnational History of the Helsinki Network* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Barbara J. Keys, *Reclaiming American Virtue: The Human Rights Revolution of the 1970s* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014); Sarah B. Snyder, *From Selma to Moscow: How Human Rights Activists Transformed U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018); Lauren Frances Turek, *To Bring the Good News to All Nations: Evangelical Influence on Human Rights and U.S. Foreign Relations* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2020). On postwar reconciliation, see Pete Millwood, *Improbable Diplomats: How Ping-Pong Players, Musicians, and Scientists Remade U.S.-China Relations* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2022); Hang Thi Thu LeTormala, *Postwar Journeys: American and Vietnamese Transnational Peace Efforts Since 1975* (Lawrence, KS: Kansas University Press, 2021).
5. Barbara Keys, "The Diplomat's Two Minds: Deconstructing a Foreign Policy Myth," *Diplomatic History* 44/1 (2020): 121.

A Roundtable on William Inboden, *The Peacemaker: Ronald Reagan in the White House and the World*

*Evan D. McCormick, Aaron Donaghy, Andrew Hunt, Gail E.S. Yoshitani, John
Sbardellati, and William Inboden*

Roundtable Introduction

Evan D. McCormick

William Inboden's *The Peacemaker*, an indispensable treatment of Ronald Reagan's foreign policy vision and sprawling set of affiliated global policies, could not have arrived at a better time. As I noted in the introduction to a previous *Passport* roundtable about the 40th president, an increasing number of scholars of the United States and the world—many of them junior scholars—are now focusing on the Reagan years to understand the transition in the U.S. global role that accompanied the end of the Cold War.¹ Inboden's book will loom large in these efforts. There is perhaps no better testament to Reagan's present stature than this: the reviewers in this *Passport* roundtable disagree almost exclusively about Inboden's handling of the contradictions that accompany Reagan, rather than about whether Reagan is deserving of such a consequential place in the literature on U.S. foreign relations. Reagan's contradictions are many and, as the lively discussion amongst these reviewers makes clear, essential to grappling with Reagan's complicated legacy.

All reviewers offer high praise for Inboden's undertaking, which achieves the feat of synthesizing Reagan's foreign policies while also presenting a fresh image of a visionary—if at times elusive—strategic thinker. Aaron Donaghy calls it “arguably the most comprehensive archival-based treatment of foreign policymaking during the Reagan era.” The reviewers are equally impressed with the style in which Inboden has pulled off this scholarly task. Donaghy notes that Inboden's work is “deeply researched and written with panache,” while John Sbardatelli, also citing Inboden's “prodigious research,” calls his prose “crisp and engaging.” Gail Yoshitani is especially laudatory, finding Inboden's balance between “insightful analysis” and knack for captivating storytelling an ideal one for educating would-be strategists about the experience of policymaking.

The reviewers are less in step in as they contend with Inboden's central argument: that Ronald Reagan—despite the detractions of contemporary critics and many historians—was indispensable to bringing about the end of the Cold War. This claim requires, first, seeing Reagan as an artful grand strategist responsible for engineering the dual-track strategy of pressure and conciliation that drove the Soviet Union to what Inboden calls “negotiated surrender.” Furthermore, the claim requires reviewers to agree that achieving peace served as Reagan's strategic North star. In other words, Inboden's portrayal of Reagan highlights centrality and consistency—two features that have long

vexed Reagan scholars and propelled debates over his foreign policy presidency.

It is on the first point that the reviewers here are most focused, not least because of a fixation on grand strategy as the primary rubric for presidential foreign policymaking by scholars of U.S. foreign policy. Sbardatelli says that Inboden “convincingly demonstrates that Reagan consistently pursued a mix of confrontational and conciliatory strategies,” yet raises questions about the framework of negotiated surrender that Inboden imposes to make sense of Reagan's often competing influences. “Reagan as a strategist,” Sbardatelli writes, “appears to have been more impulsive, pragmatic, and given to improvisation, rather than guided by a single coherent strategy that neatly tied together all the loose ends of his foreign policy.” Donaghy, who aligns himself with the camp of scholars who believe in a “Reagan reversal,” or shift in the Administration's strategy towards the Soviet Union, comes away unconvinced by Inboden's extensive case for consistency. He acknowledges the persistence of Reagan's guiding principles, but notes that the manifold “divisions, personnel changes, and policy turns” within Reagan's eight years of Soviet policy to note that a claim for grand strategy is “rather problematic.” Donaghy concludes that “it was precisely Reagan's flexibility, pragmatism, and independence of thought that contributed to the development of a more stable U.S.-Soviet relationship in the second half of the 1980s.”

The second component of Inboden's assessment—that Reagan's legacy is one of peacemaking—also comes in for scrutiny by the reviewers. It should be emphasized that each of the reviewers praises Inboden for the care he has taken to avoid a hagiography while writing a book that aims to bolster Reagan's legacy. Rather than idealizing in any capacity, Inboden foregrounds tragedy as a core theme of Reagan's legacy. In so doing, he directly tackles a number of the Administration's most infamous decisions and episodes, such as Reagan's support for authoritarian regimes and the Iran-Contra scandal. Donaghy commends Inboden's analysis as “judicious and even-handed” despite being favorable to Reagan. Similarly, Andrew Hunt writes that, while a decidedly sympathetic account, “Inboden's prose strikes a judicious tone” and says Inboden “does not ever hesitate [to add] layers of complexity to the words and deeds of the Reagan Administration.”

Judicious as Inboden is, the essays in this roundtable collectively highlight the inextricability of moral judgment from scholarly assessment regarding Reagan's role in the end of the Cold War; it has become difficult, if not impossible, to disentangle the ethics of Reagan's hegemonic conception of peace—and the many misdeeds and costly choices that it entailed—from attempts at objective historical analysis.

Sbardatelli notes that “Inboden’s brazenly triumphalist interpretation is deftly qualified by frequent concessions of Reagan’s missteps,” though he notes that these concessions “ultimately do little to darken the heroic portrait that the author sketches here.” Yohistani’s reading is more sympathetic, highlighting Inboden’s focus on Reagan’s attempts to reach the Soviet people, as well as its leaders, with a message of personal and religious liberty. Hunt’s review challenges this heroic image most directly, arguing that Inboden’s centering of Reagan obscures other complex reasons for the Cold War’s end, many of which “had less to do with policies crafted in Washington’s hallowed halls of power, and more to do with conditions inside the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.” Hunt focuses specifically on Reagan’s legacy in Central America, where the conception of the region as an ideological battlefield went hand-in-hand with political violence and repression on an unspeakable scale. Although Inboden does not shy from these facts, Hunt laments that “nowhere is there evidence that the troubling moral choices to which Inboden refers kept Reagan or anyone in his administration, or their backers in Congress, awake at night, troubled by the bloodletting they were financing.”

Inboden responds to the reviews in an essay that is typical of the author’s depth and thoughtfulness, taking on three of the themes in the reviews which more or less track with what I have previewed here: the coherence of Reagan’s strategy, his record in Central America, and charges of “triumphalism” in evaluating the end of the Cold War. In this essay, Inboden deepens his case for understanding Reagan as a visionary and deft foreign policy president, advancing a concept of grand strategy that requires adaptation and acknowledges managerial disagreement. On Central America, Inboden responds resolutely, emphasizing both the reality of the Soviet challenge to U.S. interests in the region, and Reagan’s willingness—in the case of El Salvador—to pressure authoritarian allies to respect basic democratic norms. Readers will benefit especially from Inboden’s pages on moral judgments and the end of the Cold War. Inboden objects to triumphalism as an epithet used by those who would minimize the threat posed by Soviet communism relative to U.S. foreign policy. With remarkable candor, Inboden confirms his abhorrence of the USSR’s record and urges other scholars, while making their own moral judgments, to never “exonerate[e], or even overlook[], the failings of the ‘good’ side.”

There is little doubt, in reading the essays assembled here, that Inboden has produced an essential synthesis of the Reagan Administration’s foreign policy. It is also clear, in reading these essays, that a broad consensus among scholars is hardly within reach; their interpretations of Reagan’s centrality to the end of the Cold War, and the costs of the policies that the Administration pursued in bringing about its vision of peace, diverge widely and seem indelibly bound up in an unresolvable question of conscience. Yet this is not a note of despair, but one of optimism. For scholars willing to turn their attention from the project of demystifying Reagan personally, there remain ample studies yet to be written about the policies and programs that Reagan’s strategy countenanced, the perspectives of people across the globe affected by those policies, and the impact of his presidency and memory on the power of the executive branch. In this consummate tome, Inboden has provided a vital reference point for much of that scholarship yet to come.

Note:

1. Evan D. McCormick, Susan Colburn, Augusta Dell’Omo, and Michael De Groot, “Writing About Reagan: Archival Sources and an Elusive President,” *Passport*, January 2022. <<https://shafr.org/system/files/passport-01-2022-writing-about-reagan.pdf>>

Review of William Inboden, *The Peacemaker: Ronald Reagan, the Cold War, and the World on the Brink*

Aaron Donaghy

In *The Peacemaker: Ronald Reagan, the Cold War, and the World on the Brink*, William Inboden has penned a first-rate study of Ronald Reagan’s foreign policy and the events that shaped the end of the Cold War. Deeply researched and written with panache, the book is rich with insights into one of America’s most consequential and enigmatic presidents. Although I do not agree with all of Inboden’s arguments, *The Peacemaker* stands as a formidable work—one with which all scholars of U.S. foreign policy and the Cold War must surely contend.

The Cold War ended in a swift, decisive, and largely peaceful manner. Communism was effectively consigned to the “ash-heap of history,” to echo a Reagan phrase.¹ Yet interpreting this extraordinary historical moment carries risks for scholars. More than three decades after the denouement, there is an increasing tendency to take a deterministic view of events of the late 1980s—to cast the Soviet “capitulation” as the inevitable result of Soviet systemic weakness and stagnation. But as Inboden explains, the likelihood of an imminent Soviet collapse was anything but clear in January 1981, when Reagan assumed the presidency, not least because the United States faced its own considerable challenges, having endured a series of traumas at home and abroad. “The United States appeared to much of the world as a crippled giant, in inexorable decline from economic stagnation, military weakness, political dysfunction, and international ineptitude,” Inboden writes (3).

Indeed, the author notes that no president had completed two full terms in office since Eisenhower two decades earlier. An assassin’s bullet tragically felled John F. Kennedy; the Vietnam War consumed and doomed Lyndon Johnson’s presidency; the Watergate scandal forced the resignation of Richard Nixon in August 1974. Nixon’s successor, Gerald Ford, was defeated by Jimmy Carter, whose final eighteen months in office were overshadowed by the effects of the energy crisis, inflation, and the incarceration of American hostages in Tehran. The Soviet Union, meanwhile, had installed SS-20 missiles in Eastern Europe and was embarking on a major military intervention in Afghanistan. Such was the difficult political context in which Reagan entered the White House.

According to Inboden, Reagan pursued a “comprehensive Cold War strategy” (5). At the heart of this was the concept of peace through strength, whereby the acquisition of overwhelming military power would not only deter aggression but serve to buttress Reagan’s hand at the negotiating table, particularly in the area of arms control. “Reagan used this military modernization to force the Soviets into an arms race that they could neither afford nor win, leaving the Kremlin no option but to negotiate from weakness, leading to a negotiated surrender,” Inboden argues (10). Underpinning this strategy lay a number of key principles, to which Reagan remained devoted throughout his presidency: a deeply held faith and a firm belief in religious freedom; an unwavering commitment to ideas and American ideals; and the expansion of human liberty across the globe—political, economic, and religious.

Much of the U.S.-Soviet saga of the 1980s is by now well known, although it remains open to different interpretations. Inboden illuminates Reagan’s efforts to support the anti-Soviet resistance movements in Poland and Afghanistan, for example, as he attempted to maintain the pressure on the Kremlin throughout the 1980s. But this is more than just an East-West story. As the author rightly notes, “the world itself was undergoing other changes during this time that would transcend the Cold War” (5).

The strongest part of Inboden's work lies rather in its global breadth, as the author skilfully ties together the various components of Reagan's vision while masterfully narrating the complexities, tribulations, and bureaucratic infighting that marked policy formulation behind the scenes. In that respect, the book is arguably the most comprehensive archival-based treatment of foreign policymaking during the Reagan era.

There is much to admire here. We learn, for example, of Reagan's evolving views toward the Asia-Pacific region and his administration's efforts to develop a key strategic partnership with two historic adversaries, Japan and China. While Reagan saw East Asia through the lens of the Cold War, he understood the benefits—geopolitical and economic—of closer cooperation with Beijing, and so pursued agreements with China in areas such as intelligence, arms sales, and trade. At the same time, he actively sought to engage Japan in the “global battle of ideas” and strengthen its defense posture in the Northwest Pacific—which duly occurred under the premiership of Yasuhiro Nakasone (75). The maintenance of solid relations with Japan, China, and South Korea—all partnered with the United States—gave Washington the competitive edge over Moscow and served as a deterrent to Soviet expansionism.

Inboden's analysis is generally favorable toward Reagan, yet nonetheless judicious and even-handed. He acknowledges the “carnage and suffering wrought by many authoritarian regimes and insurgencies supported by the Reagan White House in the name of anticommunism.” Such support “besmirch[ed] the administration's record, and must be included in a full moral and strategic accounting” (10–11). While Inboden tempers his criticism of U.S. policy by frequently arguing that there were “no good choices” in the Cold War, he does highlight Reagan's flaws as well as strengths throughout the book. He notes, for example, that the Iran-Contra gambit “revealed [Reagan] at his worst: stubborn, naïve, prone to self-delusion” (380).

On Central America, the author weighs up the “tragic” policy dilemmas which confronted Reagan. “No option was untainted by human suffering,” Inboden writes. “The choices he confronted ranged from bad to awful” (70). Reagan rejected Jimmy Carter's approach toward the region, but he soon realized that “embracing right-wing dictators carried its own political, strategic, and moral costs” (70). His options were poor, but a failure to act would inevitably cede the initiative to the Soviet Union and Cuba.

The Reagan administration surely exaggerated both the extent to which communism was sweeping through the region and the threat it posed to the United States. In a bid to boost public support for U.S. policy, Reagan described the Contras as “freedom fighters” and “the moral equivalent of the Founding Fathers,” despite wide reports that they were engaging in terrorist acts, torture, and the murder of civilians.² But for all his strident rhetoric, and his belief in arming the Contras, he remained averse to the idea of direct military intervention. The Vietnam War cast a long shadow over American life, and Reagan understood very well that the public had little appetite for further military entanglements.

Indeed, Inboden notes that the real lesson many Americans derived from Vietnam was “not about how best to support anticommunist forces in a civil war, but rather not to get involved in civil wars at all” (215). Only once in Reagan's eight years as president would he deploy American ground troops—a brief, low-risk mission in Grenada in 1983 that met its goals within days. This prudence points

to another key Reagan trait: his pragmatism—a much overlooked characteristic which might have been more fully developed in the book.

“No good choices” is also how Inboden frames U.S. policy options toward Southern Africa, another region torn with civil strife, and one which Reagan (and the Soviets) viewed through the lens of the Cold War. We learn of the Reagan administration's development of a policy of “constructive engagement” toward apartheid South Africa (218). The aim was to protect Pretoria from the threat of communism while simultaneously pressuring Prime Minister P. W. Botha to end the white minority's monopoly on power and oppression of the black population. “Though Reagan detested apartheid,” Inboden writes, “he considered his efforts to end it a lower priority than eradicating communism and restoring peace to the entire region” (323). Here, Reagan's outlook was similar to that of British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, who believed that applying economic sanctions against South Africa's odious regime would ultimately hurt the poorest people (i.e., black South Africans) the most.

Inboden does not dwell on the *Able Archer* crisis of November 1983. Exactly how grave the “war scare” became is still unknown, because the most relevant top-level Soviet documents remain under strict lock and key in Moscow. What is not in doubt, however, is the horror with which Reagan viewed the Single Integrated Operational Plan (which outlined the U.S. procedures to wage nuclear war) and the subsequent reports of Soviet panic. Reagan's own memoirs, diary, and the detailed report from the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board make this very clear.³ Indeed, one of the major themes to emerge from the recently declassified archival material held at the Reagan Library in Simi Valley is Reagan's antinuclearism, which arguably ranks alongside his anticommunism and moral idealism as one of his core foreign policy principles.

Recent scholarship on Reagan's foreign policy has tended to fall into one of two broad categories. On the one hand are those historians who argue that Reagan pursued a consistent “grand strategy” throughout his eight years in office that forced the Soviet “negotiated surrender” and the end of the Cold War.⁴ On the other hand, there are those historians who, while noting some continuities, argue that there was a distinct “turn” that began toward the end of Reagan's first term. They draw a sharp contrast between Reagan's early approach to the Soviet Union and the one he pursued from 1984 to 1989.⁵ I lean firmly toward the latter view, and for all the book's many strengths, there is nothing presented here that has led me to revise my thinking on this matter.

Inboden claims that “from the beginning Reagan pursued a dual track of pressure on the Soviets combined with diplomatic outreach,” which formed the basis of a “two-pronged strategy” (264). To make his case, he points to Reagan's handwritten letter to Brezhnev and the lifting of the grain embargo. These examples “reveal how from the start Reagan blended confrontation and conciliation toward Moscow” (84).

This argument is unpersuasive. Although Reagan framed the grain embargo decision as a gesture of goodwill in his letter to Brezhnev, it was a decision which stemmed purely from domestic politics and the pressure applied by farm-belt senators. Reagan's handwritten letter to Brezhnev, meanwhile, was accompanied by a formal, confrontational letter. In it the president criticized a string of Soviet policies, questioned Moscow's commitment to peace, and rebuffed Brezhnev's proposal for a personal meeting.⁶ As Reagan

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himself explained, the formal message was designed to “put him on notice that we weren’t going to accept any longer the so-called ‘Brezhnev Doctrine.’”⁷ Brezhnev’s “icy reply” could not have come as a surprise.

Reagan did on occasion engage in diplomacy with Moscow in 1981–82, but these were isolated examples—not a concerted “dual track strategy.” In any case, the Soviets were not formulating policy based on friendly words in a personal letter; they were taking decisions based on the broad thrust of U.S. policies. And in 1981–82, from a Soviet perspective, these were overwhelmingly confrontational. They included the dismantling of the diplomatic backchannel in Washington with Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin; the refusal to send an ambassador to Moscow for nearly a year; the acceleration of a massive new military buildup; the application of wide-ranging economic sanctions against the USSR; persistent hardline anti-Soviet rhetoric; and active support for anticommunist regimes across the globe. Jack Matlock, Reagan’s top NSC adviser on Soviet affairs (and later ambassador in Moscow), recalled with charming understatement that “Reagan was not eager to take up serious negotiation with the Soviet Union the moment he took office.”⁸

There is, to my mind, a clear distinction to be made between the Reagan administration’s approach toward Moscow in 1981–82 and that employed from 1984 through to the end of Reagan’s term in office. Nineteen eighty-three, as I have argued, was a transitional phase—the year in which Reagan decided that it was time to embark on a new course. It was the year in which the internal balance of power swung from the hardline ideologues toward the pragmatic moderates. Reagan was assuredly part of the latter category. He elevated Secretary of State George Shultz to the leadership of the policymaking process; Jack Matlock replaced the hawkish Richard Pipes as chief adviser on Soviet affairs; and Reagan chose Robert McFarlane (not Jeane Kirkpatrick) to succeed William Clark as national security adviser. Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger became increasingly marginalized. By late 1983, the attitudes of Reagan’s top foreign policy advisers bore very little resemblance to those who were in place at the start.

In fact, the administration conducted a lengthy foreign policy review in late 1983 and early 1984, overseen by Reagan. The backdrop to that review was the breakdown in U.S.-Soviet relations and the onset of the 1984 presidential election campaign. These events led to a number of important departures and new policy initiatives during Reagan’s fourth year in office.⁹ The administration agreed to adopt a different public tone (symbolized by Reagan’s “Ivan and Anya” address) and henceforth avoid questioning the legitimacy of the Soviet system. Reagan called for “a full, credible agenda on arms control,” with “more flexible” positions on START and INF. He directed policymakers to “build a record” of agreements with the Soviets—diplomatic, economic, and military.¹⁰ By mid-1984, Reagan was reversing most of the sanctions that had been imposed by the Carter administration in 1980, negotiating joint agreements in sixteen areas with the Soviet Union.¹¹ During August, he again broke with long-standing policy by inviting Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko to a personal meeting at the White House.

What is noteworthy is that Reagan made these moves without any corresponding change in Soviet attitudes or actions. Indeed, the Reagan “turn” followed a long period of worsening Soviet behavior: the war in Afghanistan, continued human rights abuses, the attack on the Korean airliner, walkouts from arms control talks, violations of existing arms agreements, and the withdrawal from the Olympic Games in Los Angeles. Reagan’s outlook in 1984—which continued throughout his second term—was a conscious departure from the formal strategy statements, which placed the onus on the Soviets to initiate a change

in course and warned against “yielding to pressures to take the first step.”¹² As former State Department official Louis Sell recalled, NSDD-75—the National Security Decision Directive on U.S. Relations with the USSR—was “a dead letter” by 1985. “The United States had moved on in its relationship with the USSR.”¹³ Hardliners such as Weinberger and John Lenczowski (NSC director of European and Soviet affairs) protested bitterly about the change in approach.¹⁴ Reagan waved them away.

To be sure, there were some continuities in U.S. policy, and Reagan and others certainly thought in strategic terms. The “strength” component of the “peace through strength” formula never wavered. Some of Reagan’s core arms control positions (such as his stance on INF, the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty) did not change significantly. He remained firmly committed to his Strategic Defense Initiative, to the U.S. military buildup, to supporting the Solidarity movement in Poland and the Contras in Central America. But the term “grand strategy” usually implies a considerable measure of consistency, coherence, and consensus. The sheer mass of divisions, contradictions, personnel changes, and policy turns within the administration make the claims for a “grand strategy” (3, 65) rather problematic.

That is not in any way to denigrate Reagan’s role. On the contrary, it was precisely Reagan’s flexibility, pragmatism, and independence of thought that led to the development of a more stable U.S.-Soviet relationship in the second half of the 1980s. The president rejected the counsel of powerful voices in his administration, the Republican Party, and the media, who were discomfited by the idea of negotiation with Moscow. Crucially, a new and completely different Soviet leader was by then at the helm.

Mikhail Gorbachev’s political ascension in March 1985 was improbable—occurring only because three successive Soviet leaders died within the space of thirty months. Notwithstanding the Soviet economic stagnation and Reagan’s buildup of U.S. military strength, it is nigh impossible to conceive of any other Politburo member advancing the sort of reforms and concessions that Gorbachev undertook between 1986 and 1989 and the “negotiated surrender” of which Inboden writes. Contingency and human agency were *at least* as important in explaining why the Cold War ended so abruptly in 1989 as any long-term structural force. And in Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev, the world had two peacemakers who were indispensable to bringing that process about.

Inboden’s work is an enormous contribution to our understanding of Reagan’s vision for the world and U.S. foreign policy during the 1980s. *The Peacemaker* is a lively, insightful, and provocative study of one of the most important international leaders of the twentieth century. Deftly written and well-researched, it is essential reading for scholars of American foreign relations and the late Cold War.

Notes:

1. Ronald Reagan, Address to Members of the British Parliament (London, June 8, 1982).
2. Lou Cannon, *President Reagan: The Role of a Lifetime* (New York, 1991), 358–65.
3. For Reagan’s own comments and recollections, see Ronald Reagan, *An American Life: The Autobiography* (New York, 1990), 585–89; Douglas Brinkley, ed., *The Reagan Diaries* (New York, 2007), 199. See also “The Soviet ‘War Scare,’” Report by the President’s Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, February 15, 1990, <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/nukevault/ebb533-The-Able-Archer-War-Scare-Declassified-PFIAB-Report-Released/2012-0238-MR.pdf>.
4. See, for example, John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy During the Cold War*, rev. ed. (Oxford, UK, 2005), 342–79; William Inboden, “Grand Strategy and Petty Squabbles: The Paradox of the Reagan National Security Council,” in *The Power of the Past: History and*

Statecraft, ed. Hal Brands and Jeremi Suri (Washington, DC, 2016), 151–80; Peter Schweizer, *Victory: The Reagan Administration's Secret Strategy That Hastened the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (New York, 1994); Simon Miles, *Engaging the Evil Empire: Washington, Moscow, and the Beginning of the End of the Cold War* (Ithaca, NY, 2020).

5. See, for example, Aaron Donaghy, *The Second Cold War: Carter, Reagan, and the Politics of Foreign Policy* (New York, 2021); Melvyn Leffler, "Ronald Reagan and the Cold War: What Mattered Most," *Texas National Security Review* 1, no. 3 (May 2018): 76–89; James Graham Wilson, *The Triumph of Improvisation: Gorbachev's Adaptability, Reagan's Engagement, and the End of the Cold War* (Ithaca, NY, 2014); Jeremi Suri, "Explaining the End of the Cold War: A New Historical Consensus?" *Journal of Cold War Studies* 4, no. 4 (Fall 2002): 60–92; Don Oberdorfer, *From The Cold War to a New Era: The United States and the Soviet Union, 1983–1991* (Baltimore, MD, 1998); Beth Fischer, *The Reagan Reversal: Foreign Policy and the End of the Cold War* (Columbia, MO, 1997). Hal Brands argues that "beginning in late 1983 and early 1984, Reagan made a significant recalibration of U.S. strategy." See Hal Brands, *Making the Unipolar Moment: U.S. Foreign Policy and the Rise of the Post-Cold War Order* (Ithaca, NY, 2016), 69.

6. Typed (formal) letter from Reagan to Brezhnev, April 24, 1981, NSC Executive Secretariat Head of State Files, Box 38: USSR, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library (RRPL).

7. Reagan, *An American Life*, 273.

8. Jack Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev: How the Cold War Ended* (New York, 2004), 50.

9. See Aaron Donaghy, *The Second Cold War: Carter, Reagan, and the Politics of Foreign Policy* (New York, 2021), chap. 8.

10. Minutes of NSC Meeting, "Nuclear Arms Control Discussions," March 27, 1984. NSC Executive Secretariat Meeting Files, NSC 104–114, Box 11, RRPL.

11. Ronald Reagan, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, 1984*, "Conference on U.S.-Soviet Exchanges, June 27, 1984" (Washington, DC: GPO, 1986), 916–18.

12. See NSDD-75, "U.S. Relations with the USSR," January 17, 1983.

13. Louis Sell, *From Washington to Moscow: U.S.-Soviet Relations and the Collapse of the USSR* (Durham, NC, 2016), 133–34.

14. See, for example, Memorandum by Weinberger to Reagan, "Arms Control Strategy," March 23, 1984. NSC Executive Secretariat Meeting Files, NSC 104–114, Box 11, RRPL; Matlock to McFarlane, "Proposed Presidential Statement: Building Cooperation Between U.S. and Soviet Peoples," May 29, 1984 (see handwritten note for Lenczowski's views); Lenczowski to McFarlane, "Reactivation of U.S.-USSR Environmental Agreement," May 8, 1984. The Jack Matlock Files, Series I: Chron File, April–May 1984, Box 4, RRPL.

Review of William Inboden, *The Peacemaker: Ronald Reagan, the Cold War, and the World on the Brink*

Andrew Hunt

There is much to admire in William Inboden's *The Peacemaker*, an engrossing account, sweeping in scope, of Ronald Reagan's years in the White House, with a focus on his foreign policy. Inboden, an associate professor of public affairs at the University of Texas, has written an expansive history of the national security policies championed by Reagan and his administration during his two terms as president, from 1981 to 1989. His book is rich in detail yet sure to become one of the definitive synthesis histories on the topic.

The Peacemaker is a decidedly sympathetic, sometimes even reverent account of the fortieth president. Inboden identifies Reagan in the introduction as "one of the two most consequential presidents of the twentieth century," the other being Franklin D. Roosevelt (3). It is here, early in *The Peacemaker*, that he establishes the central theme running through his book: "Reagan presents a paradox on the use of force. The American president who launched one of the most expansive military build-ups in history, and who used militant rhetoric toward America's adversaries, was in fact extremely reluctant to deploy the military in combat" (9).

From the outset, Inboden's prose strikes a judicious tone, presenting Reagan as a complex man, at times brimming with contradictions. Through much of the book, Reagan is portrayed as an engaged commander-in-chief with an astute mind, more involved in statecraft than many of his critics believed (they claimed at the time that he was mostly asleep at the wheel). He surrounded himself with men of sharp intellect and shrewd instincts. Most of them shared his idealistic worldview and, of equal importance, his overall commitment to restraint on the world stage. An anticommunist ideologue at times, Reagan "also possessed a pragmatic streak," Inboden writes. He was "often willing to compromise on policies and work with those who did not share his political convictions" (43). Little wonder, then, that he was able to gather bipartisan support for many of his foreign policies.

Of course, the timing of Reagan's presidency, so close to the trauma of the Vietnam War, shaped the administration's approach to world affairs. Entering the White House in the aftermath of the tragic debacle in Southeast Asia, Reagan faced constraints on large-scale intervention in conflicts overseas. And yet, in Inboden's book, Reagan is not a man in search of America's next big war. Despite his commitment to militant anticommunism, re-affirmed in countless speeches, he fully understood the folly of war—conventional and nuclear—and assiduously avoided it on a large scale at every turn. Reagan, writes Inboden, "was pragmatic and ecumenical in his national security catechisms" (309). Even during the frigid depths of the revived Cold War of the 1980s, when Reagan was referring to the USSR as the "Evil Empire" and Soviet MiG-23s shot down Korean Airlines flight 007, he was never on the verge of starting World War III. One never gets the feeling in *The Peacemaker* that his finger was anywhere near the button.

Despite his administration's careful handling of world affairs, Inboden takes Reagan to task more than once in *The Peacemaker* for what he sees as the president's occasional missteps. Such is the case with the 1980 speech in which Reagan celebrated the Vietnam War as a "noble cause." It was a potentially divisive declaration, occurring at a time when the pain of the war was still raw and memories of the domestic upheavals it triggered remained potent. Inboden regards Reagan's efforts to rehabilitate the war as amounting to misplaced and poorly timed rhetoric. But in *The Peacemaker*, Reagan is adept at balancing a good many things, including his ideology and his pragmatism. He listened to men like Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger and Secretary of State George Shultz, statesmen who often personified the principles of *realpolitik* and helped to bring him back to the center time and time again.

Outside the Cold War realm, this *realpolitik* strategy came into play during the Iran-Iraq War, which had reached a bloody, protracted deadlock early in the decade. Washington helped prolong the conflict, fearing a decisive victory by either side. It was one of a growing number of regional proxy wars occurring beyond the framework of the superpower rivalry that absorbed the Reagan administration's attention. It was, in short, a sign of things to come after the collapse of the Soviet Union. "The logic of this stalemate strategy dictated helping whichever side was losing," writes Inboden. "Starting in 1982, this meant a tilt toward Iraq" (277).

While *The Peacemaker's* primary focus is on Reagan, it contains a sizable cast of world leaders, journalists, members of Congress, and top figures in the Reagan administration. The men closest to Reagan, particularly George Shultz, loom large throughout the book. One can sense a particularly vital turning point with Reagan's decision to replace Secretary of State Alexander Haig with the less volatile Shultz in the summer of 1982. "It was an inspired choice," writes Inboden. "Shultz was one of the most accomplished men in the annals of American statecraft" (163).

Inboden dispels the notion—widely held amongst pundits and political figures by the mid-1980s—of “a feud between the ‘moderate’ Shultz and the ‘conservative’ Weinberger” (308). He is at his best when he is dismantling these kinds of myths. He muddies the waters in a welcome way when he writes that “by some measures, such as his support for Israel, overall hawkishness, aggressiveness against terrorism, and support for promoting freedom, Shultz was actually more “conservative” than Weinberger” (308). Similarly, it is refreshing to see First Lady Nancy Reagan appearing in most chapters of *The Peacemaker* as an engaged participant in the era’s events, which contradicts the fallacy that she was simply helming “Just Say No” anti-drug campaigns and appearing at White House dinners alongside her husband.

In chronicling the Cold War’s unravelling, Inboden gravitates toward the camp of historians that believes communism’s demise came about in large part because of a grand plan by the Reagan administration to force the Soviets into spending their way into oblivion to keep up with the American arms race. “By outcompeting the Soviets in the military and economic domains,” he writes, “American pressure had contributed to the USSR’s financial exhaustion and ideological bankruptcy” (465).

That explanation certainly has a basis in truth, and it ought to be considered in any account of the Cold War’s end. But its elevation to the central reason for the end of the Cold War has been a deliberate effort, for ideological reasons, by Reagan hagiographers and Cold War triumphalists. Too often, the tight focus on the spending-into-oblivion thesis is emphasized in their narratives, to the exclusion of other causes for the Cold War’s end. These causes had less to do with policies crafted in Washington’s hallowed halls of power, and more to do with conditions inside the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Those who give credit entirely to Reagan either downplay or ignore resistance movements by people living in those nations, the inherent weaknesses of totalitarian regimes that predated the 1980s, and the ascendancy of Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev at a pivotal moment in Russian history. Other reasons, too many to list here, must be explored to develop a richer, fuller understanding of the Cold War’s complex end.

Unlike many of Reagan’s more hyperpartisan defenders, Inboden is never entirely reductionist in *The Peacemaker*, and he never hesitates to add layers of complexity to the words and deeds of the Reagan administration, and to world events in general. But in the book’s final chapters and the conclusion, the tone of his account moves decisively toward triumphalism. He celebrates Reagan’s achievements, while occasionally noting that sometimes unfortunate compromises were made, and steep prices were paid, for the administration to be able to do the things that it did.

The author’s defense of the Reagan administration’s Cold War worldview is most problematic when he turns his attention to Central America. Despite a handful of brief comments about the brutality of America’s allies there, Inboden treats the region as a Cold War battleground, accepting the fundamental underlying premise offered by the White House in the 1980s to rationalize its support for the ultraviolent, autocratic regime in El Salvador, which routinely used death squads against large segments of its population. Similar justifications could be found in the administration’s support for the Nicaraguan Contras, an army consisting mainly of ex-members of U.S.-backed Nicaraguan dictator Anastasio Somoza’s reviled National Guard. The horrific atrocities of the Salvadoran government and the Contras in the 1980s were extensively documented

during Reagan’s presidency, yet they are only briefly alluded to here, and never adequately explored.

Inboden writes that “Communist regimes around the world had chosen Central America as a priority front” (71). His evidence to support that contention is thin. He quotes Soviet foreign minister Andrei Gromyko as saying that “this entire region is today boiling like a cauldron” (71). And he claims that Gromyko’s “Kremlin colleagues salivated at the chance to foment revolution in Central America” (71). To support this claim, he cites page 196 of Hal Brands’s *Latin America’s Cold War* (Cambridge, MA, 2010), where Brands briefly mentions increased Soviet and Cuban roles in Nicaragua under the Sandinistas. But this passage can hardly be described as painting a portrait of Gromyko’s “Kremlin colleagues” salivating at the prospect of stirring up revolution in the region.

Still, Inboden attacks the Nicaraguan Sandinista government for its human rights abuses and “brutality” toward “its own people” (325). It is true that the Sandinistas took unfortunate steps at different points to curtail freedom of expression among the regime’s opponents, and they adopted policies that uprooted and harmed Miskito people. Yet there was no evidence in the 1980s—and, indeed, Inboden offers none in his book—of the Sandinistas murdering ordinary Nicaraguans on the scale of the atrocities conducted by the death squads in El Salvador with the backing of the U.S. government, or similar crimes against humanity committed by the Contras.

There is no avoiding the fact that unspeakable atrocities were committed by Washington’s allies in the region, with the support of the Reagan administration (among those allies were Honduras and Guatemala, whose regimes enjoyed extensive support from the U.S. government). The closest Inboden comes to wrestling with this Washington-funded savagery is when he acknowledges some of the more well-known human rights abuses in El Salvador and the difficult decisions faced by the Reagan administration in the formation of its policies toward the tiny war-torn country. “The policy dilemma that confronted Reagan was tragic in the theological sense: No option was untainted by human suffering. The choices he confronted ranged from bad to awful,” writes Inboden (70). But nowhere is there evidence that the troubling moral choices to which Inboden refers kept Reagan or anyone in his administration, or their backers in Congress, awake at night, troubled by the bloodletting they were financing.

This speaks to a deeper issue with Inboden’s book. The author is not an entirely impartial chronicler of the Reagan administration. At its core, *The Peacemaker*—for all its strengths and majestic prose—is ultimately a celebration of Ronald Reagan, his presidency, and his multifaceted legacies. Inboden is making an explicit case for Reagan’s greatness in these pages. The author deserves to be commended for introducing nuance throughout the book. But his verdict is unambiguous. “Time’s passage calibrates history’s scale,” Inboden writes. “Weighed in that balance, the Reagan legacy measures well” (478).

The Peacemaker is great man history for our times. Large segments of it are persuasive and gripping, packed with keen insights and impressive research. It deserves a place on the bookshelf of anyone seeking to understand this most eventful of eras. Still, there are also moments, particularly late in the book, when it veers perilously close to hagiography.

Unlike many of Reagan’s more hyperpartisan defenders, Inboden is never entirely reductionist in *The Peacemaker*, and he never hesitates to add layers of complexity to the words and deeds of the Reagan administration, and to world events in general.

Review of William Inboden, *The Peacemaker: Ronald Reagan, the Cold War, and the World on the Brink*

Gail E. S. Yoshitani

The views expressed in this paper are my own and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, DOD, or the U.S. Government.

Well known for his revealing quips, President Ronald Reagan “felt the nine most terrifying words in the English language are: I’m from the government and I’m here to help.”¹ While Reagan cherished local government, in *The Peacemaker*, William Inboden casts him in a new role: that of a visionary strategic practitioner who led a revolution against the Cold War order and proselytized for an international system empowered by “the trinity of religious freedom, political freedom, and economic freedom” (112). In Inboden’s telling, Reagan joins President Franklin Delano Roosevelt as “one of the two most consequential presidents in the twentieth century” (3). He earned that superlative, Inboden says, by overseeing “the American strategy for the successful end of the Cold War” and bringing “the Soviet Union to the brink of a negotiated surrender” (476).

Given his experience as a policymaker at the State Department and on the National Security Council, Inboden is undoubtedly acquainted with life’s untidiness. Thus it seems most appropriate that he should use a chronological narrative to tell Reagan’s story as the “commander in chief, diplomat in chief, and leader of the free world” (54). In his introduction, he shares that he selected this approach “to capture in part the chaos of policymaking as it felt to Reagan and his team” and to give “the reader the vantage point of seeing history as it happened” (7). His fear that “readers may on occasion feel a bit of whiplash as the story moves from event to event and issue to issue” (7) was unjustified. This is a credit to Inboden’s expertise as both an analytical and a descriptive writer.

Readers need not be daunted by the 608-page length of this book, because Inboden is an exceptionally polite host. He moves through the narrative with intention and assists his readers by injecting insightful summary analysis on a consistent schedule, ensuring that they are never asked to carry too heavy an analytical load on the voyage. He also knows when to share a captivating story. I was intrigued by his account of Soviet scientists’ experimentation “with a computer system known as Dead Hand that would automatically launch all of the USSR’s ICBMs upon detecting an American strike—placing the fate of the world in the hands of machines rather than men” (375). Inboden’s rich analysis and descriptive storytelling are founded on both primary source materials (drawn from eleven archives in the United States and the United Kingdom and from twenty-four interviews, all with Americans) and on a comprehensive reading of the field’s secondary literature.

What is most exciting about *The Peacemaker* is its potential to educate American policymakers about how to serve as strategic practitioners within the realm of foreign policy. Inboden was inspired to create what ultimately became the William P. Clements Jr. Center for National Security while on a trip to Camp David. There he observed senior national security leaders for President George W. Bush studying history books. Inboden wanted the center he envisioned to encourage scholars to curate their scholarship to be directly useful for practitioners.² It is delightful to see him following his own vision with this book.

In this vein, *The Peacemaker* serves as an excellent illustrative case study for the theoretical conclusions Sir Lawrence Freedman offers in *Strategy: A History*.³

Freedman explains that his aim was “to provide an account . . . of the most prominent themes in strategic theory—as they affect war, politics, and business.”⁴ He offers strategic practitioners one definitive theme: that strategy is best considered “as a story about power told in the future tense from the perspective of a leading character.”⁵ For Freedman, strategy “is the art of creating power,” and there is no better way to create power than by consciously communicating a visionary story, or in his words, “a strategic script” about the future.⁶ A strategic script can profoundly influence how an audience anticipates, interprets, and responds to events.⁷ A compelling strategic script will grab an audience’s attention by containing “an element of the unusual and unexpected” and will create imperatives and expectations for how other main actors are to act.⁸

Freedman contrasts *strategic plans* with *strategic scripts*, explaining that strategic plans, which focus on channeling one’s means “through a series of [sequential] steps” against a specific outcome, unrealistically imagine “a predictable world.”⁹ Strategic scripts, on the other hand, are open-ended and leave room for “adaptability and flexibility” as the strategy becomes “more deliberative.”¹⁰ This is particularly helpful since, as Freedman observes, “much strategy is about getting to the next stage rather than some ultimate destination.”¹¹ The deliberative portion of one’s strategy ought to “identify moves that will require other players to follow the script out of the logic of the developing situation.”¹² Leaders at future retreats to Camp David who wish to engage in substantive conversation about the theory, art, and practice of foreign policy strategy would be wise to pair Freedman’s final chapter, “Stories and Scripts,” with Inboden’s *The Peacemaker*, which affords readers a superb opportunity to observe Ronald Reagan putting Freedman’s framework of a strategic script and deliberative strategy in action.¹³

In Inboden’s narrative, Reagan is the leading character who possessed both the requisite intuition that the end of the Cold War could be hastened and the strategic script describing how the contemporary global fabric might be peacefully quilted together into a new system. Inboden opens with an elegant summary of the geopolitical landscape as it stood in June of 1982, along with Reagan’s story of the future, as presented in his Westminster speech. He explains that “to those with ears to hear,” Reagan is distilling “what the next six and a half years of his foreign policy will entail” (2).

The Westminster speech represents Reagan’s definitive first move as a strategic practitioner.¹⁴ Inboden explains that “he concluded [the speech] with a prophecy, and a way to hasten it: ‘What I am describing now is a plan and a hope for the long term—the march of freedom and democracy which will leave Marxism-Leninism on the ash-heap of history’” (157–58). Inboden’s subsequent narration details the acuity of the assumptions¹⁵ upon which Reagan’s script rested, as well as the deliberate plans, actions, and imperatives that the script drove, which began sewing the Kremlin into “a negotiated surrender” (4, 43, 141, 470) and stitching together a new order intended to be more supportive of “individual liberty, self-government, and free enterprise” (315).¹⁶

Inboden introduces the key concept of “negotiated surrender” to help sharpen our understanding of Reagan’s Cold War strategy. He notes the challenge that scholars studying Reagan encounter: “How could he [Reagan] try to defeat Soviet communism while at the same time cooperating with the Kremlin to end the arms race?” (4) and “Did he desire to inflict a crushing defeat on the Soviet Union or to negotiate a peaceful truce?” (42). He explains that “from the beginning,”¹⁷ the deliberative side of Reagan’s strategy involved the pursuit of “a dual track of pressure on the Soviets combined with diplomatic outreach” (264), and he catalogues “eight pillars” upon which Reagan “built his Cold War strategy” (4). Pillars to restore the American

economy and modernize the military served to build a position of strength from which Reagan could negotiate; while pillars to “delegitimize Soviet communism,” support “anticommunist insurgencies,” and “promote human rights and freedom” helped strengthen the remaining decisive pillar to pressure “the Soviet system into producing a reformer with whom Reagan could negotiate.”¹⁸

As evidenced by the specific surrender terms he sought, Reagan was truly optimistic about what could be achieved with the appropriate pressure and a proper negotiating partner. He wanted the Soviet Union to “lift the Iron Curtain and end Soviet control of its satellite states in Eastern Europe. Quit inflicting communist revolutions on the third world. Stop tyrannizing its own people. Cease threatening the United States with nuclear destruction” (141). Inboden’s negotiated surrender concept is one which strategic practitioners would do well to study, both for how it specifically applied to Reagan’s effort to lead a revolution against the Cold War order and for its usefulness in understanding the strategic art that, as Freedman suggests, involves getting more “than the starting balance of power would suggest” through “bargaining and persuasion as well as threats and pressure.”¹⁹

It is important to note that the surrender Reagan sought did not involve sidelining Soviet leaders or the Soviet people. Rather, Inboden shows how Reagan and Secretary of State George Shultz made efforts to involve both as partners in Reagan’s “global strategy,” which “put the expansion of human liberty at the center” (11). Inboden poignantly describes how Reagan “urged Gorbachev and all Soviet citizens to believe in God”; “pushed for the Soviet Union to respect human rights and allow freedom of emigration, religious freedom, freedom of expression”; and “tried to persuade Gorbachev to adopt free markets and let private enterprise and the knowledge economy flourish” (469–70).

Inboden also details Shultz’s advice to Gorbachev and Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs Eduard Shevardnadze about the impact the information age would have on the global economy (340–41), and he includes Reagan’s speech to students at Moscow State University, in which he described the information revolution and its driver: “The key is freedom—freedom of thought, freedom of information, freedom of communication” (468). Inboden calls these efforts “a quiet diplomatic revolution,” as Reagan and Shultz “tried to persuade Gorbachev to embrace their views because *they were in his country’s best interests*” (464–65).²⁰

Inboden aptly names Reagan and Shultz “apostles of the information age, knowledge economies, open trade, and democracy” (11–12) and writes that they not only encouraged the Soviets, but also disciplined and disciplined allies and authoritarian partners where those “interlocking drivers of prosperity and human flourishing” (12) were concerned. For example, Inboden provides exceptional coverage of the Reagan administration’s efforts to encourage political and economic freedom in Asia, a region they saw as the engine for the new global economy and as ripe for more democracy. He reports on Reagan’s diligent efforts to help Tokyo, a strategic ally and a democracy, replace Beijing as America’s “supreme partner in the region” (76). These efforts involved not only “treating Japan as on par with NATO allies” but also pressuring Tokyo to “further open its economy” (183). Inboden also describes Reagan’s support of democratic transitions away from dictatorial leadership, which spanned from relatively vigorous, as in the case of South Korea’s President Chun Doo-Hwan, to more cautious, as in the case of the Philippines’ President Ferdinand Marcos (341–43, 397–98, 438–42).

Inboden does not shirk from describing Reagan’s blind spots, such as his hesitation “to turn on Marcos” (342), and he selects “tragedy” as one of seven themes that are “essential to understanding Reagan’s foreign policy across

all domains.”²¹ When introducing the theme of “tragedy,” he writes that “of perhaps the most infamy, the tragic includes the carnage and suffering wrought by many authoritarian regimes and insurgencies supported by the Reagan White House in the name of anticommunism.... and must be included in a full moral and strategic accounting” (10–11).

Nevertheless, it is evident to me, after reading about Reagan’s foreign policy, that Inboden’s title—*The Peacemaker: Ronald Reagan, the Cold War, and the World on the Brink*—is on point. Reagan’s central characteristic, which Inboden exemplifies so well in *The Peacemaker*, was his love of and faith in humanity. Reagan held his audience by audaciously declaring that the two ideologies upon which the Cold War rested—the idea of mutually assured destruction and the Soviet system—were inhumane.²² He believed that each, in its own way, infringed upon humankind’s right to live peacefully and freely. At its root, Reagan’s strategic script asked the people of the world and their leaders to remember their shared humanity and their essential right to liberty.

Notes:

1. Ronald Reagan, The President’s News Conference Online, 12 Aug. 1986, by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/259715>.
2. Alicia Dietrich, “Robert Gates Stresses Study of History at Clements Center Gala,” *Alcalde: The Official Publication of the Texas Exes*, November 25, 2013, Robert Gates Stresses Study of History at Clements Center Gala | The Alcalde (texasexes.org).
3. Lawrence Freedman, *Strategy: A History* (Oxford, UK, 2013).
4. Freedman, *Strategy*, xiv.
5. Freedman, *Strategy*, 608.
6. Freedman, *Strategy*, xii, xiv.
7. Freedman, *Strategy*, 622.
8. Freedman, *Strategy*, 621–22.
9. Reviewer’s emphasis. Freedman, *Strategy*, 622.
10. Lawrence Freedman, “Meaning of Strategy, Part I,” *Texas National Security Review*, vol. 1, no. 1 (Nov. 2017), 92. The Meaning of Strategy, Part I: The Origins - Texas National Security Review (tnsr.org).
11. Freedman, *Strategy*, 628.
12. Freedman, *Strategy*, 628.
13. Freedman, *Strategy*, “Chapter 38: Stories and Scripts,” 607–29.
14. Freedman explains that “the script must leave considerable room for improvisation. There is only one action that can be anticipated with any degree of certainty, and that is the first move of the central player for whom the strategy has been devised.” Freedman, *Strategy*, 622.
15. This concept regarding assumptions is also from Freedman. He writes that “whether the plot will unfold as intended will then depend on not only the acuity of the starting assumptions but also whether other players follow the script or deviate significantly from it.” Freedman, *Strategy*, 622.
16. Inboden contextualizes these words from Reagan’s second inaugural address: “Reagan proclaimed his hope that his years in office would be remembered as a time ‘when America courageously supported the struggle for individual liberty, self-government, and free enterprise throughout the world and turned the tide of history away from totalitarian darkness and into the warm sunlight of human freedom.’”
17. Inboden directly engages the scholarship contending that Reagan changed his strategy in 1984. “Many scholars and journalists contend that the multiple Cold War crises of 1983 prompted a ‘Reagan reversal.’ In this view, the escalated tensions, nuclear war scares, and collapse in the Geneva talks prompted Reagan to abandon his confrontational policies and instead seek conciliation with the Kremlin for the next five years. He did not. Rather, from the beginning Reagan pursued a dual track of pressure on the Soviets combined with diplomatic outreach. The INF deployment, military expansion, economic warfare, covert support to Solidarity and overt broadcasting, human rights campaign, and support for anticommunist insurgencies all embodied the pressure track. Just as Reagan’s repeated letters to Soviet leaders, offers to negotiate arms reductions, refusal to downgrade relations after crises such as KAL 007, vision of abolishing nuclear weapons, and search for a Soviet reformer all embodied the outreach track. As 1984 unfolded, Reagan did not

reverse his two-pronged strategy. Instead he rebalanced it, with a tilt toward diplomacy" (264).

[18. The other two pillars were "making 'mutual assured destruction' (MAD) obsolete through the Strategic Defense Initiative" and "reducing the number of nuclear weapons in the world—with the ultimate hope of abolishing nuclear weapons entirely" (4).

19. Freedman, *Strategy*, xii.

20. Inboden's emphasis.

21. The seven themes Inboden highlights are Allies and Partners; History; Force and Diplomacy; Religious Faith and Religious Freedom; Tragedy; Battle of Ideas; and Expansion of Liberty (7–12).

22. It is not discussed here, but Inboden provides excellent coverage of Reagan's strategy to make mutual assured destruction (MAD) and nuclear weapons obsolete by providing for a "mutually assured defense" (311) with the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) (2, 4, 201–5, 258, 310–11, 354, 374, 404).

Review of William Inboden, *The Peacemaker: Ronald Reagan in the White House and the World*

John Sbardellati

With his new book, *The Peacemaker: Ronald Reagan, the Cold War, and the World on a Brink*, William Inboden makes possibly the most impressive contribution to the "Reagan Victory" school and to the broader scholarly annals of Cold War triumphalism. Perhaps taking his title from Richard Nixon's fervent urging of Reagan to shift to peacemaker mode early in his presidency (119) or from Mikhail Gorbachev's 2004 remembrance of Reagan's timely decision "to be a peacemaker" during his second term (475), Inboden emphasizes the pacific consequences of Reagan's statecraft as the key to his formidable legacy. This does not mean that he downplays Reagan's hawkish side. Rather, he envisions the fortieth president's defense buildup, military modernization, and ideological offensive as prerequisites to his "peace through strength" strategy. Inboden's brazenly triumphalist interpretation is deftly qualified by frequent acknowledgments of Reagan's missteps and weaknesses, though his criticisms of "the Gipper" ultimately do little to darken the heroic portrait that the author sketches here.

The central argument in the book is that Ronald Reagan should be recognized as the chief architect of America's Cold War victory. Throughout these pages Inboden lauds Reagan for his unique foresight. He was steadfast in his belief that Cold War victory could come about without great bloodshed, that the Soviet empire could be toppled without invasion or attack. Reagan's many critics derided such views as unrealistic. "Whether from the Left or the Right," Inboden asserts, such commentators "shared a default commitment to the Cold War status quo of two nuclear-armed blocs and a stagnant number of democracies. Reagan challenged these verities and envisioned a new world beyond the Cold War" (158).

At odds with most expert prognosticators about the strength of the Soviet system, including many within his own administration, Reagan intuited its weakness and fragility, not least because of his view that Soviet atheism could never command the allegiance of a mass population that would always strive for religious liberty. Reagan's eagerness to negotiate with his Soviet counterparts earned him frequent criticism from the Right, who adored him for restoring American power but loathed his openness to diplomacy.

Reagan's unrelenting hatred of nuclear weapons also made for strange bedfellows, placing him in some ways closer to the antinuclear peace activists who despised him than the Cold War hawks who made up his base. Inboden claims that the peace movement of the 1980s simply "did

not realize that the nuclear abolitionist-in-chief resided in the White House. It is just that Reagan detested Soviet communism even more and remained determined to build up America's nuclear arsenal in order to bring down both the Soviet Union and the world's most destructive weapons" (175). His tool for accomplishing this, the much-derided Strategic Defense Initiative, completely "changed the landscape of the Cold War" (205). Meanwhile, Inboden ultimately celebrates his policy of aiding anti-communist uprisings around the world. Despite recognizing the morally suspect compromises made by the Reagan administration as it backed brutal dictators and illiberal insurgencies, he concludes that "the Reagan Doctrine succeeded on its own terms—and did so without risking American troops" (461).

Inboden is certainly not the only historian to take note of both the hawkish and dovish aspects of Reagan's presidency. However, unlike previous historians who tried to reconcile these two sides of Reagan by imposing the narrative framework of a "Reagan reversal" (264),¹ Inboden convincingly demonstrates that Reagan consistently pursued a mix of confrontational and conciliatory strategies. Yet he cannot refrain from imposing his own coherent framework onto Reagan's policies. He labels his construct *negotiated surrender*. Inboden surely recognizes that Reagan's goals of Cold War triumph and of denuclearization were competing impulses; peaceful coexistence could prolong the Cold War, while the pursuit of victory could risk Armageddon. Hence Reagan's strategy to transcend the Cold War by producing the conditions under which his adversaries would negotiate their own surrender.

Inboden paints Reagan as a master strategist who nevertheless relied on his aides, such as National Security Advisor Bill Clark, to flesh out the details. He finds the blueprint for Reagan's master plan articulated most clearly in two National Security Study Directives produced during his first term in office, NSDD-32 and NSDD-75. Together these sought to translate into policy Reagan's long-held and oft-repeated goal for the Cold War: "We win, they lose" (134). Certainly these studies called for increased pressure on Soviet weak spots, whether in Third World battlefields or within the Soviet empire itself. But was the goal to vanquish the USSR or to press it to reform? "Negotiated surrender" suggests a clear blueprint to accomplish both, but Reagan as strategist appears to have been more likely to be impulsive, pragmatic, and given to improvisation, and less likely to be guided by a single coherent strategy that neatly tied together all the loose ends of his foreign policy.

If the Reagan administration did adopt a master strategy to induce the Soviets to negotiate their own surrender, several high-ranking members of the administration appear to have been in the dark about it. Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger, a key player in Reagan's military buildup, consistently resisted negotiations, and eventually the president had to replace him lest he prove to be too much of an obstacle to Reagan's increasingly fruitful negotiations with Gorbachev. Inboden writes that "few if any of Reagan's diplomatic successes would have been possible absent the formidable military that Weinberger rebuilt and modernized" (454), but apparently "Cap" never understood the purpose of the military buildup that he implemented. Likewise, Reagan's penchant for nuclear abolition frustrated such top officials as National Security Advisor John Poindexter and such key allied leaders as Margaret Thatcher and Helmut Kohl. While Inboden is right to claim that Reagan's steadfast "vision of a nuclear-free world showed the fervor of his convictions" (417), if such an end-goal was a vital element of his strategy of *negotiated surrender*, it seems rather odd that so many top players on his team were not cognizant of this.

Perhaps Inboden would reply to this criticism by pointing to another recurring theme in his book. He states plainly that Reagan "despite his strategic vision was a

dreadful manager” (7). Reagan’s affability meant that he was fond of just about all of his aides. His extreme conflict avoidance made him reluctant to settle their many feuds, which he allowed to fester to the point that they often led to policy confusion, scandal, and disaster. His administration’s internecine warfare reared its head during the Falklands crisis (146–49), in battles over U.S. policy toward China and Taiwan (169–171), and, perhaps most notably, in the aftermath of the bombing of the Marine barracks in Beirut.

In that dreadful episode Reagan’s managerial skills were so lacking that his top national security officials were confused as to whether Reagan had even ordered a retaliatory strike at the terrorists in Lebanon. National Security Advisor Bud McFarlane believed that Reagan had approved a joint operation with France and that the defense secretary had scuttled the strike. McFarlane would later write, “It was outrageous. Weinberger had directly violated a presidential order” (254). Weinberger, for his part, insisted Reagan had given no such order. As Inboden laments, “when Reagan was unsure about an issue and faced a divided staff, the president sometimes would speak in broad, ambiguous terms that left his team members hearing what they wanted to hear” (255). Indeed, Reagan’s pitiful response to the bombing elicits Inboden’s harshest judgment of his otherwise much-revered leader: “Reagan should have retaliated. His failure to do so damaged American credibility, hurt relations with an important ally, and invited further terrorist attacks” (256).

Of course, the Iran-Contra scandal also exposed Reagan’s weak managerial abilities. Inboden is especially critical of the Iranian side of the scandal: “American weapons sales to Iran did not just reverse American policy. They also broke the law, which required congressional notification and prohibited providing arms to state sponsors of terrorism; incentivized further hostage-taking; destabilized the Persian Gulf; eroded American credibility; and stuck a finger in the eye of allies” (350). On the other hand, Inboden lets the administration off the hook for the Contra side of the scandal. This too was in violation of the law—specifically, the Boland Amendments—but because congressional policy vacillated and, more importantly, because he finds Reagan’s motives in seeking to roll back communism in Latin America “commendable” (423), Inboden downplays the Reagan team’s transgressions in “America’s backyard” (69).

Although Inboden celebrates the Reagan Doctrine, he proves willing to admit it had a dark side. He notes that Reagan deluded himself while supporting the Rios Montt regime in Guatemala (184), that his Indochina policy put him in bed with the dastardly Khmer Rouge in Cambodia (194), and that only “unadulterated realpolitik” explains his support for Saddam Hussein in the Iran-Iraq war (277). While Inboden laments the moral ambiguity of supporting brutal, authoritarian regimes, he likens such actions to the moral compromises the United States made during World War II while it was allied with the Soviet Union. His oft-repeated refrain is that diplomacy oftentimes entails choosing between tragic choices. This is a defensible position, to be sure, but ultimately Inboden deflects criticism of the dark side of the Reagan Doctrine by relying on such justifications and by never quite focusing in on the atrocities abetted by Reagan as he resisted communism around the globe.

Soviet atrocities, on the other hand, come under the microscope. I do not think it is setting up a false equivalency to suggest that Inboden should have subjected American misdeeds to the same detailed scrutiny as Soviet ones. Doing

so may well have strengthened his ultimate judgment that the Soviets were the “chief architects of this despotism” (324) in Cold War hot spots without leaving him quite so open to charges of too readily closing the book on U.S.-supported tyranny. His revulsion toward Soviet atrocities in Afghanistan is palpable and well-justified: “The Red Army used chemical weapons on civilians, incinerated towns and villages with napalm, poisoned water supplies and food stocks, deployed thirty million land mines in the country, and created booby-trapped toys to maim and kill children” (320). By contrast, Reagan’s insistence that the American war in Vietnam “was, in truth, a noble cause” earns only a tepid rebuke, mostly for its tone-deafness to the lingering divisions within American society over the war (46–47) rather than for the role such words played in forestalling the much-needed “American reckoning” (to borrow from the title of Christian Appy’s powerful book) over the atrocities inflicted on the Vietnamese.

The book’s tendency toward imbalanced criticism at times detracts from its otherwise compelling strengths. Consider, for example, Inboden’s handling of Cold War fears. He might have been content to point out that the climate of fear in the 1980s had ratcheted up to such a degree that both sides faced the chilling prospect of nuclear Armageddon. He might—indeed, he should—also have more fully acknowledged the ways in which Reagan’s own rhetoric contributed to the escalation of these fears. Instead, he labels it “Soviet paranoia” when pointing out that the “Kremlin’s top leadership genuinely believed that Reagan was preparing to launch a surprise nuclear attack on the USSR” (80). On the very next page American officials who harbored such thoughts are not labeled paranoid. In the immediate wake of the assassination attempt on Reagan, Inboden notes that “Allen and Weinberger worried that the Soviets might have assassinated Reagan as a prelude to launching a surprise nuclear attack.” To be fair, Inboden ascribes the fears on both sides to the “unrelenting terror of the Cold War in 1981” (81). And the narrative here makes for engrossing reading. But still, only one side is labeled paranoid.

I think this is largely because Inboden has adopted Reagan’s view of the Cold War as a battle between good and evil. For this reason, Soviet fears are unrealistic, whereas American fears are warranted. Reagan’s exaggerated fears about “Soviet bloc advances” in Central America get little critical scrutiny, even when he fretted, in a private letter to Nixon, that they marked “the beginning of the conflict for communist control of the United States itself” (213). Perhaps Cold War paranoia was a disease that afflicted leaders on both sides.

These criticisms aside, William Inboden’s *The Peacemaker* remains an impressive work. He has done prodigious research in nearly a dozen archives and conducted two dozen interviews with several of the leading figures. His prose is crisp and engaging. Early on he warns the reader of possible “whiplash” that may result from his adamancy in unveiling his narrative in a truly chronological manner. In some of the early chapters I indeed felt the whiplash, but the reader adjusts as the story unfolds, and ultimately Inboden delivers on his goal of relaying what Secretary of State George Shultz labeled the “simultaneity of events” (7). I am also persuaded by Inboden’s assessment that in the final analysis, Reagan, unlike his predecessors, transcended the Cold War. Yet, as Melvyn Leffler stresses in his marvelous work, *For the Soul of Mankind*, Gorbachev did so as well. Indeed, it is almost certain that neither could have done so without the other.

Reagan’s managerial skills were so lacking that his top national security officials were confused as to whether Reagan had even ordered a retaliatory strike at the terrorists in Lebanon. National Security Advisor Bud McFarlane believed that Reagan had approved a joint operation with France and that the defense secretary had scuttled the strike.

Note:

1. Oddly, although Inboden takes his most overt shot against the “reversal” thesis in this passage, he does not cite Beth A. Fischer’s path-breaking *The Reagan Reversal: Foreign Policy and the End of the Cold War* here, though he includes the book in the bibliography.

Author Response

William Inboden

I am grateful to each of the reviewers for their thoughtful evaluations. Though their assessments of my book vary, all of them pay the author the supreme compliments of having read it carefully and of understanding the arguments I try to advance. Each of them in their own right has produced noteworthy scholarship on the Reagan administration, so I am especially appreciative that they describe my book as a meaningful contribution to the growing body of Reagan historiography. On the whole, these are fair-minded, judicious reviews, which is a tribute to the authors, and to Andy Johns and Evan McCormick in convening and introducing the roundtable.

I will focus my response on three broad themes that emerge in various ways across these reviews. First, the question of whether Reagan had a coherent strategy towards the Soviet Union. Second, the assessment of Reagan’s Central America policies. Third, the matter of “triumphalism,” and rendering moral judgments about American policy in the Cold War.

On the first question, did Reagan develop a coherent, consistent Cold War grand strategy? In my book I argue that he did. Gail Yoshitani agrees, and her review helpfully draws on Sir Lawrence Freedman’s distinction between “strategic plans” and “strategic scripts” to contend that Reagan’s Soviet strategy embodies the latter. Channeling Freedman, she writes that as leaders seek to shape the future, “a strategic script is open ended and leaves room for ‘adaptability and flexibility’ as the strategy becomes ‘more deliberative.’” In briefest outline, Reagan’s strategy – his strategic script, if you will -- was predicated on a belief that the Soviet system was militarily strong yet otherwise weak and vulnerable. Thus he held that consistently employing a combination of pressure (military, political, ideological, economic) and outreach could reduce the risk of nuclear war while bringing the Soviet Union to what I call a “negotiated surrender.”

Donaghy, drawing in part on his own insightful work on Reagan’s foreign policy, remains skeptical. He places himself among the scholarly camp arguing for a “Reagan reversal” or “Reagan turn” from ostensibly hardline anti-Soviet policies early in the presidency to a more conciliatory approach towards the Kremlin (the specific timeframes and causes of this purported shift vary from scholar to scholar, but most date the change taking place sometime in 1983. Among adherents of this viewpoint, the causes of the alleged reversal are variously attributed to Reagan’s domestic political concerns, or his horror at the nuclear scares of the fall of 1983, or the departure of hardline advisors such as Bill Clark and Richard Pipes). Instead, Donaghy writes, “the sheer mass of divisions, contradictions, personnel changes, and policy turns within the administration make [Inboden’s] claims for a ‘grand strategy’ rather problematic.” Similarly, Sbardellati contends that Reagan “appears to have been more impulsive, pragmatic, and given to improvisation, rather than guided by a single coherent strategy that neatly tied together all the loose ends of his foreign policy.”

Readers of my book can judge these critiques for themselves. I believe it provides extensive evidence that Reagan developed and employed a clear and consistent grand strategy in the Cold War.

What to make, then, of Donaghy and Sbardellati’s skepticism? First, implicit in their claims that Reagan did not have a grand strategy seems to be a belief that strategy must be a rigid template, adamant and unchanging. Yet this is almost never the case with grand strategy, which by its very nature blends clear strategic principles and goals with adaptation and recalibration of means and ends. Virtually every notable figure in the pantheon of grand strategists ancient and modern – Thucydides, Machiavelli, Metternich, Castlereagh, Clausewitz, Bismarck, both Roosevelts, Kennan, Kissinger, et al – included adjustment and flexibility within his broader grand strategic framework.

Reagan even made this explicit in his own strategy. For example, as I describe in the book, his primary strategy document toward the Soviet Union, NSDD-75, spelled out that “ ‘U.S. policy toward the Soviet Union will consist of three elements: external resistance to Soviet imperialism; internal pressure on the USSR to weaken the sources of Soviet imperialism; and negotiations to eliminate, on the basis of strict reciprocity, outstanding disagreements.’ The ‘internal pressure’ on the Kremlin included encouraging a reformist leader to emerge by promoting ‘the process of change in the Soviet Union toward a more pluralistic political and economic system.’”¹ Made explicit in these goals (e.g. “reciprocity,” “process of change”) is Reagan’s intention to respond in kind once the Kremlin demonstrated a commitment to constructive negotiations.

The second point follows from this. During his first three years in office, Reagan intended his buildup of pressure and denunciations of Soviet communism in part to deter Kremlin aggression, in part to weaken the Soviet system, and in part to create the conditions for negotiations and effective diplomacy. His stepped-up outreach to the Soviets beginning in 1984 was thus not a “turn” or a “reversal,” but the next steps in the sequence his strategy had intended all along. As he often said, he always desired to negotiate with the Soviets – he just wanted to do so from a position of strength.

The consistency in Reagan’s strategy also entailed maintaining the pressure on the Kremlin in tandem with his diplomatic outreach. Donaghy’s argument for a Reagan reversal contends that the “broad thrust of Reagan’s policies” in 1981-82 appeared “overwhelmingly confrontational” to the Kremlin, in contrast with Moscow’s favorable view of Reagan’s alleged turn to conciliatory policies from 1984 onwards. Yet as I detail in the book, throughout his second term Reagan kept up and even increased the full spectrum of pressure on the Kremlin. The Soviets certainly perceived it that way. The transcripts of the Reagan-Gorbachev summit meetings in Reagan’s second term are replete with the Soviet leader’s complaints about US policies, including the intermediate range nuclear missile deployments (“like a pistol held to our head” bemoaned Gorbachev), economic pressure to decrease Soviet oil revenues and access to below-market credit rates, increased Reagan Doctrine support for UNITA rebels in Angola and the Afghan resistance, expanded support for Soviet bloc dissidents, denouncing Soviet imperialism and demanding “Mr. Gorbachev, Tear Down this Wall,” deploying a new array of advanced weapon systems, and of course the Strategic Defense Initiative.²

Reagan described this strategy in an important but little-remembered 1988 speech in Springfield, Massachusetts, just before he traveled to Moscow for his final summit with Gorbachev. Describing the pressure prong of his strategy and his previous criticisms of Soviet communism, Reagan observed

“this candor made clear to the Soviets the resilience and strength of the West; it made them understand the lack of illusions on our part about them or

their system...But in all this we were also doing something practical. We had learned long ago that the Soviets get down to serious negotiations only after they are convinced that their counterparts are determined to stand firm. We knew the least indication of weakened resolve on our part would lead the Soviets to stop the serious bargaining, stall diplomatic progress, and attempt to exploit this perceived weakness.”³

Sbardellati further contends that if Reagan indeed had a strategy, “several high-ranking members of the administration appear to have been in the dark about this.” He then cites Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger’s opposition to Reagan’s negotiations with the Soviets, and National Security Advisor John Poindexter’s frustrations at Reagan’s nuclear abolitionism. (To this list of staff dissent from Reagan’s policies could be added many other examples such as UN Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick’s heartburn over Reagan’s promotion of democracy among military dictatorships, and Shultz and Powell’s resistance to Reagan’s demand that Gorbachev tear down the Berlin Wall).

However, the better explanation is just the opposite. It is not that as Sbardellati says that these advisors “were not cognizant” of Reagan’s strategy – rather, they just disagreed with their president on the points in question. Thus the advisor would argue against the specific policy they objected to (as Poindexter did when he wrote a lengthy memo to Reagan right after the Reykjavik summit remonstrating against nuclear abolition). If they lost those arguments, they would sometimes salute and carry on – and other times they would leak, bicker, try to undermine the policy, and in some cases eventually resign in frustration. That some of Reagan’s advisors resisted some elements of his strategy does not mean that he did not have a strategy.

The second theme concerns Reagan’s Latin America policies, especially Central America. Readers of the book will see that I am quite critical of several aspects of Reagan’s policies in the region, such as his disregard of vicious abuses committed by US-funded military regimes particularly during his first term, and the criminality of his administration’s contra-funding scheme in his second term. Hunt, however, finds this inadequate, and laments that my book is “most problematic” when “Inboden treats the region as a Cold War battleground, accepting the fundamental underlying promise” of the Reagan administration that it was such.

I do indeed. And that is because Moscow and Havana also treated the region as a Cold War battleground. Hunt regrets that I do not include more material on topics such as Soviet efforts in Central America, and levels of domestic repression by the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua. That is primarily because my book is about American policy during the 1980s, rather than an international history or a history of conditions within other countries. I make occasional references to Soviet bloc policies and developments only insofar as those help illumine Reagan administration policies.

That said, while Hunt expresses skepticism about Soviet bloc designs in Central America, and suggests an oddly benign view of the Sandinista regime, his critique downplays or even disregards altogether two malignant aspects of Sandinista rule. First, Managua eagerly sought -- and received -- considerable economic and military aid from the Soviet bloc (including Cuba, East Germany, and the Soviet Union itself), and actively positioned itself as a

Soviet client state in the region. Witness Daniel Ortega’s multiple trips to Moscow and other Soviet bloc capitals, and the multiple billions of dollars in economic and military aid that the Kremlin and its satellites enthusiastically lavished on his regime over the course of the decade – sums which vastly exceeded American assistance.⁴ And with Moscow’s encouragement the Sandinistas became a key supporter of the communist FMLN rebels seeking to overthrow the Salvadoran government, and also supported communist insurgents in Honduras and Guatemala.⁵

Second, Sandinista repression was much more severe than Hunt’s euphemistic characterization of it as “unfortunate steps...to curtail freedom of expression” and “policies that uprooted and harmed Miskito people.” Managua’s abuses included hundreds of extrajudicial executions, torture and imprisonment of peaceful dissidents, and the massacre of over one hundred indigenous Miskito people and forced displacement of over ten thousand, perhaps even twenty thousand, more.⁶ That misrule does not by itself justify support for the contras – but it should be acknowledged in an honest reckoning of the conflict.

As for El Salvador, Hunt laments that “nowhere is there evidence that the troubling moral choices to which Inboden refers kept Reagan or anyone in his administration, or their backers in Congress, awake at night, troubled by the bloodletting they were financing.” My book does not address Reagan administration sleeping habits, but it does present abundant evidence that the Reagan administration worked strenuously to curtail the death squads and other gross abuses by the Salvadoran military junta. Understanding the strategic context is essential. By the end of his first year in office, Reagan adopted a “third-way” policy of supporting democracy in El Salvador. Specifically this meant backing the embattled Jose Napoleon Duarte and his Christian Democrats against both the brutal insurgents of the communist FMLN and the sadistic death-squads of the rightist ARENA party. As Reagan wrote approvingly in his diary after hosting Duarte at the White House following successful nationwide elections, the Salvadoran president is “outspoken against both the extremists on the right & the [communist] Guerillas.”⁷

It is inaccurate to say, as Hunt does, that the death-squads committed atrocities “with the backing of the US government,” as this implies the US encouraged and promoted such barbarity. Rather ARENA and its bloodthirsty proxies waged violence on innocent Salvadoran civilians despite pressure from the Reagan administration (strongly reinforced by Congress) to end the abuses. This included separate visits to the country by Vice President George Bush and CIA Director Bill Casey to deliver firm messages that US assistance would be terminated if the atrocities continued, and extensive efforts, including a CIA covert action, to back the Christian Democrats against ARENA in the Salvadoran elections. ARENA requited these sentiments, denouncing the Reagan administration in obscene terms and attempting to assassinate Reagan’s ambassador to El Salvador.⁸ Those are not the actions of a party that enjoyed unblinking support from the Reagan White House.

Now to the final matter of the moral evaluation of the Cold War. This is prompted by Hunt and Sbardellati’s use of the word “triumphalist” and its derivatives. Sbardellati invokes it twice in his introductory paragraph alone (“Cold War triumphalism,” “Inboden’s brazenly triumphalist interpretation”), while Hunt criticizes “Cold War triumphalists” and laments my concluding chapters for moving “decisively toward triumphalism.”

Readers of the book will see that I am quite critical of several aspects of Reagan’s policies in the region, such as his disregard of vicious abuses committed by US-funded military regimes particularly during his first term, and the criminality of his administration’s contra-funding scheme in his second term.

It is an odd word. I have yet to encounter a clear definition of what it actually means. (Almost twenty years ago here in the pages of a previous *Passport* book roundtable, after being accused of “triumphalism,” John Lewis Gaddis raised a similar question, saying “as for ‘triumphalism,’ I’ve never been quite sure what the word means.”)⁹ It cannot mean an account of American foreign policy that dispenses with any negative judgments, since as both Sbardellati and Hunt acknowledge, my book includes abundant criticisms of Reagan and his foreign policy on numerous grounds.

Rather, then as now, the term “triumphalism” seems rather casually deployed -- somewhere between a description, a criticism, and a slur -- against any accounts that offer a favorable assessment of the American role in bringing the Cold War to a peaceful and victorious end. There is even an entire book devoted to these themes.¹⁰

In contrast, consider how rarely “triumphalist” gets invoked against favorable scholarly accounts of the Union’s victory over the Confederacy in the Civil War, or the American intervention in World War I’s critical role in the defeat of Germany, or the indispensable American contribution to the Allies winning World War II. It is not that American (or Union in the case of the Civil War) conduct in each of these wars was untainted by serious strategic errors and grave moral abuses; it was. Nor is it that the decisive role that American policy played in these victories is discounted. While there are thoughtful debates over the interplay of structural factors and contributions by other actors in these conflicts, accounts that privilege American actions as determinative rarely get labeled “triumphalist.”

So the question remains -- when it comes to the Cold War, why do many scholars wield “triumphalist” like an epithet? Let me suggest a fresh effort to interrogate the term. As commonly used, “triumphalist” seems to be employed when two conditions obtain: a historian privileges American policy as playing a decisive difference in the Cold War’s peaceful denouement, and renders a moral verdict that the good side prevailed over the bad. Combine those two factors, and critical invocations of “triumphalism” by those who disagree invariably follow.

I suspect that much of how the Reagan record is assessed, or American Cold War policy overall for that matter, depends in not insignificant part on what one makes of communism. To those who regard communism as an imperfect but well-intentioned system to redress political and economic inequities -- and that its Soviet version was an understandable expression of Russian insecurity and posed only a minor threat to the rest of the world -- Reagan’s assertive foreign policy may appear overwrought, jingoistic, even reprehensible. It naturally follows that this camp generally deploys more condemnation of American policies than the policies of communist regimes.

Whereas to those such as me who regard Soviet communism as a depraved, malignant ideology that spawned dictatorships responsible for the deaths of anywhere from 65 to 100 million of their own citizens, Reagan’s anticommunism merits a more sympathetic assessment.¹¹ I believe those numbers -- necessarily imprecise but no less staggering in their sheer horror and ghastliness -- should anchor any scholarly and moral assessments of the Cold War.

To the inevitable remonstrance that details a litany of American Cold War abuses and misdeeds, I would reply that making such a moral judgment does not mean exonerating, or even overlooking, the failings of the “good” side. It just means rendering a moral assessment of the overall stakes of the conflict and the relative virtues of each camp. One does not need to be an apologist for every American policy to believe that Soviet communism was a

monstrous evil, whose collective oppressions and atrocities far exceeded the depredations committed by the United States during the Cold War. That Reagan determined to reverse the Soviet bloc’s expansion, to work towards the collapse of Soviet communism itself, and to do so while avoiding a direct military confrontation between the US and USSR, let alone a nuclear apocalypse, strikes me as, yes, a triumph -- but not the tut-tutting of “triumphalism.”

Notes:

1. Inboden, *The Peacemaker*, 139-140.
2. Donaghy makes a passing acknowledgement of some of these measures, but contends they paled in comparison with his conciliatory policies from 1984-89.
3. Reagan, Remarks to World Affairs Council of Springfield, Massachusetts, April 21, 1988. Available at: <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/remarks-world-affairs-council-western-massachusetts-springfield>
4. *The Peacemaker*, 285, 444; Klaus Storkmann, “East German Aid to the Sandinista Government of Nicaragua, 1979-1990,” *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Volume 16, Number 2, Spring 2014, pp. 56-76.
5. For more on this, see Robert P. Hager, Jr. and Robert S. Snyder, “The United States and Nicaragua: Understanding the Breakdown in Relations,” *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Volume 17, Number 2, Spring 2015, pp.3-35. Notably, this was not just a policy concern of the Reagan administration. The Sandinista decision to provide substantial arms to the FMLN in 1980 caused the Carter administration to suspend its aid to Managua.
6. Jean-Louis Panné and Andrzej Paczkowski, eds., *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 665-675.
7. For a thorough and insightful accounting of this policy, see Evan McCormick, “Freedom Tide? Ideology, Politics, and the Origins of Democracy Promotion in U.S. Central America Policy, 1980-1984,” *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Volume 16, Number 4, Fall 2014, pp. 60-109. Reagan quote cited in *The Peacemaker*, photo section.
8. *The Peacemaker*, 212-214, 284-285. For a comprehensive and balanced assessment of the Salvadoran civil war and Reagan’s policies, see Russell Crandall, *The Salvador Option: The United States in El Salvador, 1977-1992* (New York: Cambridge University Press 2016).
9. John Lewis Gaddis, “Passport roundtable response,” *Passport*, August 2005. Gaddis continued that “I’m tempted to define it as a term of opprobrium those who’ve lost arguments like to hurl at those who’ve won them -- but that would no doubt also be seen as triumphalist.” I will refrain from speculating along those lines.
10. Ellen Schrecker, ed., *Cold War Triumphalism: The Misuse of History After the Fall of Communism* (New York: The New Press 2004).
11. See, for example, Stephen Kotkin, “Communism’s Bloody Century,” *The Wall Street Journal*, November 3, 2017 C1; Jean-Louis Panné and Andrzej Paczkowski, eds., *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999); and Benjamin Valentino, *Final Solutions: Mass Killing and Genocide in the 20th Century* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press 2005). The majority of these deaths occurred under Mao Zedong’s despotism in the People’s Republic of China, a regime which would not have taken power absent Soviet support. Most estimates of deaths perpetrated by the Soviet Union are between 20 and 30 million of its own people.

Update on Records Access Issues

Mary Ann Heiss

A few brief updates on SHAFR's recent work on documentary access issues.

NARA External Affairs Liaison Meg Phillips continues to conduct regular virtual meetings with representatives of history and political science associations to discuss common concerns related to records access, research facilities, etc. Long-time SHAFR stalwarts Richard Immerman and Warren Kimball have provided invaluable assistance during these meetings, which have also been attended by a succession of SHAFR presidents and vice presidents/presidents-elect.

SHAFR members are reminded that the website contains resources related to the Freedom of Information Act and records management in general.

The National Council for History has created a Working Group on NARA and Presidential Libraries under the chairship of SHAFR delegate to the NCH, Amy Offner. The group is focused on improving the funding and functioning of the National Archives and to generate support for that agenda in Congress, the White House, and with the Archivist of the United States. Its first order of business is drafting a white paper laying out NARA's real needs in numerous areas, including declassification, subject matter expertise, physical infrastructure, strengthening the Presidential Records Act, and ensuring the independence of the Presidential Libraries from presidential foundations.

Finally, SHAFR's Historical Documentation Committee (chaired by Sarah Snyder) and others played key roles in compiling an important document, "Recommendations for Reform of the Executive Order on National Security Information Policy," that the NCH sent to both houses of Congress and the White House. The statement is reprinted below in its entirety.

SHAFR's Recommendations for Reform of the Executive Order on National Security Information Policy

The continued classification of so many historical records held by the U.S. government has created a major crisis of government accountability. Declassification is currently a series of autonomous fiefdoms, operating by their own agency instructions rather than by a government-wide policy. The result has become chaos. The U.S. National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) has jurisdiction over millions of pages of classified presidential and federal agency records dating back to the early years of the Cold War, yet it lacks authority to declassify them. NARA has centralized control of the classified presidential records but no known plans to initiate their systematic declassification review.

President Barack Obama established NARA's National Declassification Center (NDC) in to streamline declassification processes, facilitate quality-assurance measures, and implement standardized training for declassification of records. It is routinely deluged with huge numbers of classified records (both paper and electronic) transferred whose processing it must balance with a backlog of thousands of declassification requests for specific records. It lacks both the resources and the authority to take timely action on any of these responsibilities. Moreover, complicated coordination requirements delay timely action on Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and Mandatory Declassification Review (MDR) requests.

The Executive Order (E.O.) on national security information policy that President Obama signed in 2009 is long out of date, and its language gives undue scope to the agencies to overclassify and even block declassification of historical records. The Department of Defense can unilaterally withhold from declassification historical records that are 50 years old or older on the grounds that declassification will hurt U.S. diplomatic relations with another country.

The Interagency Security Declassification Panel (ISCAP) makes important decisions on final MDR appeals, and it also has a tremendous backlog of cases. Its decisions reflect careful deliberations and have important implications. But ISCAP, too, confronts a tremendous backlog of cases. Further, its decisions do not become precedents that could inform and facilitate future declassifications by the agencies.

Moreover, rules governing Formerly Restricted Data under the Atomic Energy Act enable the Department of Defense and the Department of Energy to preserve the classified status of overseas deployments of nuclear weapons from the earliest days of the Cold War. Presently, the NDC and ISCAP lack the technology they need to share declassified documents with agencies; instead of e-mailing them they must use compact discs or couriers. In addition they lack the technology to hold classified online meetings with other agencies. To a great extent this is a NARA budget issue outside of the scope of the Executive Order, but an E.O. should include hortatory language to encourage NARA to make improvements and initiate necessary action.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address these shortcomings of current declassification policy, a revised Executive Order should include arrangements to expedite the release of classified historical records and to provide ground rules to help agencies prepare for transferring their records to NARA. For the purpose of achieving these goals, SHAFR supports the following improvements in the Executive Order:

- To reduce future backlogs, the E.O. should establish a “drop dead” date for automatic declassification of records over 30 years old. Exceptions should be limited and expressed explicitly and narrowly. The burden should be placed on the agencies to justify withholding a record from automatic declassification.
- The agencies should expedite automatic declassification so that it minimizes the need for the public to file FOIA or MDR requests. Any exemptions from automatic declassification will require the approval of the National Security Advisor to the President and should be made publicly available.
- The National Declassification Center must be vested with the authority to declassify information subject to automatic declassification without having to refer the records back to the originating agency. The NDC must be authorized to make decisions on MDR and FOIA appeals involving NARA records. Toward this end, included on the NDC staff should be representatives from all agencies that generate classified documents. Collaboration between these representatives and NARA personnel should enable the NDC to make decisions on the spot.
- ISCAP decisions should be incorporated into agency declassification guidance. This incorporation must be mandatory.
- The Departments of Energy and Defense should be required to begin reviewing Formerly Restricted Data and converting and redefining it either as Restricted Data or as national security information. This is necessary to differentiate information about historical locations of nuclear weapons that should be treated differently than technical information about nuclear weapon use.
- The use of the foreign relations exemption (exemption 6) by agencies and offices other than the State Department and National Security Council should be limited by requiring them to seek the Department’s approval before applying it to archival documents. This procedure will prevent abuse of the exemption in declassification decisions on historical records.
- NARA should be directed to initiate the systematic review of classified presidential records, potentially modeled after the CIA’s former Remote Archives Capture (RAC) program.
- NARA should receive sufficient resources to build up staff support for NDC and ISCAP staff and to secure up-to-date technology so that the NDC and ISCAP can better share classified information with other agencies.
- A specific procedure must be formulated for the public to seek declassification of properly classified information that is of high public interest along the lines proposed by the Federation of American Scientists. This calls for a procedure to allow the public to request declassification of properly classified records from an entity other than the original classification authority (OCA), similar to ISCAP.
- Along these lines, OCA must be given the option not to classify information in cases where the public interest outweighs the potential harm from disclosure. OCA must also be granted the discretion to declassify information that has been the subject of unauthorized disclosure.
- Because the effectiveness of these recommendations requires oversight with the authority to implement its decisions, the Executive Order must designate an executive agent to oversee declassification policy, standardize procedures, and review and approve agency guidelines. The logical source for the executive agent is the Information Security Oversight Office (ISOO) or the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI).

Shock and Awe Revisited: Legacies of the Iraq War 20 Years Later

Zaynab Quadri, Zainab Saleh, Catherine Lutz, Osamah Khalil, Carly A. Krakow, and
Moustafa Bayoumi

“Shock and Awe Revisited: Legacies of the Iraq War 20 Years Later”

Zaynab Quadri

In the increasingly breakneck-paced and internet-centric world of the twenty-first century, the past twenty years is a difficult amount of time to situate mentally. Is it already official history? In the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth countries of Australia and Canada, the Public Records Act of 1967 delineates thirty years as the legal and temporal boundary separating the present from the de-classifiable and thus formally historical past. Yet in practice—especially for students in today’s college history classrooms—the unprecedented and constant digital availability of information makes even recent memories from before the 2016 election feel ancient and in need of explanation.

The Bush years have already receded into the distance in the public sphere: as Will Ferrell quipped in a much-applauded 2017 reprisal of his aughts-era SNL impersonation of George W. Bush in the wake of Trump’s inauguration, “How do you like me now?”¹ In my recent course on US diplomatic history in the Middle East, I had to teach the Iraq War the same way I teach the 1970s, the 1940s, the 1910s: as a past, with primary sources and a historiography, in a broader context of American power.

It was in this spirit that on March 31st, 2023, I organized a one-day conference event at The Ohio State University in my capacity as a postdoctoral fellow at the Mershon Center for International Security Studies—an event I called “Shock and Awe Revisited: Legacies of the Iraq War 20 Years Later.”² The twentieth anniversary of the US invasion of Baghdad offered an important opportunity to revisit the war as history and to host a sustained academic discussion of the local as well as global causes, consequences, and legacies of the Iraq War. In the Mershon Center’s long tradition of bringing scholars of the humanities into dialogue with traditional security studies, three panels totaling nine scholars came together in Columbus, Ohio—not in shock and awe, but in sobriety and reflection.

The framing of this introductory essay, and the roundtable of five essays that follow, were produced out of conversations that evolved through the conference event. The roundtable essays represent cutting-edge scholarship, and feature fresh insights, on the Iraq War specifically but with broad implications for the general study of US diplomatic history.

Since 2003, a growing and diverse body of work—from incisive books written by investigative journalists, to academic scholarship across media and cultural studies,

political science, history, and American Studies—has already begun to address questions of the war’s dubiously legal origins; its cultures of Islamophobia, imperialism, and incarceration; and the conduct of political officials, private security contractors, and military practitioners of a revamped counterinsurgency program.³ More recent scholarship within the last few years has shed new light on internal Bush administration machinations, the role of contractor workers, and the Iraq War’s relation to Bush’s larger Global War on Terror campaign.⁴ Debates and disagreements do abound between individuals, of course.⁵ Yet, a thicker, more cohesive field-level academic discourse on the war—especially in the study of US foreign relations—has yet to emerge in its own right. As Marjorie Gallelli inquired in this publication’s pages in April of 2023: “Why are historians so reluctant to tackle the subject?”⁶ More specifically, I would add: Why are historians so reluctant to tackle the subject *critically*?

The last twenty years have, in fact, seen prodigious yields of scholarship on the history of US empire that can, should, and must form the foundation for the next wave of scholarship on the early twenty-first century’s “forever wars,” including the Iraq War. The analytic of imperialism incorporates important structural nuance and long-running arcs of violence into its treatment of American foreign policy; these contexts are critical for historicizing the devastating military campaign waged against Iraq. In 2003, shortly before and then during the initial heat of the invasion, a multivalent discourse on imperialism did emerge in real time, in the popular press as well as in academia, in direct response to events on the ground.⁷

As Paul Kramer notes, “the term’s use... in reference to the United States has crested during controversial wars, invasions, and occupations, and ebbed when projections of American power have receded from public view.”⁸ But “empire” is, of course, more than a sometimes-fashionable pejorative or polemic. It is, as Kramer puts it, “a dimension of power in which asymmetries... enable and produce relations of hierarchy, discipline, dispossession, extraction, and exploitation.”⁹ Empire as a lens is especially useful in excavating continuities across space and time—from Jefferson’s “empire of liberty” in the Caribbean to the re-colonization of the Philippines at the turn of the twentieth century to US Cold War policy in Asia.¹⁰

Indeed, in her 2003 presidential address to the American Studies Association a few months into the war, Amy Kaplan called on historians in particular to “draw on our knowledge of the past to bring a sense of contingency to this idea of empire, to show that imperialism is an interconnected network of power relations, which entail engagements and encounters as well as military might and which are riddled with instability, tension, and disorder—as in Iraq.”¹¹

Dynamic work throughout the humanities and social sciences has made path-breaking strides in fulfilling this mandate. War and militarism—“not... a shadow [but] the substance of American history,” to borrow Marilyn B. Young’s turn of phrase—foster new proximities forged in violence within and beyond the re-fortified yet contingent and contested national boundaries of the United States.¹² The Costs of War Project, begun in 2010 at the Watson Center at Brown University, has become a vibrant and essential repository of scholarship highlighting the myriad social, political, and economic costs of the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars.

In addition, texts by scholars such as Chalmers Johnson, Ann Stoler, Reece Jones, David Vine, and Daniel Immerwahr have continued to employ fresh archival sites, materials, and methodologies by which to take the measure of American imperial power and its ever-evolving reach. Johnson’s *The Sorrows of Empire* (2004), Stoler’s *Haunted by Empire* (2006), Jones’s *Border Walls* (2012), Vine’s *Base Nation* (2015) and *The United States of War* (2020), and Immerwahr’s *How to Hide an Empire* (2019) collectively emphasize the importance of culture, ideology, labor, and material logistics in maintaining American hegemony in ways that speak to and through the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars and the Global War on Terror. New resources such as the United States Foreign Policy History & Resource Guide provide ever more examples of how to write nuanced histories of US global power that attend to the complexity as well as brutality of US war-making.

Of course, there remains plenty of work to be done on the Iraq War, as the twenty-year threshold is crossed, and new archives become available, and another generation of scholars starts building upon these first drafts of not-quite-recent-anymore history. The Shock and Awe Revisited Conference, and the essays in this roundtable, seek to help advance this endeavor.

The conference was conceived out of the reading and research I have been doing in the course of revising and reimagining my book manuscript in progress. The project, tentatively titled “Inherently Governmental: Private Military Contracting and US Imperialism in the Twenty-First Century,” works at the intersections of diplomatic history, American Studies, and critical theory to analyze private military contractors (PMCs) as both under-studied brokers of US empire and opaque figures onto which public anxieties around war, democracy, and empire were displaced. Among other interventions, it weaves together news media, journalist accounts, blogs, films, legal cases, congressional hearings, and governmental reports to theorize private contracting as a structure—a form of corporate governance at odds with traditional liberal-democratic governance in the post-9/11 US security state, as well as its client states in Iraq and Afghanistan.

I have therefore spent time scouring an eclectic array of academic sub-fields to locate scholars and scholarship that could address the political economy of American warfare as it was transformed through the mobilization for the War on Terror. I was extremely fortunate that the Mershon Center saw the value in translating the conversations I was having with myself, through footnotes and draft chapters, into an in-person assemblage of esteemed experts on the twentieth anniversary of the Iraq War.

The conference panels were structured around three broad topics and sets of questions. The first panel, “Social and Political Costs of Intervention,” featured anthropologists Zainab Saleh (Haverford College), Bridget Guarasci (Franklin & Marshall College), and Catherine Lutz (Brown University) in conversation regarding the immeasurable costs of the Iraq War on Americans but especially Iraqis. The second panel, “Historical Contexts and Memories,” more explicitly asked its participants, Osamah Khalil (Syracuse University), Carly Krakow (New

York University), and Alex Lubin (Pennsylvania State University), to situate the Iraq War in the twentieth and twenty-first century history of US diplomacy. The third and final panel, “Culture, Journalism, and the First Draft of History,” brought Deepa Kumar (Rutgers University), Moustafa Bayoumi (City University of New York), and Rajiv Chandrasekaran (formerly of the *The Washington Post*) together to address the changing media landscape of the last twenty years, and how to grapple with the limits of traditional and digital media coverage of the Iraq War.

The essays in this roundtable reflect and expand upon themes that emerged in and across the panels. The first essay, by Catherine Lutz, provides a comprehensive overview of the myriad metrics by which to assess the costs of the Iraq War in the United States and in Iraq. However, these costs, as Lutz demonstrates, go even beyond the already grim body counts, permanent injuries, national debt, destruction of infrastructure, and rampant political corruption. “Another result of the war,” she writes, “has been a kind of moral coarsening. War is, like slavery, a human institution that destroys bodies and damages the souls of those who wage it, both in combat and as civilian supporters and bystanders at home.”

The second essay, by Moustafa Bayoumi, delves further into this particular social and moral effect through the lens of delusion, arguing that “from before the run-up to the Iraq War of 2003 until its twentieth anniversary... delusion appears as the common thread in so much of the American media’s discourse.” The third essay, by Osamah Khalil, addresses the “persistent silences coupled with mythmaking about the war, its motivations, and consequences” which converged to obscure the costs of war in the political as well as social sphere. Read together, Lutz, Bayoumi, and Khalil illuminate the ways in which the Iraq War remains so difficult to narrate because of how systemic and devastating its effects have been on the very fabric of American society.

The fourth and fifth essays, by Carly Krakow and Zainab Saleh, explicate the environmental and human tragedies that have had and will continue to have psychological, material, and generational impacts beyond the immediate visible damage on the ground. Krakow’s work on burn pits connects the quite literal toxicity of warfare in Iraq to the Vietnam War. “The use of war toxins in Iraq and Vietnam,” writes Krakow, “demonstrates the United States’ destructive pattern of deploying war toxins abroad, delaying recognition for US veterans harmed by these toxins, and leaving civilians behind to face ongoing toxic assaults in contaminated environments for years.”

Finally, Saleh draws attention on how the obfuscation in the United States around how to remember the Iraq War adds insult to already cataclysmic injury for Iraq and Iraqis. “Mechanisms of erasure, sanitation, deflection, and rehabilitation constitute a strategy mobilized by US officials, military personnel, and journalists to evade any serious and ethical reckoning with an illegal invasion that has caused unruliness and death in Iraq,” she argues. To “reflect solely on [Saddam] Hussein’s regime” and its record of atrocities in justifying the war “ignores the United States’ political and military interventions in Iraq over the past four decades.”

Twenty years after the invasion of Baghdad, this roundtable should leave no doubt or ambiguity for scholars or students: the Iraq War was not just an American mistake, or miscalculation, or political lesson to learn. The Iraq War was an existential tragedy. The Iraqi people paid for decisions they did not make with their lives and their livelihoods at a generational scale. It is my personal and professional conviction as a historian of US foreign relations that in our minds, and in our analyses, this is the legacy we must continue to center.

Notes:

1. Samantha Bee, "Will Ferrell's Full Speech As George W. Bush At #NotTheWHCD | Full Frontal on TBS," YouTube Video, May 15, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KZ7S-ymyaZ4>.
2. Recordings of the panels can be found on the Mershon Center's YouTube page. For example: Mershon Center, "Shock and Awe Revisited: Legacies of the Iraq War Twenty Years Later | Panel 1," YouTube Video, April 5, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x285tFKuniU>.
3. Notable texts include: Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of US Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002); Derek Gregory, *The Colonial Present* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004); Michelle Brown, "'Setting the Conditions' for Abu Ghraib: The Prison Nation Abroad," *American Quarterly* 57, no. 3 (September 2005): 973-997; Rajiv Chandrasekaran, *Imperial Life in the Emerald City: Inside Iraq's Green Zone* (New York: Vintage Books, 2007); Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (New York: Picador, 2008); Andrew J. Bacevich, *The Limits of Power: The End of American Exceptionalism* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2008); Jeremy Scahill, *Blackwater: The Rise of the World's Most Powerful Mercenary Army* (New York: Nation Books, 2008); Timothy V. Kaufman-Osborn, "'We Are All Torturers Now': Accountability After Abu Ghraib," *Theory & Event* 11, no. 2 (2008); Beth Bailey and Richard H. Immerman, eds., *Understanding the US Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan* (New York: New York University Press, 2015).
4. See: Adam Moore, *Empires Labor: The Global Army That Supports US Wars* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019); Alex Lubin, *Never-Ending War on Terror* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2021); Deepa Kumar, *Islamophobia and the Politics of Empire: Twenty Years After 9/11* (London: Verso, 2021); Joseph Stieb, *The Regime Change Consensus: Iraq in American Politics, 1990-2003* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021); Zaynab Quadri, "War is Still a Racket: Private Military Contracting, US Imperialism, and the Iraq War," *American Quarterly* 74, no. 3 (September 2022); Melvyn P. Leffler, *Confronting Saddam Hussein: George W. Bush and the Invasion of Iraq* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023).
5. See, as recent examples: Joseph Stieb, "Confronting the Iraq War: Melvyn Leffler, George Bush and the Problem of Trusting Your Sources," *War on the Rocks*, January 30, 2023, <https://warontherocks.com/2023/01/confronting-the-iraq-war-melvyn-leffler-george-bush-and-the-problem-of-trusting-your-sources/>; Jeremy Kuzmarov, "Dispatches," *Passport: The Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations Review* 54, no. 1 (April 2023): 51.
6. Marjorie Galelli, "The Last Word: It's Been Twenty Years— Time for Historians to Turn to Iraq," *Passport: The Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations Review* 54, no. 1 (April 2023): 63.
7. See, for example: Michael Ignatieff, "The American Empire; the Burden," *The New York Times*, January 5, 2003, <https://www.nytimes.com/2003/01/05/magazine/the-american-empire-the-burden.html>; Ivo H. Daalder and James M. Lindsay, "American Empire, Not 'If' but 'What Kind,'" *The New York Times*, May 10, 2003, <https://www.nytimes.com/2003/05/10/arts/american-empire-not-if-but-what-kind.html>.
8. Paul A. Kramer, "Power and Connection: Imperial Histories of the United States in the World," *The American Historical Review* 116, no. 5 (December 2011): 1348.
9. *ibid.*, 1349.
10. Greg Grandin, *Empire's Workshop: Latin America, the United States, and the Rise of the New Imperialism* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006); Paul A. Kramer, *The Blood of Government: Race, Empire, the United States, & the Philippines* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Michael H. Hunt and Steven I. Levine, *Arc of Empire: America's Wars in Asia from the Philippines to Vietnam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012).
11. Amy Kaplan, "Violent Belongings and the Question of Empire Today: Presidential Address to the American Studies Association, Hartford, Connecticut, October 17, 2003," *American Quarterly* 56, no. 1 (March 2004): 7.
12. Marilyn B. Young, "'I Was Thinking, As I Often Do These Days, of War': The United States in the Twenty-First Century," *Diplomatic History* 36, no. 1 (January 2012): 1. See also: Inderpal Grewal, *Saving the Security State: Exceptional Citizens in Twenty-First-Century America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017); Todd Miller, *Empire of Borders: The Expansion of the US Border Around the World* (London: Verso, 2019); Roberto J. González, Hugh Gusterson, and Gustaaf Houtman, eds., *Militarization: A Reader* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019).

Iraqis Deserve Better Than Saddam Hussein and the U.S. Invasion

Zainab Saleh

March 20, 2023, marked the twentieth anniversary of the U.S. occupation of Iraq. The anniversary, which received considerable media and scholarly attention in the United States, Britain, and Iraq, also coincided with the first anniversary of the Russian war on Ukraine and the International Criminal Court's issuance of an arrest warrant for Russian president Vladimir Putin on allegations of war crimes.

Journalists, scholars, and military personnel grappling with the legacy of the U.S. invasion have focused on different aspects of it. The mainstream media in the United States mainly discussed the lessons learned and the "winners" and "losers." Though this coverage included some detailed reporting on the experiences of the vets and some mention of the situation in Iraq, it mainly approached the invasion as an opportunity to reflect on what went wrong and on how to wage a better military invasion in the future. Scholars and journalists in independent media, however, elaborated on the ways the U.S. military campaign and policies reshaped the social, political, religious, and environmental landscape in Iraq and across the region, with references to double standards regarding Bush/Blair and Putin.

As an Iraqi who arrived in the United States just seven months before the invasion, I was curious about how the U.S. occupation would be commemorated. Two decades later, I have followed the mainstream media coverage of this anniversary closely. This year I was also invited to many conferences commemorating the event, which included military personnel and journalists as well as scholars of Iraq. During this diverse coverage, one question kept being raised by U.S. military personnel and even well-informed journalists: If Saddam Hussein had stayed in power, would he have committed more atrocities? U.S. officials and media pundits often indicate that by focusing on the atrocities of the U.S. invasion, we ignore Saddam Hussein's persecution of his people, in particular Kurds and Shias, because of ethnic and sectarian hostility.

What is striking about this question from an Iraqi perspective is the ongoing effort by U.S. military and media personnel to erase the devastating legacy of the invasion in human and political terms, deflect any opportunity to hold U.S. officials accountable for an illegal war, sanitize the invasion as producing something good despite the violence and destruction, obfuscate earlier U.S. support of Saddam Hussein, and convey the assumption that Iraqis can choose only between two bad alternatives, namely an authoritarian regime or a brutal invasion. Ultimately, this line of reasoning is based on the premise that violence perpetuated by Western imperial powers—such as the United States and Britain—is more benevolent than Saddam Hussein's atrocities.

The effort to reflect solely on Hussein's regime ignores the United States' political and military interventions in Iraq over the past four decades. On the one hand, the United States supported Hussein during the Iran-Iraq War and ignored his atrocities (including the gassing of Kurds in 1988) for geopolitical reasons. Following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990, the United States and its allies carried out a military campaign—known as the Gulf War of 1991—that targeted military installments but also led to a massive breakdown of infrastructure, including water and sewage treatment, agricultural production and food distribution, health care, communications, and power generation.

After the war, the United States decided to keep Saddam Hussein in power for fear of the rise of an Islamist government. It also imposed brutal sanctions, which had devastating impacts on Iraqis. The sanctions led to an

increase in crime, theft, and prostitution. Families struggling to make ends meet had to sell their possessions. The basic monthly rations distributed by the Iraqi government prevented mass starvation in the country, but they did not limit malnutrition. It is estimated that at least five hundred thousand children died between 1990 and 2003 because of malnutrition and a lack of basic services. When asked by a journalist about the price of half a million Iraqi children for the sanctions, Madeleine Albright, the secretary of the state in the Clinton administration, famously replied that “the price is worth it.”

This catastrophe was brought on by policies adopted by the United States and Britain, in particular, which included restricting imports of food and goods into a country that was heavily dependent on foreign products, the undermining of the sale of oil in exchange for food, and the destruction of public infrastructure during the war. Joy Gordon called the sanction years, from 1990 to 2003, an invisible war waged mainly by the United States and Britain, which stifled any attempts by members of the United Nations to lift the sanctions.¹

The argument that the U.S. invasion was necessary to prevent further atrocities by Saddam Hussein also erases the war’s devastating impacts on Iraq’s society and state after 2003. The United States enacted measures and carried out policies that engendered rampant corruption, the collapse of infrastructure, the rise of the Islamic State, the massive displacement of Iraqis internally and abroad, and a staggering death rate. Among those policies were the disbandment of the army, the privatization of the state, the institutionalization of a sectarian quota system, de-Ba’thification, the failure to protect the borders, the resort to brutal violence and collective punishment to put down the insurgency, the incarceration and brutalization of prisoners, the use of depleted uranium, and burn pits.

The U.S. invasion also prompted a civil war that ripped the country apart and evolved into a proxy war involving different regional players, including Iran, Syria, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia. Moreover, the U.S. military employed brute force to deal with violence and attacks on its troops. The leaked pictures of abused and brutalized prisoners at the notorious Abu Ghraib prison epitomized the U.S. military’s use of extreme violence against Iraqis. In addition, the invasion worked to erase Iraq’s cultural landscape and historical memory with the destruction and pillage of museums, archaeological sites, libraries, and archives.

The U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 was not the starting point for imperial interventions. Scholars of Iraq have argued that the 2003 occupation was merely the latest chapter in the contemporary imperial history of Iraq. Toby Jones situates the U.S. invasion of Iraq within a longer history of U.S. policy in the region. He warns against the argument that September 11 was the catalyst for change in U.S. policy, pointing out that this argument fails to consider that “oil and oil producers have long been militarized, the role oil has played in regional confrontation for almost four decades, and the connections between the most recent confrontation with Iraq and those of the past.”²

Using this framework, Jones refers to the United States’ decision to pursue a policy of regime change in Iraq in 2003 as “the high-water mark of direct American militarism in the region.”³ He suggests we see the past four decades of Iraq’s history not as a series of wars—the Iran-Iraq War (1980–1988), the Gulf War of 1991, and the 2003 invasion—but as “a single long war, one in which pursuing regional security and protecting oil and American-friendly oil producers has been the principal strategic rationale.”⁴ Similarly, Sinan Antoon maintains that the invasion of Iraq in 2003 constitutes Act III of U.S. military interventions in

Iraq, with the Gulf War as Act I and U.S. sanctions as Act II.⁵

Scholars of Iraq have repeatedly problematized the politics of erasure and sanitization and argued that the current situation in Iraq is the product of decades-long policies by the United States. While imperial politics in Iraq have shaped the political and economic scene through the support of authoritarian rule and increasing militarization of the country, the expansion of its scope since 1991—through the use of more lethal weapons during bombardments, the destruction of its infrastructure and social fabric, the installation of corrupt and sectarian elites who have the backing of militias, and the privatization of the state—brought about an all-encompassing political, social, and environmental collapse. Tragically, and ironically, the situation in Iraq is so bad that there is now nostalgia for Saddam Hussein, not because Iraqis liked living under a dictatorship, but because the status quo deteriorated to such an extent after 2003 that Saddam’s reign has come to be re-imagined as “better days,” when there was still the semblance of a functioning state and political violence was perpetuated by the regime only.⁶

The argument that the U.S. invasion was necessary to prevent further atrocities by Saddam Hussein also erases the war’s devastating impacts on Iraq’s society and state after 2003.

The constant references to Saddam Hussein’s atrocities are premised on the erasure of the United States’s complicity in his crimes and political and military interventions in Iraq, as well as the failure to hold U.S. officials—such as former President George W. Bush, Vice-President Dick Cheney, and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld—accountable for a war that was based on lies. Rather than challenging U.S. militarism abroad and the rehabilitation of George W. Bush as merely a nice man who paints dogs, U.S. pundits continue to convey the idea that the U.S. invasion ultimately produced something good: the removal of a dictator. The idea that Iraqis should see U.S. violence as more benign than Saddam’s violence obfuscates the conditions of unruliness under which most Iraqis now live today. The idea reproduces the old colonial rhetoric that the West is saving brown people from brown dictators, while omitting the fact that this dictator was for a long time supported by the West.

Ironically, it was a gaffe that made former president George W. Bush acknowledge the brutal impact of his action in Iraq. On May 18, 2022, in a speech in Dallas about the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Bush referred to Putin’s decision to invade as “the decision of one man to launch a wholly unjustified and brutal invasion of Iraq.” He quickly corrected his gaffe by saying, “I mean Ukraine,” but he chuckled and muttered “Iraq, too,” to laughter from the audience.⁷ Ahmed Twajj, a journalist and child of Iraqi migrants, commented that Bush “has finally, if unintentionally, admitted his error in invading Iraq nearly 20 years ago. While attempting to scold Russian President Vladimir Putin for his ruthless invasion of Ukraine, Bush accidentally condemned his own action.”⁸

The condemnation of Putin’s invasion of Ukraine by Western countries and the welcoming of Ukraine refugees in Europe and the United States starkly show the hypocrisy of the liberal West, whereby the lives of white and European people during imperial wars have more value than the lives of people of the global majority. While Western countries have condemned Putin for his invasion of Ukraine and flocked to provide military and humanitarian aid to Ukrainians, they have been silent about their own colonial past and imperial present, and they have resisted accepting Iraqi refugees in their countries. In this framework, Iraq emerges as part of a Western tradition of hypocrisy and violence.

These mechanisms of erasure, sanitization, deflection, and rehabilitation constitute a strategy mobilized by U.S. officials, military personnel, and journalists to evade any

serious and ethical reckoning with an illegal invasion that has caused unruliness and death in Iraq. Moreover, they are premised upon a will to ignorance. This will to ignorance forecloses the possibility of remembering wars and grappling with accountability. It also invokes a politics of forgetfulness, which will blame victims for their tragedies, minimize U.S. military violence, and pave the road for another war.

Twenty years after the invasion, it is shocking to see that these deep-seated assumptions still prevail. More importantly, the question about Saddam Hussein's brutality had he stayed in power shows that the person asking cannot envision a different existence for Iraqis. This question forecloses the possibility of seeing Iraqis (and marginalized and dispossessed people all over the world) as human beings who are worthy of safety, who deserve a life beyond the binary of U.S. atrocities and Hussein's dictatorship.

Notes:

1. Joy Gordon, *Invisible War: The United States and the Iraq Sanctions* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).
2. Toby Craig Jones, "America, Oil, and War in the Middle East," *Journal of American History* 99:1 (June 2012): 208–18.
3. *Ibid.*, 216.
4. *Ibid.*, 217.
5. Sinan Antoon made this remark during a lecture entitled "Iraq Afterwar(d)s: Epistemic Violence and Collateral Damage," delivered at Swarthmore College on April 25, 2023.
6. https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/mar/17/iraqis-saddam-hussein-us-invasion-country?CMP=share_btn_fb&fbclid=IwAR1F_ynK0Gk1YpIClrNfX4DiAy57VXRcYmWmf-wwbUy9-wU5-ZjOKaqceOto
7. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eH3QqcUJnBY>.
8. <https://www.nbcnews.com/think/opinion/george-bush-gaffe-ukraine-iraq-putin-rca29829>.

The Costs of the U.S. War in Iraq: An Overview

Catherine Lutz

There are too many wide-ranging impacts of the U.S. war in Iraq to enumerate them all.

These brief notes will summarize some effects, a number of which have been described by contributors to the Costs of War, a research project ongoing since 2010 at Brown University's Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs (www.costsofwar.org). While a few of those impacts are benefits accruing to the corporations that have received billions of dollars in war contracts, most of the impacts form a litany of social, political, economic, and moral costs, firstly to the people of Iraq, where those impacts have been catastrophic, and secondarily to the people of the United States.

It is important to point out that this essay follows the framing of this conference around the period beginning with the U.S. invasion of March, 2003. What follows is an accounting of the impact of that period from 2003 to the present. We know, however, that the violence of war in which the United States was a central actor began with military support for Iraq in the 1980s and continued with the 1991 war and then the sanctions and aerial occupation/no-fly zones of the 1990s.

In Iraq, the war was defined by massive loss of human life, first and above all civilian life. Many lives were also lost among Iraqi soldiers, policemen, and insurgents; among U.S. military contractors, many of whom were Iraqis; and among journalists and humanitarian workers, many of whom were also Iraqis. These individuals died from U.S. aerial bombardment, including drone strikes; from ground combat, in house raids and street fight cross-fire; in sectarian killing; and from toxic exposures to U.S. weapons and practices of war.

An even larger number of people died as a result of what demographers call an "indirect" result of war, that is, as a second-order effect of such things as the bombing of sewage treatment plants, which led to diarrheal disease and death, particularly in infants and children; or the bombing of hospitals, which led to otherwise preventable death by everyday diseases. Such reverberating deadly effects of the war continue today and will do so far into the future as basic infrastructure, such as the electrical grid, continues to exist in a war-degraded state.

The war resulted in even larger numbers of serious physical and mental injuries than deaths. Some of those Iraqis will require lifelong care and will represent an economic drain on their households and the country. Some of those injuries and illnesses are the result of toxic exposures that have contributed to higher rates of cancer, heart and respiratory diseases.

The war also created vast dislocation, as people fled the violence. That dislocation was both internal and cross-border. Internal displacement is associated with some of the worst health outcomes, as it increases the likelihood that people will be unemployed, be unable to get public services such as clean drinking water, or be pushed into areas of environmental contamination. The internally displaced also experience malnutrition and mental health challenges at higher rates, and more often lack access to healthcare, with particularly serious consequences for maternal and infant mortality.

Many internal and cross-border migrants did not return home, and the drain in medical talent was particularly hard-hitting. The flight from home also fractured communities in ways that created even lower social trust than once existed within neighborhoods. The flight across borders into neighboring countries and into Europe amplified regional tensions in many cases and provided an opportunity for right-wing demagoguery against immigrants to flourish.

Beyond the impact on morbidity and mortality, the widespread infrastructural destruction in Iraq degraded public services once uniformly relied upon, including electricity, water and sewage, housing, and central societal institutions such as government services and education. The unreliability of those services further eroded the legitimacy of existing governance. Furthermore, corruption metastasized at every level, particularly through privatization and lessened regulation of the oil industry. This had deeply erosive effects on government legitimacy and stability.

Human rights abuses were rampant in virtually every context in which the U.S. military interacted with Iraqis, from prisons to household raids and street encounters. Although the United States built numerous judicial facilities and prisons throughout Iraq, the rule of law remained weak.

The war also resulted in continued or worsening militarization. U.S.-funded security labor increased during the war, as did weapons transfers and then sales through U.S. military-industrial corporations in recent years. As part of this process, the war proliferated private militias and helped birth ISIS, al-Qaeda in Iraq, and other organizations. Sectarianism was strongly amplified by U.S. policies and helped result in civil violence and longer-term governance challenges.

U.S. bombing, the immediate invasion chaos that it created, and subsequent insecurity resulted in the looting or destruction of museums and other sites of historical, demographic, and health data. The long-term consequences of these losses of knowledge may be likened to the country having been shot in the brain.

Unemployment rose and remained high, leading to higher poverty, suffering and outmigration rates. The death rate among men resulted in many more widow-headed households. Widows have even more limited employment

opportunities than men.

In the United States, as many have pointed out about war in general, the first casualty of these wars was truth. During the Iraq War, the Pentagon perfected its methods of controlling the narrative of war, methods first developed when journalists brought visuals of the Vietnam War home to the U.S. public. The very powerful, very well-funded campaign of Pentagon public relations included disinformation, the embedding of journalists within units, and home-front advertising. These decades-long efforts created a war that, for much of the civilian U.S. public, was alternately invisible and imaginary.

Another result of the war has been a kind of moral coarsening. War is, like slavery, a human institution that destroys the bodies of those subjugated and damages the souls of those who wage it, both in combat and as civilian supporters and bystanders at home. That coarsening takes many forms. In this case those forms include racism, white supremacism, Islamophobia, and toxic masculinity. While the latter are certainly not new problems in U.S. history, the Iraq War has thrown gasoline on those already burning fires. It would in fact seem impossible for a society to spend twenty years waging violence on this scale without these kinds of effects.

Historians have long detailed the growth of an imperial presidency and the concentration of power in the Executive Branch. That continues apace and, in combination with issues just mentioned, has garnered further acceptance of authoritarianism more generally.

Another national political effect is erosion in faith in government. Despite some support for the war and long-term but unwarranted faith in the military in the United States, faith in government has declined, as some people recognized the catastrophic costs and incompetence displayed in going to and prosecuting the war. Intertwined with the rise in violent masculinity, paramilitarism has grown, and it contributed to the attempted coup of January 6, 2020. In fact, fully twenty percent of all those charged for crimes at the Capitol were veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

There has also been a rise in the size, power, monopolizing tendencies, and profit-taking of U.S. military industrial corporations and a corresponding acceleration of the more general corporate capture of Congress. These corporations have become much larger and more powerful, allowing them to be ever more successful in their efforts to capture resources from the federal discretionary budget.

The war has prompted the rapid and massive growth of military spending as a proportion of all federal discretionary spending, resulting in a squeezing out of spending on all other elements, including the welfare of the public. While the military budget tended to increase each year from World War II onward, the increases during the Iraq War were much larger (in both a newly carved out Overseas Contingency Operations or war budget as well as the "base budget").

The macroeconomic effects of this (and all) military funding are significant. They include upward pressure on interest rates as money for the Iraq War was raised through borrowing rather than new taxes or war bonds; and job creation that proceeded at a much lower pace than it would have with spending on more labor-intensive sectors as health, education, or home construction.

Finally, there is the damage the war has done to military personnel and their families. While the death rate per year of war is far lower than in previous U.S. wars, partly as a result of the massive outsourcing of military work and risk to civilians (i.e., contractors), especially Iraqi and other workers from the Global South, many service members have survived with catastrophic injuries as a result of advances in battlefield medicine. While the U.S. media have paid a relatively significant amount of attention to these

deaths and injuries of service members, it has taken years of struggle for some of the injured (e.g., those with burn-pit inhalation injuries and traumatic brain injuries that only reveal their severity and nature over time) to be recognized as such. There is a similar imbalance in the attention the U.S. media have paid to household disruptions in military families with multiple deployments. They have focused on the emotional struggles of those at home, but not on the higher rates of substance abuse, child abuse and divorce that the wars have produced.

History, Silence, and Mythmaking Twenty Years On

Osamah F. Khalil

On board the USS *Abraham Lincoln* in May 2003, President George W. Bush declared the end of major combat operations in Iraq. He reiterated the claim that Iraq was linked to the al-Qaeda terrorist organization responsible for the September 11 attacks and that the war was a "crucial advance in the campaign against terror." Bush hailed the swift military victory and the use of new weapons that allowed the United States to "achieve military objectives without directing violence against civilians."¹ Like the administration's claims about Iraq's weapons of mass destruction leading up to the war, these assertions were proven false. However, in the two decades since the United States invaded Iraq, there have been persistent silences, coupled with mythmaking about the war, its motivations, and its consequences.

Only a few weeks after September 11, President Bush initiated war planning for Iraq. Over the next sixteen months, the administration embarked on a deliberate campaign of saber-rattling, deception, and misinformation. The campaign relied on a decade of demonization of Saddam Hussein and Iraq following the 1991 Persian Gulf War. Saddam Hussein's brutal regime persisted under the crippling sanctions imposed after the conflict. He was also able to counter regime-change efforts, which relied on exile groups with limited support inside and outside of Iraq. September 11 reinvigorated the failing regime change policy and provided the Bush administration with the rationale for a direct intervention.

Vice President Dick Cheney led the disinformation campaign. Then-House Majority Leader Dick Army (R-Tx) later recounted that Cheney pushed the narrative of Iraq attempting to acquire uranium as well as aluminum tubes, presumably for centrifuges and an active nuclear weapons program. In the press and in briefings with lawmakers, Cheney also promoted non-existent ties between Iraqi intelligence and al-Qaeda.²

These claims were repeated by congressional allies in the debate for the authorization of military force and recycled in the media. Fake defectors were made available to select journalists to repeat key administration talking points about Iraq's weapons of mass destruction programs as well as ties to and training of terrorists. After these claims were repeated in major media outlets, administration officials promoted the published reports as proof that Iraq was an existential danger.

These reports were compounded by hundreds of articles and dozens of op-eds in leading outlets with an editorial bent that consistently favored war. There was a similar echo-chamber on the cable news networks that often relied on the same reporters, columnists, op-ed authors, and think tank experts. Although there was an attempt by several outlets to examine their participation in the deception two years later, that history has been removed from the twenty-year retrospectives that were recently published.³

The UK's Chilcot Inquiry found that Iraq did not pose a direct threat and that there was a rush to war. It also deter-

mined that the intelligence services identified the weapons programs of Iran, North Korea, and Libya were a far greater danger to Anglo-American interests. However, Foreign Minister Jack Straw actively lobbied and manipulated the services to make sure that the intelligence assessments aligned with Washington's narrative. Straw explained that the assessment that was produced "has to show why there is an exceptional threat from Iraq."⁴

The scare tactics worked. A year after September 11, as the Bush administration was building the case for war in the public and in Congress, the Pew Research Center found that two-thirds of Americans believed Saddam Hussein had aided al-Qaeda.⁵

In June 2004, *The New Republic* magazine published a special issue that asked: "Were We Wrong?" The magazine's editors attempted to explain their strategic and moral reasons for supporting the invasion in the midst of a raging insurgency and the Abu Ghraib prison abuse scandal. Even though their strategic reasons had been exposed, they wrote that "we feel regret—but no shame." As for the moral reasons, the editors reverted to blatant stereotypes and Islamophobia. But they asserted that the future was up to the Iraqis.⁶

This line of reasoning was not limited to *The New Republic*. Indeed, the major media outlets, which had been accomplices in the Bush administration's deception and cheerleaders for the invasion, favored pro-war voices that had since become critics. Those who were opposed to the war from the beginning continued to be suspect and were ignored or silenced. The prevailing ethos, to paraphrase the late Tony Judt, was "You and your kind were wrong to be right; we were right to be wrong."⁷

Absent from the discussion of regret and shame are the Iraqi casualties. Two decades later, an accurate and consistent number is difficult to obtain. Estimates range from 300,000 to 1,000,000 or even more. There remains a deliberate silence about the casualties and the refugees created by the conflict. Both London and Washington downplayed the casualties. The Chilcott Inquiry criticized the UK's Ministry of Defense for focusing its efforts on refuting charges that it was responsible for civilian casualties.⁸

By the fifth year of the war, the International Organization for Migration reported that sixty thousand Iraqis a month continued to leave their homes. By that time, there were already two million Iraqi refugees and two million internally displaced people. The devastation to Iraqi families—especially Iraqi women and girls—cannot be understated. Thousands of women and girls have been forced into prostitution and sexual slavery since 2003.⁹

Others faced a different fate. Abeer Qassim al-Janabi, age 14, lived with her family near Al-Mahmudiyah in a house about two hundred meters from a U.S. checkpoint. On March 12, 2006, five soldiers from the 101st Airborne went to the al-Janabi home and took her parents and her 6-year-old sister into one room where they were murdered. The five soldiers then raped and killed Abeer. They attempted to burn the bodies to conceal their crimes, but neighbors extinguished the fire and discovered the massacre. The soldiers were eventually arrested and tried. Steven Green, the alleged nineteen-year-old ringleader, was given five life sentences.¹⁰

Green later attempted to explain how his combat experience in Iraq and the deaths of fellow soldiers a few months before had left him embittered and scarred. This reaction was coupled with the derogatory view of Iraqis that was pervasive in the U.S. military. "There's not a word that

would describe how much I hated these people," Green said. "I wasn't thinking these people were humans." Green died in prison in 2014 in an apparent suicide.¹¹

Proponents of the war inside and outside the administration argued that Iraq and the Middle East could be reshaped under the benevolent guidance of an American empire. This utopian vision was to be implemented through lightning victories and high-tech weapons with minimal or no occupation. Although President Bush praised this strategy in his "Mission Accomplished" speech, it quickly became apparent that the United States did not deploy a sufficiently sized or equipped force to maintain an occupation or fight an insurgency. By the sixth year of the war, mounting U.S. casualties also revealed that Veterans Administration facilities were underfunded and understaffed. The descriptions of care for wounded U.S. soldiers—some with devastating injuries—were similar to those that were documented by veterans during the Vietnam War era.¹²

Twenty years ago, those protesting against the war were derided as Saddam's useful idiots or worse. The largest antiwar protests since the Vietnam War have been erased from history. The opposition by leading scholars of International Relations and Middle East specialists, scorned at the time as unrealistic or harboring anti-American sentiments, is a mere footnote. The resignation of a few State Department officials has been forgotten. And the French and the Germans are still being disparaged for their opposition.

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Today, the architects of the war and its proponents are claiming vindication, if not victory. Saddam Hussein is gone and Iraq is a struggling democracy, but a democracy. They deliberately ignore the corruption, the sectarian political structure, the competing militias, the stronger ties to Iran, the casualties, the ethnic cleansing, the refugees, the environmental damage, the devastated infrastructure, the continued presence of the Islamic State, the looting, the assassinations, the torture of political prisoners, etc. "We were right," they insist.¹³

Yet America's war in Iraq continues. U.S. Central Command reported that as part of the "Defeat ISIS Mission in Iraq and Syria," the United States continues to provide advice and support on thirty-seven partnered operations with Iraqi and Kurdish forces against the Islamic State in March 2023. As much as Americans have tried to forget or ignore the Iraq war, it was and remains a crime. But none of the perpetrators will be held accountable.¹⁴

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A Bad War Story, On Repeat: The Ongoing Threat of Toxic Saturation in Iraq and Vietnam¹

Carly A. Krakow

March 2023 marked twenty years since the United States invaded Iraq in 2003, and fifty years since the United States officially ended combat operations in Vietnam in 1973. In August 2022, U.S. President Joe Biden signed the Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics Act (PACT).² The PACT Act devotes \$280 billion to healthcare and compensation for approximately 3.5 million U.S. veterans who have been harmed by war toxins, including burn pits, during military service in Iraq, Afghanistan, and other countries as part of the "War on Terror." It also extends coverage for Vietnam War veterans harmed by herbicides, including Agent Orange, and veterans exposed to toxins during the 1990–91 Gulf War.

The PACT Act provides overdue assistance for veterans with numerous cancers, severe lung conditions, and more. Prior to the act, 78 percent of disability claims linked to burn pit exposure were denied by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).³ Now, nearly 85 percent of claims are being approved.⁴ No comparable structure exists, however, to assist civilians injured by war toxins, including in Iraq and Vietnam. The use of war toxins in Iraq and Vietnam demonstrates the United States' destructive pattern of deploying war toxins abroad, delaying recognition for U.S. veterans harmed by these toxins, and leaving civilians behind to face ongoing toxic assaults in contaminated environments for years.

In *Nothing Ever Dies: Vietnam and the Memory of War*, Viet Thanh Nguyen asks, "What is a war story, and what makes a good one?"⁵ He describes the conventions of the "good" war story as it has been typically understood: it is a story that "pump[s] us up" and "through spectacular battles and sacrificial soldiers . . . affirm[s] the necessity of war."⁶ However, he notes,

This rhetoric is deceptive because what it really permits is continual war-making. It is cynical because the troops often are not supported when they come home, unprotected or inadequately protected from depression, trauma, homelessness, illness, or suicide. A true war story should tell not only of the soldier but also what happened to her or him after the war's end. A true war story should also tell of the civilian, the refugee, the enemy, and, most importantly, the war machine that

encompasses them all.⁷

Twenty years later, the true story of the United States' invasion and occupation of Iraq is, bluntly, a bad war story. In the lead-up to the war, the U.S. "war machine" made tremendous efforts to depict the invasion as necessary—as hitting all the notes of a good war story—despite the Bush administration's knowledge that there was no evidence of a connection between Iraq and the 9/11 attacks. As Moustafa Bayoumi writes, we cannot forget how the Bush administration "manipulated the facts, the media and the public after the horrific attacks of 9/11, hellbent as the administration was to go to war in Iraq."

Weapons of mass destruction were never found in Iraq, but warnings about the threat of a "mushroom cloud" relentlessly "flooded the airwaves."⁸ The Costs of War project estimates the number of "indirect deaths" from the post-9/11 wars is between 3.6 and 3.7 million.⁹ The number of Iraqis killed because of the Iraq War is as high as one million or more.¹⁰ As Osamah Khalil emphasizes, "Iraq remains with the United States and will be for a long time to come."¹¹

On May 1, 2003, President George W. Bush infamously gave a speech standing in front of a "Mission Accomplished" banner, six weeks into a war that would last many years and would go on to cause devastation that will affect many generations.¹² In *The Long Reckoning: A Story of War, Peace, and Redemption in Vietnam*, George Black writes that "the truth of all wars is that they never really end."¹³ This is certainly true of Vietnam, where poisonous dioxin from Agent Orange remains an ongoing health and environmental threat, and new victims continue to suffer from birth defects forty-eight years after that war's end. It is true in Iraq, too, where war toxins remain an ongoing threat.

The United States must be held accountable and provide assistance for sickened civilians. This is not solely a matter of correcting past harms. Just as the PACT Act has saved the lives of American veterans, recognition of the damage in Iraq could save Iraqi lives *now*. Environmental clean-up and access to medical care reduces the acceleration of damage. The bad war stories of Iraq and Vietnam are not over. These stories demonstrate how the United States' repeated use of war toxins harms an unknowable number of future generations.

Whenever I explain the brutal impact of war toxins in Iraq, I refer to statistics that convey the scale of toxins that the United States introduced to the country. More than 780,000 rounds of depleted uranium were used in 1991, and more than 300,000 rounds in 2003.¹⁴ The U.S. military used white phosphorus as an incendiary weapon in Fallujah in 2004.¹⁵ Until at least 2010, burn pits were used widely.

As explained by the VA, depleted uranium "is a potential health hazard if it enters the body, such as through embedded fragments, contaminated wounds, and inhalation or ingestion."¹⁶ Incendiary weapons can "cause excruciating burns and destroy homes."¹⁷ Burn pits are open pits of waste, sometimes as large as football fields, in which weapons, chemicals, plastics, and medical and human waste are burned, typically using jet fuel.¹⁸ Throughout the post-9/11 wars, they were often operated by private military contractors.¹⁹

The scale of toxic infrastructure created by the United States in Iraq is staggering. But it is the human toll that best conveys the full scale of destruction. In my work, I call this "toxic saturation" because Iraqis are not merely "exposed" to toxins, they are forcibly "saturated" with them from before birth until death.²⁰ Iraqi civilians suffer from high rates of congenital anomalies (birth defects) and cancers. In his poem "To an Iraqi infant," Iraqi novelist, poet, and scholar Sinan Antoon describes an Iraqi mother's breast milk as "bursting with depleted uranium." As she awaits

the birth of a child she is “already mourning,” the child’s “grave is looking at its watch.”²¹

A 2019 study in *Environmental Pollution* found that children living in proximity to Tallil Air Base, a U.S. military base near Nasiriyah, Iraq, had an increased likelihood of congenital anomalies including spina bifida²², anencephaly, hydrocephalus²³, heart diseases, and musculoskeletal malformations including missing right hand and paralyzed clubfoot.²⁴ These are severe, often fatal, conditions. Anencephaly, for example, is when an infant is born without parts of the brain and skull.²⁵ Doctors in Fallujah have reported dramatic increases in serious birth defects since the United States attacked the city in 2004. Dr. Samira Alani, a Fallujah pediatrician, has described conditions for which “[t]here are not even medical terms” because “we’ve never seen them until now.”²⁶

The event celebrating President Biden’s signing of the PACT Act in August 2022 was heart-wrenching.²⁷ His speech referenced his son Beau, who died of brain cancer following burn pit exposure. The event also featured the widow and young daughter of the late Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson, for whom the law is named. But when I watched Biden’s speech, knowing about all the Iraqis suffering with cancer or birth defects that are often fatal, I thought the speech played like a scene from a work of science fiction. How can the U.S. government rightly embrace one community—U.S. veterans—unjustly affected by war toxins, without even acknowledging the existence of another one—Iraqis—that continues to be saturated by these same toxins?

As Rob Nixon writes with regard to the Gulf War and other sources of what he terms “slow violence,” “War deaths from environmental toxicity demand patient, elaborate proof.”²⁸ The PACT Act removes this burden of proof for veterans by providing “presumptive” benefits for numerous conditions. Why have Iraqi and Vietnamese civilians been held to a higher standard of proof?

The U.S. government’s failure to acknowledge Iraqi victims and all civilian victims of war toxins used during the “War on Terror” is even more disturbing, but not surprising, when viewed in historical context. From 1962 to 1971, during the Vietnam War, the U.S. military sprayed an estimated twenty million gallons of herbicides on Vietnam, including Agent Orange (which contained dioxin), to destroy foliage that was a food source and provided cover for Viet Cong and North Vietnamese forces.²⁹ “The Vietnam Red Cross estimates that three million Vietnamese have been affected by dioxin, including at least 150,000 children born after the war with serious birth defects,” notes Andrew Wells-Dang of the U.S. Institute of Peace.³⁰ Vietnamese people have birth defects including spina bifida and malformed arms and legs. “Most live at home, where they are sustained by around-the-clock care by a parent or sibling,” explains Charles R. Bailey, former director of the Ford Foundation’s Agent Orange program.³¹

Dioxin was left in the soil for decades in Vietnam. In 2019, the United States began a clean-up of Bien Hoa airbase, believed to be the largest remaining dioxin “hotspot.”³² Though the United States has spent around \$400 million on the environmental and health effects of Agent Orange in Vietnam, there is no comprehensive funding structure in place to assist dioxin victims in Vietnam, Laos, or Cambodia.³³

New York Times war correspondent Gloria Emerson wrote, in reference to photographer Philip Jones Griffiths’ harrowing photography book, *Agent Orange: “Collateral Damage” in Vietnam*, that it is “almost unbearable” to look at the images of Agent Orange’s victims, “but to turn away and not see the photographs is to compound the crime.”³⁴

By failing to provide sufficient care and compensation for the victims of Agent Orange, the United States has “compound[ed] the crime.” And by allowing Iraqi victims of war toxins to suffer unrecognized and unsupported, the United States has repeated the injustice it committed in Vietnam.

In principle, international law prohibits the use of war toxins that destroy civilian lives and infrastructure. Additional Protocol I (1977) to the Geneva Conventions addresses the illegality of environmental damage and health destruction and the expectation that reparations for harm caused will be provided.³⁵ Article 55 requires that “Care shall be taken in warfare to protect the natural environment against widespread, long-term and severe damage.” This protection prohibits methods that “prejudice the health or survival of the population.” Article 91 states that parties that violate international humanitarian law shall “be liable to pay compensation.” The Environmental Modification Convention forbids military “environmental modification techniques having widespread, long-lasting or severe effects as the means of destruction, damage or injury.”³⁶

Alex Lubin, who writes about “previous incidents of US-led state violence” in his book *Never-Ending War on Terror*, explains that “the past is never fully concealed or subjugated, and it frequently emerges in the US War on Terror as something of a haunting.”³⁷ Despite international law, the United States created a pattern of exporting war toxins overseas, harming its own soldiers, and then leaving civilians behind to cope with the health and environmental destruction that inevitably ensued. The United States’ harmful actions in Vietnam and Iraq are alarming but not unique. Domestically, the United States has an abundance of “sacrifice zones.”³⁸ For example, U.S. Navy activities on the Puerto Rican island of Vieques contaminated the land with arsenic, lead, cadmium, and cyanide.³⁹ The cancer rate on the island is 27 percent higher than in the rest of Puerto Rico.⁴⁰

The United States’ past environmental injustice haunts the present. The parallels between Vietnam and Iraq show the atrocities that occur when past injustice collides with the production of new victims in the present. The harms inflicted have created a reality in which new victims will inevitably continue to be born in the future. This pattern of the bad war story—the true war story—must first be acknowledged, and then it must end.

As Viet Thanh Nguyen and Richard Hughes explain, “Americans created Agent Orange here in a laboratory, shipped it overseas and dumped it with abandon.”⁴¹ Estimated costs for remaining healthcare and clean-up in Vietnam are, to use their term, “inconsequential,” when compared to the original cost of deploying herbicides and to the annual U.S. military budget of more than \$800 billion.⁴² Morally, “[d]enying the reality of the need” takes “an unacceptable toll here in the United States.”⁴³ Yet the U.S. government has been reluctant to act. The U.S. government can begin to address the ongoing harm inflicted by its use of Vietnam War herbicides and Iraq War toxins by responding to the needs of civilians. This requires acknowledging all people who were unjustly harmed, including the Iraqi infants who continue to be born severely ill because of America’s use of war toxins.

Notes:

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On Truths, Illusions, and Delusions: The American Media and the Invasion of Iraq

Moustafa Bayoumi

We in the United States are often taught to think of journalism as a righteous institution that searches for uncomfortable facts and is guided by a noble mission. "There can be no higher law in journalism than to tell the truth and to shame the devil" (13), wrote Walter Lippman in 1920 in his book *Liberty and the News*, and virtually every Hollywood movie about a newspaper confirms this view, including *Shock and Awe*, a 2017 film about the media and the Iraq War.

Of course, not everyone sees the media this way. For critics like French Marxist Louis Althusser, the media is part of the ideological state apparatus and as such functions to support the ruling ideas of the ruling class.¹ In Lippman's view, journalism is an essential component of a liberal society. "Democracy Dies in Darkness," the *Washington Post* tell us daily on the paper's masthead. In Althusser's view, journalism buttresses a fundamental illusion of our age, the illusion that we live in a liberal, meritocratic society, rather than a rapacious, capitalist society.

But when it comes to American journalism and the war on Iraq, perhaps it is time to put away all the talk about journalism as beacon of truth or purveyor of illusion. Instead, we need to talk about journalism as delusion. From before the run-up to the Iraq War of 2003 until its twentieth anniversary this month, delusion appears as the common thread in so much of the American media's discourse. What I mean here by delusion is the propensity to believe something—here, American virtuousness, above all—despite copious evidence to the contrary.

My examples will follow in a moment, but first I would like to suggest that the reason why delusions play such a large part in discussions of the Iraq War, even twenty years later, may be in part structural. There is an increasingly dissolving or fuzzy line between the news-gathering parts of the media and opinion journalism, a border that has only gotten hazier in the American media ecology of the twenty-first century. There have always been fundamental differences in how these two parts of a newsroom function, and those differences remain. However, particularly as the news media continues to consolidate into ever larger

conglomerates, wiping out a lot of local news organizations in the process, and as the ever-expanding drive for greater profit translates into fewer resources put into expensive news bureaus around the world, the role and prominence of opinion journalism has grown. In the internet age, many of the new media innovations, from blogging to Substack newsletters, have also favored opinion journalism, and many prominent careers in today's journalism (think Glenn Greenwald or Heather Cox Richardson, though there are many others) have been forged more by the force of informed opinion than by the ability to report a story.

I say this as someone who comes from the scholarly world but who has in recent years also joined the world of professional journalism. Personally, I write more opinion journalism than reported stories, though I certainly have also been on the news-gathering side of the enterprise and have reported my share of original stories. But looking across the media landscape today, what I see is a media that does not seem to have learned from its mistakes in 2003, when it freely and gullibly went along with the false notion that Iraq had a stockpile of weapons of mass destruction. There was a kind of collective delusion around this issue then, and there is a collective delusion around this issue now, facilitated today, in part, I think, by the cultural tilt toward opinion journalism.

Consider, for example, recent comments by Richard Haass. Since 2003, Haass has been the president of the Council on Foreign Relations, an influential post in the American foreign policy establishment. Prior to this appointment, he was the former director of policy planning in Colin Powell's Department of State. He was, in other words, a key player in the run-up to the War in Iraq.

Recently, Haass wrote an opinion piece on the Iraq war and its anniversary, published online in *Project Syndicate*, which he summarized with the following tweet from 2023:

The US Govt & my boss at the time Colin Powell did not lie about WMD. The word "lie" involves intent. There was no intent; we got it wrong. We misinterpreted intelligence & assumed Saddam was hiding WMD when he was hiding his lack of WMD. No more. No less.²

You will forgive me if I call balderdash on this notion, and not just on the tweet but also on the article itself. One would think that Haass would have some regrets for destroying an overseas nation on the basis of phantom WMDs, a threat that he and his boss helped propagate at the United Nations Security Council. Instead, he suggests that U.S. decision-makers were, well, just doing their best. If the region was destabilized for at least a generation, if hundreds of thousands if not millions of lives were lost, if the environment was catastrophically ruined (perhaps beyond repair), well, it's not the fault of Richard Haass or Colin Powell or the American foreign policy establishment. They did what they could with the information they had.

Haass's position strikes me as delusional. The invasion of Iraq was always a choice and never a forgone conclusion. That choice, like all choices, comes with an ethics of responsibility. To avoid looking squarely at that responsibility is to accept delusion for reality.

David Frum has a similarly delusional article in the *Atlantic*.³ Frum was an influential thinker among the neocons of the Iraq war era. He coined the phrase Axis of Evil as a speechwriter for George W. Bush and was also the author, with Richard Perle, of *An End to Evil: How to Win the War on Terror*.⁴ (If the first part of that title—an end to evil—is not also delusional, I'm not sure what is.) In his 2023 *Atlantic* article, Frum says we can only guess how the Saddam Hussein story would have ended had the United States not invaded, but, he says, what happened next door in Syria is a clue.

The presumption behind such a claim strikes me not only as counterfactual but basically clueless, as if what happens in one country doesn't affect what happens in another that is right next door. The Iraq War had a profound effect on the destabilization of Syria, as the opposition quickly moved to Syria and operated a state within a state there, organizing much of the Iraqi resistance from Iraq's northern neighbor. Frum's proposition is an intellectual game that sees the different parts of the region as independent of each other but the behavior of Arabs as grossly predictable. In that regard, his intellectual exercise isn't just useless, but borders on Orientalist. Moreover, by letting the United States off the hook for the havoc it unleashed in the region for the last twenty years, his intellectual exercise is fundamentally delusional.

Similarly, we can go back to the beginnings of the Arab Spring. In 2010 and 2011, there were popular uprisings throughout the region, with a particularly important one in Egypt, the biggest country in the region in terms of population. In fact, there is a cliché that states that whatever happens in other Arab countries may not happen in Egypt, but whatever happens in Egypt will assuredly happen in the other Arab countries.

But of course, right after the Arab Spring happened, we soon started hearing from the same Iraq War Group—that is to say, former members of the Bush administration and its supporters for the invasion of Iraq. This cast of wishful war makers began penning essays and op-eds that appeared in various parts of the U.S. media, saying essentially that the Iraq War paved the way for the Arab Spring. Kanan Makiya's *New York Times*' op-ed was even titled "The Arab Spring Started in Iraq."⁵ Condoleezza Rice, Bush's national security advisor at the time of the invasion, told an interviewer in 2011 that the popular uprisings stemmed in part from the "freedom agenda" of George W. Bush's government. "The change in the conversation about the Middle East, where people now routinely talk about democratization is something that I'm very grateful for and I think we had a role in that," she said.⁶

Again, I think this is delusional. The Arab uprisings were formed by generations of repression, much of it backed by the United States. And seeing Iraq destroyed by invasion, Arab populations hardly saw Iraq as worthy of emulation, but instead saw the ongoing carnage and the social and ecological disasters as dire warnings.

Then, we can go back to the origins of the Iraq War itself. After the lies that launched the war were exposed, the *New York Times* staff finally offered some sort of soft apology for their role in priming the public for war.⁷ (Incidentally, it is shameful that the *New York Times*, which played such a prominent role in creating the public consensus for the war in 2003, did not publish an op-ed by an Iraqi about the war twenty years later.) The *Times* was in fact admitting to its own delusions, albeit with all kinds of caveats—blaming the Iraqi exiles for the lies more than its own paper for falling for them—that seemed to allow the paper to avoid the responsibility that it was ostensibly owning up to.

In fact, delusion and American warfare on Iraq may even go back as far as Operation Desert Storm, the 1991

Gulf War. At the time, French theorist Jean Baudrillard wrote a book titled *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place* because, as he argues, it didn't happen in our reality. It happened on our screens. It didn't happen on the ground, as in fighting and combat. It happened from the air, with jets dropping bombs from above. It was, in Baudrillard's view, a war that was not a war. It was a war that was a spectacle. It was a simulacrum of war. This may be the origin point of the delusions of the long view of the Iraq War.

Baudrillard is right to point to the ways in which war is viewed, represented, encountered, and experienced today. In the United States, some wars have gained more clarity as time passes. While people may disagree as to the reasons why, the American war in Vietnam is now largely seen as a tragedy and as a failure. But twenty years after the invasion of Iraq, the delusions that propped up that war not only continue but have actually strengthened. The lies about WMD in Iraq no longer hold water, but the idea that the war was a net-positive for the United States, Iraq, and the world—that idea, or delusion, continues. Why?

Taking responsibility requires coming face-to-face with one's actions, but that is certainly not what's happening here. Instead, our own exalted opinion of ourselves functions as a way for us to maintain our own delusions about ourselves, enabling the same catastrophic decisions to happen again and again in the future. Our delusions are an American danger, and not just to others. In our inability to see our actions for what they are, our delusions, like all delusions, are fundamentally a danger to ourselves.

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SHAFR SPOTLIGHTS

I have been interested in History as long as I can remember. I don't know what the spark was, but I continue to be fascinated with how people lived in other places and times, especially when I can read their mail. I got started on this path when I earned a B.A. from Temple University in 1975 and an M.A. from Penn State in 1977. After a short break to contemplate the realities of a depressed job market, I earned my Ph.D. from Temple University in 1986. It turned out that the Department of History at Temple was an ideal place to weather the economic storm lashing the profession in the late 1970s and early 1980s. In 1985, as I neared the completion of my dissertation, Temple rescued me from unemployment with an invitation to teach at their Tokyo campus. The next year, Temple came through again with a visiting appointment in Philadelphia. By then, the job market was improving. I landed a tenure-track position at Northeast Missouri State in 1987, moved to Villanova in 1989, and lived happily ever after.

I have published most often on American-East Asian relations in the twentieth century. In writing on that subject, I have explored the connections between domestic politics and foreign policy, the role of race in international affairs, and the function of collective memory in contemporary trans-Pacific relations. I have written four books, including *The African American Encounter with Japan and China* (2000), which won the Ferrell Prize and co-authored a fifth, *Implacable Foes: War in the Pacific, 1944-1945* (2017) with Waldo Heinrichs, which won the Bancroft Prize. My most recent book is *Unconditional: The Japanese Surrender in World War II* (2020). I am currently working on a multigenerational history of Benjamin Franklin's Japanese descendants.

I met my wife, Lisa Ross, at Penn State. We have two children, Sam (34) and Isabelle (29), both of whom are gainfully employed.

What are your favorite movies/TV shows of all time?

I will try to limit my list to movies that I will watch almost any time they are on. *Oh Brother Where Are Thou?*, *The Maltese Falcon*, *The Princess Bride*, *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?*, *The Great Escape*, *The Magnificent Seven*, *Young Frankenstein*, *Blazing Saddles*, and *A Night at the Opera*.

What was your most embarrassing/nerve-wracking/anxiety-producing professional moment?

I can't remember, but whatever it was, it has been overshadowed by even more embarrassing moments in my life outside of work.

You are exiled to a desert island and can only take five novels. What do you take and why?

Burr by Gore Vidal. Lisa Ross and I happened to both be reading it when we met at Penn State.

A Gentleman in Moscow by Amor Towles. Because it is a beautifully written story about someone drawing on their own resources to survive in difficult circumstances.

A Prayer for Owen Meany by John Irving. Under the circumstances, a book about loss, faith, and hope would come in handy.

Moo by Jane Smiley and *Straight Man* by Richard Russo. They are two of my favorite novels about academic life. They will remind me that there are worse things than being stranded on a desert island.

Bored of the Rings by the Harvard Lampoon. Because it still cracks me up and because the geniuses at *MAD* magazine did not write a novel.

If you could have dinner with any three historical figures, who would they be and why?

Groucho Marx, Stephen Jay Gould, and Beatrix Potter. They were wonderful writers and had multiple interests beyond their livelihoods.

What would you do if you won the \$500 million Powerball?

Retire, self-fund our long-term care, contribute to several charities, buy a country house with an apple orchard, and travel.

You have been given an unlimited budget and a time machine to organize a music festival. What bands or solo acts do you invite?

First, I would recreate the first concert I ever saw. It was at the Spectrum in Philadelphia, and it featured, and I am not making this up, Commander Cody and the Lost Planet Airmen, The Chambers Brothers, and Alice Cooper. I would also want to see the 1970s version of George Thoroughgood and the Delaware Destroyers at J.C. Dobbs, "the best rock and roll bar in Philadelphia, with just a hint of danger in the air." Finally, Bonnie Raitt and Freebo at Philadelphia's Dirty Frank's, recommended drink – beer in a bottle.

What are five things on your bucket list?

Win the \$500 million Powerball. (See above.)

What would you be doing if you were not an academic?

Oceanographer or private investigator.



Marc Gallicchio

I always have been interested in how Americans see themselves in the world and why. That question led me to the subject of wartime propaganda, which I investigated in *To Win the Peace: British Propaganda in the United States during World War II* (1997) and *Why America Fights: Patriotism and War Propaganda from the Philippines to Iraq* (2009).

After twenty-five years at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, I have retired from teaching history to become a full-time writer. I currently am working on two projects that are labors of love. The first is about the dispossession of Oneida Indian lands as told through the histories of my family's farm in Oneida, New York, and the Oneida/Mohawk family and my non-native family who called that place home. The second is a *festschrift* in honor of Walter LaFeber. Working with co-editors Doug Little and Richard Immerman, as well as with several of Walt's former undergraduate and graduate students, has been a joy.



Susan Brewer

What are your favorite movies/TV shows of all time?

The Lady Vanishes, Casablanca, The Night of the Hunter

What was your most embarrassing/nerve-wracking/anxiety-producing professional moment?

For my dissertation, I interviewed an elderly British journalist who mentioned while answering a question that he had interviewed Adolf Hitler in the early 1930s. I felt like my brain began to shut down because it only could think, "I am talking to someone who talked to Hitler." Naturally, I wanted to ask more about that, but the man seemed so frail I was worried he would not be able to make it through my prepared questions. So, I continued as planned and have always wondered if I made the right call.

You are exiled to a desert island and can take only five novels. What do you take and why?

This is a tough question because I love to read. I think I would take novels by Austen, Dickens, and Tolstoy because they are filled with characters that would keep me company.

If you could have dinner with any three historical figures, who would they be and why?

I would like to have dinner with the admired Oneida orator Good Peter (Agwelondongwas) and the Wolf Clan war chief Honyery Tehawenkaragwen so I could ask them why they allied with the Americans during the Revolutionary War and what they were thinking as they witnessed the United States and New York State violate their guarantees of Oneida lands. I also would like to have Abigail Adams there to weigh in on this matter and others.

What would you do if you won the \$500 million Powerball?

See bucket list and I would set up a fund to support study abroad or international travel for students at community colleges.

You have been given an unlimited budget and a time machine to organize a music festival. What bands or solo acts do you invite?

Johann Sebastian Bach, Frederic Chopin, Duke Ellington, Ella Fitzgerald, Carlos Santana, Aretha, and the Gipsy Kings.

What are five things on your bucket list?

Travel, climb mountains, have adventures with friends, hear more live music, see more art.

What would be doing if you were not an academic?

What I am doing now.

I received my Ph.D. in Peace Studies and US History from the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies at the University of Notre Dame in 2021. I hold a B.A. from Luther College and a Master of Theological Studies from Harvard Divinity School. From 2021 to 2023, I have served as the Visiting Assistant Professor of Peace and Conflict Studies at Colgate University. My favorite courses I have taught include “Practices of Peace & Conflict: War in Lived Experience” and an elective I designed called “Troublemakers or Peacemakers? The Youth, Peace, and Security Agenda from the Cold War to the Present.”

For the 2023-2024 academic year, I have been selected as a Rosenwald Postdoctoral Fellow in US Foreign Policy and International Security at Dartmouth’s John Sloan Dickey Center for International Understanding. I am grateful for this opportunity to work towards the completion of my first book manuscript tentatively titled, “The American Way of Child Development: Cold War Government Experiments in International Exchange Programs.” I have published in *Diplomatic History* and *Peace & Change*, and I have written a chapter in an edited volume on the state of the field of *Youth, Peace, and Security Studies* forthcoming with Routledge this year. My husband Ryan, a senior tax manager at PwC, and my daughter Geneva, who will be 8 months old in June, are very excited to make the move to Hanover this fall!



Anna Fett

What are your favorite TV shows and movies of all time?

Derry Girls (Season 2 Episode 1), *Fleabag* (Season 2 in its entirety), *Working Moms* (can't pick an episode let alone a season)

What's Up Doc? (an underappreciated Barbara Streisand gem), *The Sound of Music*, *Moulin Rouge*, *Tin Cup*, and *Talladega Nights: The Legend of Ricky Bobby* (What can I say? I love musicals, and I grew up in Texas.)

What was your most embarrassing/nerve-wracking/anxiety-producing professional moment?

Funny you should ask because it just happened last week! I was guest lecturing in a colleague’s class and completely blanked on his last name in front of his students. I had to refer to him as “you” for the entire hour and pretend I meant it.

You are exiled to a desert island and can only take five novels. What do you take and why?

Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, and *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (I believe this list needs no explanation, but I’m happy to debate which of the 7 you should take if forced to choose only 5.)

You have been given an unlimited budget and a time machine to organize a music festival. What bands or solo acts do you invite?

Idina Menzel, Kristen Chenoweth, Jonathan Groff, Renée Elise Goldsberry, and Darren Criss (Have I mentioned yet that I love musicals?)

What are five things on your bucket list?

Lots of traveling! Visiting Ireland, Croatia, Egypt, Japan, and Australia (in any possible order)

What would you be doing if you were not an academic?

Infant photography! I say this not because I have any training in photography whatsoever but because I adore working with newborns, including my own, during their first photoshoots.

I was born in Québec City, Canada. I got my Ph.D. from the University of Hawaii at Manoa. I'm currently completing the second edition of *Vietnam's American War: A History*, which should be out early next year. I'm editor of *The Cambridge History of the Vietnam War*, Volume III: Endings, also coming out in 2024. I published "The Indochinese Communist Party's Unfinished Revolution of 1945 and the Origins of Vietnam's 30-Year Civil War" in *Journal of Cold War Studies* in 2023. My next article, "U.S. Visitor Diplomacy in the Vietnam War" is forthcoming in *Past & Present* in August 2024.

I got interested in the Vietnam War watching *Rambo: First Blood Part II* during my last year of high school in Québec. I've been hooked on that conflict – and Rambo – ever since. I moved into my current position at San Diego State University in 2017, after living and teaching in Hawaii for twenty-five years. I'm here with my wife, Grace, and our cats Stella, Hiro, Dexter, all rescues. I paddle at Mission Bay on a 14' racing board 2-3 times weekly, and play hockey, as a goalie, 3 times weekly. I'm getting pretty good at the former, and still stink at but absolutely love the latter.

What are your favorite movies/TV shows of all time?

My favorite movies in terms of artistic value are, in that order, *Once Upon a Time in the West*, *Apocalypse Now* (the original, not the "redux," version), and *Lawrence of Arabia*. My go-to movies, the ones I watch over-and-over again because I can never decide what to select on Netflix, are *The Big Lebowski*, *Nacho Libre*, and *The Interview*. My father was a James Bond fan; I'm a James Bond fan.

What was your most embarrassing/nerve-wracking/anxiety-producing professional moment?

I got torn to shreds by a senior scholar after a presentation at one of the first professional conferences I attended. I was still a graduate student, and quite confident in my abilities before I presented. I felt sorry for myself for quite some time thereafter, but then realized that several points raised by the senior scholar were valid. I learned from that experience to be diligent in my research and writing, and humbler. It was by far the most humiliating of my professional experiences – and I've had a few, but also one of the most valuable.

You are exiled to a desert island and can only take five novels. What do you take and why?

I rarely read fiction because I feel guilty when I do. I'm very poorly read when it comes to novels and novelists. On those extremely rare occasions when I feel like reading fiction, I end up re-reading *Catch-22*. So, I would take that book with me. I would also bring *War and Peace*, which I started years ago but never finished. The older I get, the more I hate capitalism and the rich – bourgeois as I remain. So, with that in mind, Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club* would be third on my list. Gary Jennings' *Aztec* and Douglas Preston and Lincoln Child's *The Relic* would round up that list.

If you could have dinner with any three historical figures, who would they be and why?

I've always wanted to have a couple of beers with Stalin and ask who he thinks was responsible for starting the Cold War. I have an idea of what he's say, but I'd like to hear it from him. I think that experience would markedly enhance my professional credibility. Nikita Khrushchev, Mao Zedong, and Kim Il-sung also sound like they'd be fun people with whom to discuss history, global politics, and my love life over drinks and food.

What would you do if you won the \$500 million Powerball?

At our next department meeting, I'd tell each of my colleagues what I really think about them. Then, I would leave the meeting early, head over to my dean's office and then the university president's office, and do the same there. Before leaving the president's office, I would express my eagerness to endow the "Asselin Chair in Vietnam War Studies" to the tune of \$6 million and give Greg Daddis \$20 to film the reaction. Then I would buy some really nice linens for each my wife, my mother, my sister, and Daddis because that's just the kind of guy I am. I would use what's left to expedite the demise of capitalism with a view to bringing about a global socialist paradise.

You have been given an unlimited budget and a time machine to organize a music festival. What bands or solo acts do you invite?

Honeymoon Suite, Platinum Blonde, Rush, and Mötley Crüe. The first two were my favorite bands as a kid. Neither made it big outside Canada, unlike Rush, which is the reason SHAFR members except Andrew Preston never heard of them.

What are five things on your bucket list?

Safari in Botswana; visit Persepolis; travel through Uzbekistan; get into the archives of the Central Committee of the Vietnamese communist Party; win the Stanley Cup.

What would you be doing if you were not an academic?

I'd be a university administrator. No experience, brains, or sense of common decency required. It's right up my alley.



Pierre Asselin



Augusta Dell'Omo

For as long as I can remember, I have been interested in history, but my interest solidified in high school. My sophomore year we had a “presidential debate” where our teacher assigned us a president and we had to debate that they were – in fact – the greatest president ever. I championed dark horse candidate James A. Garfield and ultimately bested John F. Kennedy (which our teacher overruled because it seemed an egregious victory for a 200 day presidency). Nevertheless, these moments solidified my love of history. Now, my work focuses on global white supremacist movements, specifically in the United States and South Africa in the 1980s and 1990s. Recently, my work appeared in *Diplomatic History* and *Passport*, and I am currently working on the manuscript for my first book while Postdoctoral Fellow at the Center for Presidential History at Southern Methodist University. While I have no pets of my own, I am a dog aunt and dog sister to my family’s two pups. They – along with my parents and brother – live out in sunny Southern California and I try and visit them as often as I can.

What are your favorite movies/TV shows of all time?

As a lover of television and film this is too hard to choose, so I'm going to go with what immediately comes to mind. Still, I'm sure I'm missing something. For tv shows – *Veep*, *Hacks*, and *Money Heist*. For movies – *Grand Budapest Hotel*, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, and *the Dark Knight*.

What was your most embarrassing/nerve-wracking/anxiety-producing professional moment?

My most anxiety-producing professional moment was my admitted student visit to the University of Texas at Austin – where I ended up getting my PhD (Hook ‘em!) I did my PhD straight out of undergrad and I remember feeling so terrified that I could not even get out of the car to go to the dinner – which was before any of the “official” activities took place! After nearly throwing up in the parking lot, and realizing I could not actually sit in the car forever, I mustered up the courage to go inside. Fortunately, everyone was incredibly lovely!

You are exiled to a desert island and can only take five novels. What do you take and why?

I'm bringing the first four books of Brandon Sanderson's “The Stormlight Archive,” series – *The Way of Kings*, *Words of Radiance*, *Oathbringer*, and *Rhythm of War*. I'm bringing these books because they are some of my absolute favorite high fantasy novels – with incredible characters – and each is about a thousand pages long so I'll have plenty of material. I'm also going to bring Viet Thanh Nguyen's *The Sympathizer* because it is my favorite book of all time – its viciously funny and an absolutely brutal – and brilliant – satire.

If you could have dinner with any three historical figures, who would they be and why?

Anthony Bourdain, to hear about his travels and culinary experiences; Ida B. Wells, to learn about her activism and scholarship; and Betty White, to laugh with her.

What would you do if you won the \$500 million Powerball?

Off the bat, I'm giving most of it away, specifically to local organizations in the South working on economic equity and democratic governance. For myself, I'm buying a house and my parents a house in Southern California where I can go to the beach every day. I'd also only fly first class for the rest of my life and lie flat every single time I fly internationally!

You have been given an unlimited budget and a time machine to organize a music festival. What bands or solo acts do you invite?

If given an unlimited budget to organize a music festival, I am absolutely trying to get Beyoncé and Lady Gaga to headline together and finally give us part two of “Telephone.” I'm also inviting some of my favorite current artists like Bad Bunny, Doja Cat, and Dua Lipa.

What are five things on your bucket list?

1. Visit Japan
2. Purchase a physical copy of my book from a bookstore
3. Buy a home (thanks un-affordable housing!)
4. Climb Mt. Kilimanjaro
5. Attend the World Cup

What would you be doing if you were not an academic?

If I was not an academic, I'd have wanted to be a doctor for a professional sports team – I could see an alternate reality version of Dr. Dell'Omo as an orthopedic surgeon for the Pittsburgh Steelers!

2023 SHAFR Conference Prize Announcements

At this year's awards presentation at the SHAFR Conference, we recognized some of the best scholarship of the previous year, determined by some of SHAFR's hardest working volunteers on our prize committees.



This year's **Betty Miller Unterberger Dissertation Prize** committee—chaired by Megan Threlkeld and including Nicole Anslower and Karine Walther (pictured with the winner to the left)—awarded this year's prize to **Samantha Payne**, who earned her Ph.D. from Harvard University in 2022 (under the direction of Sven Beckert) and is currently an Assistant Professor of History at the College of Charleston. In her dissertation, "The Last Atlantic Revolution: Reconstruction and the Struggle for Democracy in the Americas, 1861-1912," Dr. Payne argues that white elites in the United States, Cuba, and Brazil responded to the revolutionary crisis of the U.S. Civil War by collaborating on a white supremacist legal regime to ensure Black exclusion from democratic politics. Based on archival research in three languages and demonstrating an impressive command of scholarship from multiple countries, Dr. Payne's work successfully challenges the notion that Reconstruction in the United States was a "unique and unparalleled" experiment

in democracy, showing instead that it was rooted in the Black Atlantic, born of the collective experience of Afro-descendants across the Americas.

The members of the Unterberger Prize committee also awarded an Honorable Mention to **Amanda Waterhouse**, who earned her Ph.D. from Indiana University in 2022 under the direction of Nick Cullather. Dr. Waterhouse's dissertation, "Grassroots Architects: Planning, Protest, and U.S. Foreign Aid in Cold War Colombia," persuasively argues that architecture was a form of U.S. aid during the Cold War, used in conjunction with Colombian officials to control dissent and maintain public order. Drawing on a wide range of archival sources and oral histories, she shows, however, that these efforts instead gave rise to a grassroots movement by university students to push back against that public order.



Ji Soo Hong of Brown University is the winner of this year's **Marilyn Blatt Young Dissertation Completion Award**. The committee—chaired by Tore Olsson and including Monica Kim and Kate Burlingham—found this dissertation project unusually original and innovative. SHAFR Vice President Mitch Lerner (pictured with the winner) made the award. "Business of Détente: Petroleum, Petrochemicals, and the Making of U.S.-USSR Economic Relations, 1956-1982" examines the decades after World War II and explores how the United States and Soviet Union became both major extractors and refiners of petroleum and increasingly devoted to producing synthetic materials—particularly plastics—with that oil. As it turns out, this mutual interest in extracting and processing petrochemicals eclipsed the seemingly insurmountable distinctions between capitalism and communism. Ji Soo Hong's unusually original and innovative dissertation shows how U.S.-Soviet cooperation, trade, and exchange in the field of synthetic materials broke down barriers

between the two and ultimately made possible the 1970s experiment of détente. Like other scholars have done recently, Hong reveals that the two superpowers shared a tremendous deal in their economic and ecological outlook and that acknowledging their cooperation is essential to understanding humanity's environmental transformations of the twentieth century. The award committee was unanimous in their admiration for the

originality of Hong's project and her wide-reaching language skills in Russian, German, and the technical prose of petroleum experts, alongside her strengths in crafting an engaging and persuasive narrative. This dissertation, once completed and revised, promises to become a vital book in U.S., Russian, Cold War, and environmental history.

Jaeyoung Ha, a graduate student at the University of California, San Diego, received Honorable Mention for the Young Fellowship. His dissertation project, entitled "Frontier above the Clouds: Trans-Pacific Development, Colonization, and the Rehabilitation of South Korean Mountains, 1945-1972," examines the post-World War II effort by U.S. technical experts to increase humanity's agricultural output. They did not merely target the verdant lowlands, valleys, and plains that provided most of humanity's agricultural output but were also attracted to mountainous highlands, which they saw as both potential bastions of anti-communism and vital sources of industrial raw materials. This was especially apparent in South Korea, where upland development projects were particularly transformative. Jaeyoung Ha's nuanced and ground-breaking dissertation reveals how U.S. technocrats and their South Korean allies relocated a vast number of highland subsistence farmers and sought to forcefully convert them into miners who would expand South Korea's industrial manufacturing. This effort built both on Japanese colonial precedent and on the U.S.'s own practices of reordering mountain life in the West and southern Appalachia during the first half of the twentieth century. As the first but hardly the last upland development project in East Asia, the experience in South Korea's mountains rippled outward in the years that followed. The award committee was deeply impressed by the novelty and originality of Ha's research and by the rich array of primary sources he is using to tell that story. We expect that this will become a vital addition to Korean history, Cold War history, the history of the U.S. in the world, and development studies.



The **Stuart L. Bernath Scholarly Article Prize** was awarded to **Emilie Connolly's** "Fiduciary Colonialism: Annuities and Native Dispossession in the Early United States," from *The American Historical Review*. The committee—chaired by Alex Beasley and including Theresa Keeley (pictured below with the Honorable Mention winner) and Mattias Fibiger—found it an innovative and forcefully argued reassessment of the mechanisms by which the U.S. gained control over Native land and governance in the early republic. Connolly examines federal administration of annuities paid to Native nations, which were the form of compensation offered for some Native land that was not expropriated by pure force. As Connolly shows, this compensation was not a one-time payment but rather a prolonged commitment to pay over a period of many years. The annuity system "endowed federal officials with the discretion to decide how, where, and

if each installment would be disbursed," in the process "providing the levers to pry Indigenous people from their homelands and compel their migration." The annuity relationship, imagined as payment negotiated between sovereign nations, became a means to shrink Native land claims and, ultimately, undermine Native sovereignty altogether within the "non-violent" context of economic exchange. This framework enriches our understanding of American settler colonialism and Native American history while also suggesting new avenues of research for imperial relationships outside of North America.

Samantha Payne's "A General Insurrection in the Countries with Slaves': The US Civil War and the Origins of an Atlantic Revolution, 1861-1866," from *Past & Present* received Honorable Mention for the Bernath Article Prize. It shows the far-reaching political implications of the U.S. Civil War within the slave societies of Cuba and Brazil. During the war, slave-owners in these countries (rightly) feared that the war in the U.S. threatened their own institution of slavery, and state officials worried about a revolution led by enslaved people that would jeopardize the nations themselves. Upon receiving news of the war in the United States, enslaved Brazilians and Cubans began to flee plantations in larger numbers and to organize revolts, expecting that the upheaval in the U.S. would make abolition within their own nations more possible. Brazilian and Cuban elites ultimately passed "gradual emancipation laws," or "freedom of the womb" legislation, to ensure the freedom of any future descendants of enslaved people. Payne bridges the divide between earlier generations of scholars, who argued for the causality of the U.S. Civil War in prompting these reforms among the elites, and more recent work from social historians, who emphasized the role of local enslaved people's demands in forcing concessions from slave-owners and state officials. As Payne shows, "the end of the Civil War precipitated the abolition of slavery in Cuba and Brazil because of the actions of" the enslaved people, who were themselves inspired by the news coming from the United States. In making this case, Payne demonstrates the effect of faraway developments on the thought and action of subaltern actors in Brazil and Cuba, compellingly integrating diplomatic/international and social/cultural history.



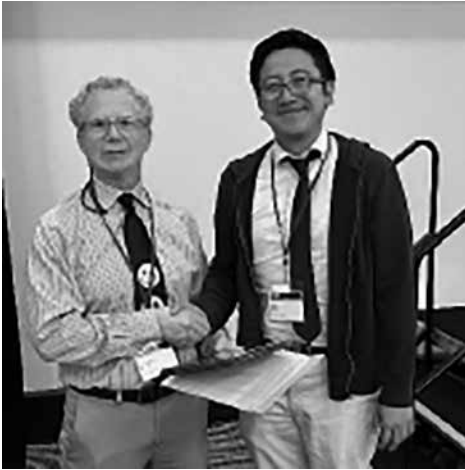
The **Stuart L. Bernath Book Prize** is awarded to the best first book in the field. This year's committee—chaired by Gretchen Heefner and including Colleen Woods and David Milne—makes the award to **Nicholas Mulder's** *The Economic Weapon: The Rise of Sanctions as a Tool of Modern War*, which is an incisive, revelatory history of the rise of sanctions as a tool of war and diplomacy. Focusing primarily on 1914 to 1945, Mulder demonstrates, in compelling prose, how sanctions come to be accepted as an essential instrument of "peacekeeping" and charts the varied consequences of this turn. The rise of the United States to pre-eminence normalized and widened the use of sanctions, weaponizing interdependence in a global economic system the United States devised and dominates. But a major theme that Mulder teases out is the sharp disconnect, as he describes it, between "effects" and "efficacy." This profound and ambitious book—

published by Yale University Press—deepens our understanding of the way the U.S. deploys its non-military, yet brutalizing, power and critiques the economic determinism that has led proponents of sanctions to exaggerate their coercive impact, again and again.

Honorable Mention for the Bernath Book Prize was also awarded to **Tessa Winkelmann's** *Dangerous Intercourse: Gender and Interracial Relations in the American Colonial Philippines, 1898–1946*. This elegantly written and deeply researched exploration of interracial relationships in the American colonial Philippines traces interracial relationships from the outset of U.S. colonial conquest through the end of colonial rule in 1946. Winkelmann convincingly demonstrates how "transgressions of the sexual color line" worked to consolidate U.S. imperial rule. Though dangerous to the racial order that buttressed colonial rule, she shows that interracial sex could be strategically managed by the colonial state and society to soften the violence and exploitation at the heart of colonial rule. While Winkelmann's account of the



gendered relations of power in the colonial Philippines is consistently attentive to the different consequences, particularly for Filipinas, of interracial intercourse, *Dangerous Intercourse* is ultimately an incisive critique of the “liberal justificatory logics of empire” that continue to shape relations between the United States and the Philippines.



The 2023 **Michael H. Hunt Prize for International History** is awarded to **Victor Seow** of Harvard University for his book *Carbon Technocracy: Energy Regimes in Modern East Asia* (by SHAFR Vice President Mitch Lerner is the photo below). The prize committee of Max Paul Friedman (chair), Jeremy Rich, and Katharina Rietzler found Dr. Seow’s book to be a highly original study emphasizing the centrality of energy extraction to questions of international politics, war, and diplomacy. The book blends a transnational history of science and technology with political economy, producing a beautifully written account of techno-utopian modernization projects surrounding Fushun, the largest coal mine in East Asia, that moves effortlessly from the global to the local. Seow depicts a wide range of actors, writing with a humane sensibility about the mining experience, discovering unexpected evidence of resistance and autonomy in the silences and allusions of the diverse evidentiary seams

he excavates to yield their valuable material. He ranges widely across sources such as technical reports, novels, diaries, and correspondence, engaging scholarly debates on global mining frontiers and coercive labor regimes in imperial contexts. The result is not only a transnational history of mining and energy’s impact on politics, but also a new way of looking at the continuities among radically conflictual Chinese and Japanese states that claimed control of Fushun across the twentieth century. The committee congratulates Dr. Seow on his achievement.

The **Robert H. Ferrell Book Prize** is awarded to reward distinguished scholarship in the history of American foreign relations, broadly defined. This year’s committee—Sarah Snyder (chair, pictured with the winner), Mario Del Pero, and Bernadette Whelan—awarded the prize to **Elisabeth Leake** for *Afghan Crucible: The Soviet Invasion and the Making of Modern Afghanistan*, published by Oxford University Press. This timely work examines the history of the Soviet invasion and occupation of Afghanistan from a global perspective. Each chapter represents a deep examination of the conflict from multiple perspectives, and her study reveals the connected histories of great power competition, anti-colonial modernity, postcolonial statehood, international relations, and Cold War realities. It shows, once more, how outside Europe the Cold War often acted as a multiplier of violence. *Afghan Crucible* is a richly detailed narrative based on extensive research in Russian, American, Indian, Afghan, British, and United Nations records. These diverse sources enable Leake to illuminate decision-making by the Iranian and Pakistani governments as well as the Carter and Reagan administrations, the response of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to the displacement of Afghans into Pakistan, and debates at the U.N. General Assembly and Security Council. As one committee member said, *Afghan Crucible* is “international history at its best.”



The 2023 **Anna K. Nelson Prize for Archival Excellence** honors an archivist who has demonstrated both exemplary expertise as well as outstanding and dedicated service over time to the community of scholars of the history of U.S. foreign relations and international history. With this year’s award SHAFR’s Historical Documentation Committee—Sarah Snyder (chair—pictured to the left with the winner), Hannah Gurman, Tom Zeiler, Kelly

McFarland, and Jim Brennan—chose to acknowledge an archivist who has long served SHAFR members—**Dr. Wendy Chmielewski**. A scholar of women’s history and peace movements, Dr. Chmielewski is honored for her leadership as the George R. Cooley Curator of the Swarthmore College Peace Collection for over twenty years. In that role, she oversaw the expansion the collection’s records, made detailed finding aids for many of them available on the internet, highlighted many of its print and graphic materials on its website, and added a public history component to this archival repository. In these ways and others, she has been a driving force in making the Swarthmore College Peace Collection an indispensable resource for scholars of the American peace movement and the history of U.S. foreign relations more broadly. Beyond the peace collection at Swarthmore, Dr. Chmielewski has also been a member of the advisory committee of the American Museum for Peace, the Jane Addams Papers Project at Ramapo College, and the Centre for Peace History at the University of Sheffield. SHAFR recognizes her for this work and her multiple contributions to the study of U.S. foreign relations.



The **Peter L. Hahn Distinguished Service Award** recognizes a long-time SHAFR member “whose service demonstrates a deep commitment to the organization’s mission of promoting and disseminating” foreign relations scholarship, and for mentorship, teaching, and other important service. This year’s committee—chaired by Mel Leffler and also including Kristin Hoganson and Frank Costigliola (pictured with the winner)—makes the award to **Robert K. Brigham**, the Shirley Ecker Boskey Professor of History and International Relations at Vassar College.

Professor Brigham has amassed an impressive record of service to SHAFR over the decades. He has served on Council, as Program Committee Co-Chair, on the Board of Editors of *Diplomatic History*, on the advisory board for *Passport*, on the Development and Membership committees, and on the Myrna Bernath and Norman and Laura Graebner prize committees. Among Professor Brigham’s most significant contributions has been his outstanding mentorship of undergraduates at Vassar College. An award-winning teacher, he has

inspired generations of students to study foreign relations history, leading them to enter the field in a diversity of ways, including the academy and public service. Professor Brigham’s former students have not only become SHAFR members, but have also distinguished themselves as important contributors, thereby helping ensure the future vibrancy of the organization. For his vision, dedication, and hard work, the committee is proud to recognize Bob with the Peter L. Hahn Distinguished Service Award.

Congratulations!

SHAFR Council meeting

June 8, 2023 via Zoom, noon-4 p.m. US Eastern

Present: Mary Ann Heiss, chair; Shaun Armstead, Laura Belmonte, Megan Black, Emily Conroy-Krutz, Sarah Miller-Davenport, Jessica Gienow-Hecht, Gretchen Heefner, Daniel Immerwahr, Mitch Lerner, Andrew Preston, Vanessa Walker, Molly Wood, Kelsey Zavelo

Attending: Amy Sayward (ex officio), Faith Bagley, Elizabeth Ferguson, Anne Foster, Petra Goedde, Jeannette Jones, Kaete O'Connell, Jason Parker

Introductory Matters

SHAFR President Ann Heiss started the meeting. Amy Sayward reviewed motions passed by email:

- Approval of January 2023 Council minutes
- Approval of Ohio State/Columbus as the host of the 2026 SHAFR Conference
- Unanimous approval of "Recommendations for Reform of Executive Order on National Security Information Policy"
- Unanimous approval of AHA statement opposing Florida House bill 999

Sayward also reviewed Council's resolution of thanks for the service of the following retiring committee/task force members, noting with admiration SHAFR members' willingness to donate their time to the organization:

- Jeannette Eileen Jones, Program Committee Chair
- Jason Parker, Program Committee Chair
- Miguel Bandeira Jéronimo, Program Committee
- Nemata Amelia Ibitayo Blyden, Program Committee
- Brian Clardy, Program Committee
- Jeff Crean, Program Committee
- Andrew DeRoche, Program Committee
- Carolyn Eisenberg, Program Committee
- David Ekbladh, Program Committee
- Thomas Field, Program Committee
- Jacob Hamblin, Program Committee
- Kimberly D. Hill, Program Committee
- Margaret Huettl, Program Committee
- Christopher J. Lee, Program Committee
- S. R. Joey Long, Program Committee
- Amanda McVety, Program Committee
- Arwen P. Mohun, Program Committee
- Aaron Coy Moulton, Program Committee
- Stephen Tuffnell, Program Committee
- Laura Belmonte, Ways & Means Committee Chair
- David Engerman, Ways & Means Committee
- Daniel Margolies, Development Committee Chair
- Shaun Armstead, Graduate Student Committee Chair
- Dexter Fergie, Graduate Student Committee
- Gretchen Heefner, Stuart L. Bernath Book Prize Committee Chair
- Alex Beasley, Stuart L. Bernath Scholarly Article Prize Committee Chair
- Megan Threlkeld, Dissertation Prize Committee Chair
- Sarah Snyder, Robert H. Ferrell Book Prize Committee Chair
- Bernadette Whelan, Robert H. Ferrell Book Prize Committee
- Melvyn Leffler, Peter L. Hahn Distinguished Service Award Committee Chair
- Max Paul Friedman, Michael H. Hunt Prize Committee Chair
- Lucy Salyer, Myrna Berthan Award Committee Chair
- Tore Olsson, Marilyn B. Young Dissertation Completion Fellowship Committee Chair
- Amy Offner, National Coalition for History Delegate
- Matt Connelly, Task Force on Advocacy Chair
- John McNay, Task Force on Advocacy
- Amy Offner, Task Force on Advocacy
- Cindy Ewing, Task Force on Advocacy

- Sam Lebovic, Task Force on Advocacy
- Karma Palzom, Task Force on Advocacy
- Yael Schacher, Task Force on Advocacy
- Brian Cuddy, Task Force on Internationalization Chair
- Sean Fear, Task Force on Internationalization Chair
- Jessica Gienow-Hecht, Task Force on Internationalization
- Hideaki Kami, Task Force on Internationalization
- Carlo Patti, Task Force on Internationalization
- Vanni Pettina, Task Force on Internationalization
- Doug Rossinow, Task Force on Internationalization
- Jayita Sarkar, Task Force on Internationalization

Conference Matters

Sayward brought forward the issue of having to distribute the awards traditionally given in January even though SHAFR Council voted to discontinue the luncheon at the American Historical Association. Sayward said that the awards would still be disbursed in January but celebrated at the June conference. She suggested either having a free-standing awards ceremony at the June conference or splitting the announcements between the two luncheons at the conference. Council members suggested ways to make the awards ceremony more efficient so as not to impinge unnecessarily on the time allotted for the Presidential and Bernath addresses—specifically having a single person narrate the awards and having the photographs taken after the luncheon with the committee chair and President. These ideas will be implemented at the June 2024 conference, which will be the first to feature the Bernath Lecture as the second luncheon speaker.

Jason Parker and Jeannette Eileen Jones (Program Committee Chairs) and Kaete O’Connell (SHAFR’s Conference Coordinator) joined the meeting to give updates on the 2023 conference. Parker gave an overview of their goals: to make this conference the most “graduate student friendly” SHAFR conference ever, to develop connections with additional institutions (also setting relationships for future work), and to bring back previous SHAFR members as well as attracting new ones, especially from the DC area. Jones added that they also wanted to reach out to smaller institutions to continue growing the SHAFR community. One of the Program Committee’s unfulfilled goals this year was to have more African participation, but a combination of the Association for the Study of the Worldwide African Diaspora (ASWAD) annual conference meeting in Ghana this summer and strained financial resources thwarted that plan. However, she did indicate a desire to more deeply and consistently engage the graduate students and faculty of Howard University in SHAFR, especially in the years when the conference is in DC. O’Connell updated Council on the conference numbers: more than \$26,000 in sponsorships, 436 currently registered (with traditional DC conference having a total of 475-535 participants), and over 100 tickets sold for both the presidential and keynote luncheons—with about fifteen gifted tickets to be raffled to graduate students. Thanks to generous sponsorships, the cost of graduate student tickets for the cruise social event was able to stay at \$25, and baseball tickets have sold out. Issues that O’Connell noted for Council’s consideration are the many late cancellations by program participants (errata sheet is at two pages) and the cost of AV services at the hotel—with just three rooms outfitted with a projector the cost for the coming conference is over \$40,000. Sayward expressed her thanks for the amount of fundraising done by the Program Committee Chairs, which was especially notable since this work has not traditionally been done for DC conferences. Parker and Jones then left the meeting.

O’Connell then gave updates on the 2024 conference in Toronto. She had recently met with the Local Arrangements Committee (Carol Chin, Tim Sayle, and Cindy Ewing) to discuss venues and accommodations. Potential hurdles for the upcoming conference include that the campus is spread out, which may cause some transportation issues, especially as the conference sessions and luncheons cannot be held in the same building. She was happy to report that conference-goers will have three different housing options at different price points: nice dormitory accommodations with shared bathrooms for \$50 per night, rooms at Kimpton hotel across from campus (less than a ten-minute walk), and rooms at the Sheraton, closer to downtown, which requires use of the Metro. The opening plenary and welcome reception will be in Hart Hall, which is a very nice campus location. O’Connell then left the meeting.

Sayward then provided information about the plans and contracts for conferences from 2025 through 2027, emphasizing the financial costs for the 2025 and 2027 hotel conferences as well as the generous monetary contribution that Ohio State campus partners have already made to hosting the 2026 conference. She suggested that campus conferences may be financially more sustainable following 2027, especially in light of both AV costs and service charges. Others highlighted that campus conferences require campus partners willing and able to partner with SHAFR to mount such a conference. Jessica Gienow-Hecht asked about the possibility of a Europe-based SHAFR Conference. Sayward provided insight based on the Cologne-based conference proposal from several years back, identifying previous Council concerns with the difficulty of scheduling what is traditionally a late June conference when European universities are still in session, a different model/timeline for reserving European hotel spaces, and increased travel costs for most SHAFR participants. However, she stated that questions about exhibitors might be lessened by the fact that many publishers now use the conference primarily for networking rather than selling books (which is more complicated for U.S.-based publishers in a non-U.S. space). Sayward concluded that a Europe-based conference was a possibility.

Financial Matters

Sayward presented her mid-fiscal year financial report with proposed budget for the 2023-24 fiscal year. She explained that she had listed expenses up to the end of May and the approved budget but also what she expected the fiscal year’s expenditures to be, which is challenging when SHAFR’s largest expenditure (the conference) has not yet occurred. She highlighted the parts of the budget that would be affected in the future by decisions before Council at this meeting as well as changes made in line with recent Council decisions. She pointed out that a relatively small deficit was expected for both this fiscal year as well as next fiscal year, which was something that Council needed to consider in making its decisions later in the agenda.

Mitch Lerner then gave an update on SHAFR’s investment portfolio based on a meeting with the TIAA endowment manager and David Engerman, SHAFR’s endowment liaison on the Ways & Means Committee. He stated that the meeting had alleviated some of his previous operational concerns but had raised additional procedural matters that will be discussed with Ways & Means. He stated that Council may have to make a decision about whether it wants to more closely manage and oversee the TIAA investment decisions made for the endowment.

Laura Belmonte, chair of the Ways & Means Committee, then provided Council with the recommendations of that committee. She pointed out that Council had voted in 2020 to raise membership rates but did not enact that decision due to the pandemic. At this point, Ways & Means recommends that Council adopt a substantive membership increase for regular membership from \$60 to \$90—while maintaining the reduced and student membership rates as they are. Ways & Means also recommended an increase in regular conference rates from \$100 to \$140—again maintaining the rate for graduate students and those who are precariously employed. She pointed out that the Conference Committee had provided a chart comparing SHAFR's membership and conference rates to other, similar organizations, showing that SHAFR's rates were currently among the lowest and that even the increase would put SHAFR rates in the lower range compared to similar organizations. The extra revenue generated (projected at about \$20,000) won't solve all of SHAFR's financial issues, but it is a start in the right direction.

Andrew Preston pointed out that the projected revenue depends on the assumption that all members will remain in the organization, paying the higher rate, despite the fact that some may choose to drop their membership and/or conference participation, especially in light of historic inflation rates and reduced university funding opportunities. Sayward reported that SHAFR has been able to maintain a relatively high membership mark that was established when the 2021 virtual conference was available free to members. Heiss stated that the present proposal shows a commitment to nurturing new scholars while also accounting for the increase in expenses that SHAFR is already seeing. It was also suggested that SHAFR might consider increasing its endowment draw from the current conservative policy of drawing no more than 3% per year to a slightly larger percentage to meet current and future needs. Belmonte also added that after the 2027 conference (which is already under contract), Virginia Tech might be able to offer a campus conference model for SHAFR, with only the need to contract hotel rooms. The motion from Ways & Means to increase the membership rate passed by a vote of 12-0-1; and the motion to increase conference registration rates passed by a vote of 13-0-0.

The second recommendation from Ways & Means was to support the proposal from the Committee on Women in SHAFR to host an annual book workshop that would be offered in-person and virtually in alternating years, providing small stipends to the mentors. Council voted 13-0-0 in favor of this motion.

Publication Matters

Council then reviewed the written reports provided by the editors of *Passport* and *The SHAFR Guide*. No action was requested or taken on these reports before Council members took a break.

Following the break, Council was joined by the editors of *Diplomatic History*, Petra Goedde and Anne Foster. Goedde reviewed highlights from their written report, specifically the continuing high quality of articles and submissions (especially from abroad) and the resolution of production issues that had previously been reported. Submissions coming from abroad that are not primarily English-speaking still have lower rates of acceptance, but there has been a larger number of submissions coming on pre-1945 topics. There has been a decline in the overall number of submissions (likely connected to the pandemic), and the proportion of women authors is still too low. All of this highlights the need to continue to be proactive in recruiting submissions and having roundtables in process should additional content be needed.

Discussion then turned to the process of renewal for the editors. Sayward reminded Council that its practice is to review the editors in year four (now) in order to decide whether or not to continue the editors for an additional five-year term. Goedde and Foster stated that they had started negotiations with their institutions, which both indicated conditional willingness to continue serving as the home to the *Diplomatic History* editorial offices. They had provided a proposal to Council for continuing that included their editorial vision and their proposal to maintain the current structure of the editorial office. Their biggest concern was the increased institutional expenses, including the increased cost for editorial assistants at Temple under their new contract. Goedde did state that Temple saw the value in housing the journal.

Heiss then turned discussion to the suggestions from the editors about the newest appointments to the editorial board. There was some discussion of the need for international members, especially given the rising number of non-U.S. submissions. The set of proposed editorial board nominees passed 13-0-0.

Elizabeth Ferguson from Oxford University Press then joined Council. Since Oxford's contract is also up for renewal, she highlighted potential terms for the contract renewal with Oxford. She noted the rise in prices caused by inflation, which has impacted library budgets and other revenue. Oxford is anticipating that an increase in costs of 15% for this year as well as an increase in open access, which impacts how subscriptions are sold and total revenues. One change that Oxford had already proposed was a shift to a fixed rate of increase for office support rather than the current connection to the CPI (consumer price index). Although Oxford had earlier suggested the possibility of an increased subscription rate for SHAFR members, they are now thinking about a different price structure, which would only charge those requesting paper copies of the journal. Another possibility would be to shift from a guaranteed minimum royalty for the journal to a profit-sharing arrangement.

Ferguson also shared that Oxford is developing a system to start tracking some demographic information (disaggregated from authors), which will help journals understand gaps in their recruited authors. Ferguson, Foster, and Goedde then left the meeting.

Sayward highlighted for Council that SHAFR is now facing potentially higher editorial office expenses and lower revenue from Oxford. The Oxford contract is set to expire at the end of 2024, but it requires one year's notice of non-renewal. The last time that Council sought a publisher, two people were appointed to negotiate and bring the offer back to Council, and Heiss intends to follow a similar procedure moving forward. A Council member asked how we could learn if there were better offers, and Sayward explained that a request for proposals (RFP) would have to be issued first. Council also discussed the question of an additional cost for print copies of the journal and whether or not that would hurt our membership numbers. Sayward suggested that since half of membership does not currently request a print copy, SHAFR might pay the total cost as it currently does. Council members also expressed concern about the significant increase in operational costs for the current editorial set-up and discussed potential ways to trim costs, including publishing one fewer issue per year. Consensus was that Council needs to have a solid proposal as soon as possible from Oxford in order to make its decisions. To that end, Molly Wood moved and Vanessa Walker seconded a motion to empower the President to obtain from Oxford a solid proposal no later than August 1st that will serve as the basis of Council's decision at its September meeting; the motion passed 13-0-1.

Discussion then turned to the Electronic Communications Co-Editors' report. Council's initial two-year commitment to this position will end with this calendar year, so Council had been provided with the initial MOA. Sayward highlighted that they have worked well within

the podcast budget provided by Council and were moving forward on the website redesign (copy of contract provided to Council), but other areas have not seen much advancement, specifically electronic programming and appointments to their editorial board. Council members believed that this matter was best considered at its September meeting, when other budgetary and editorial decisions will be made, along with a proposal from the current co-editors about their vision for moving forward. Sayward explained that the ADA accessibility guidelines for websites had been provided to Council for their information and to the web redesigner for implementation within the bounds of the MemberClicks website.

Committee and Director Reports

Sayward reviewed the IT Director's report, specifically the question of cyber insurance, which had been prompted by a disclaimer on SHAFR's annual policy that cyber insurance was not included. Although MemberClicks and Payscape are the home of SHAFR members' data, Council has not talked through what its liability might be in case of a breach of either. Council requested additional information for its January meeting.

Kelsey Zavalo and Shaun Armstead gave an oral report from the Graduate Student Committee. They reported on their work and presentations related to the impact of COVID on graduate programs as well as their work with the Program Committee Chairs to make this year's conference the most "grad-friendly" SHAFR conference ever—including a book raffle, tote bags, and coffee vouchers. Current projects include organizing a series of virtual townhalls for graduate students throughout the year and meeting with the co-chairs of the Development Committee to see how graduate student ideas might be prioritized within the work of the committee, including enhancing the dissertation completion fellowship yearly amount, restoring the second dissertation completion fellowship, and expanding the parameters of research fellowships. Council suggested that future book raffles might include books donated by members and prize-winning books donated by the press.

Sayward reviewed for Council the suggestions from the Committee on Access, Representation, and Equity (CARE) provided in a Zoom call ahead of Council. One concrete suggestion was providing the ability in MemberClicks for a member to purchase a membership for someone else. There was general consensus that this should be set up ahead of the next renewal cycle.

Heiss then highlighted issues with the future of the Task Force on Advocacy and the Task Force on Internationalization, both of which are scheduled to expire at the end of this calendar year. The Task Force on Advocacy was created to advocate for additional resources for NARA (U.S. National Archives and Records Administration), but the one proposal that it sent to the membership was not connected to NARA but to broader federal expenditure questions. There also have not been reports from this task force provided to Council for the past two cycles. The Task Force on Internationalization, however, has assembled a survey (which Council reviewed), and it seems logical that this task force would move forward with suggestions based on the data collected from the survey.

Sayward reviewed the Executive Director transition timeline and process, emphasizing that a new director would take charge on August 1, 2025. In her report, she recommended having a person in place by the summer of 2024 so they could work with her to learn the job and have a longer transition period than she enjoyed.

Heiss then reviewed Amy Offner's report on the work of the National Coalition for History, which was much more optimistic than earlier reports. The NCH has responded to some of SHAFR's promptings for change by creating a working group on NARA. Offner will be stepping down this year, but Tom Zeiler has agreed to replace her.

Council Matters

Heiss asked Council members about their preferred format for the SHAFR Council gathering at the upcoming conference. In January, Council had voted to keep its meetings virtual but to have a face-to-face gathering in June in order to better get to know one another. It was decided that no substantive decisions would be made, since not everyone can participate.

The final discussion topic was the electronic programming throughout the year that Council had endorsed last year but that had not yet taken form. Heiss looked forward to some programming based on the report of the Graduate Student Committee and the initial indication from the Electronic Communication Co-Editors. She also suggested roundtables connected to significant anniversaries. Council members were requested to provide further suggestions.

There being no new business, the meeting adjourned at 4:05 pm (U.S. Eastern time).

The Diplomatic Pouch



Errata

In the September 2022 issue, due to a software glitch, a table in Elizabeth Sanders' review of Tizoc Chavez's book had problems with the citations and some missing information. Anyone who is interested in receiving the correct table in full should contact Professor Sanders directly at mes14@cornell.edu. *Passport* apologizes for the error.



Professional Notes

Brian Etheridge was named Associate Dean for Academics in the KSU Journey Honors College at Kennesaw State University as of July 1, 2023.

Rebecca Herman (U.C., Berkeley) received the 2023 Tonous and Warda Johns Family Book Award from the Pacific Coast Branch of the American Historical Association for her book, *Cooperating with the Colossus: A Social and Political History of U.S. Military Bases in World War II Latin America* (2022).

Julia Irwin will be Professor of History at Louisiana State University beginning in Fall 2023.

Addison Jensen will be an Ernest May Fellow in History & Policy at the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University during the 2023-2024 academic year. She will be Assistant Professor of History at Montana State University beginning in Fall 2024.

John Sbardellati will be Associate Professor of History at the University of Houston beginning in January 2024.

Marc Selverstone will be Professor of History and Director of Presidential Studies at the University of Virginia's Miller Center of Public Affairs beginning in Fall 2023.



Recent Books of Interest

Bailey, Beth. *An Army Afire: How the U.S. Army Confronted its Racial Crisis in the Vietnam Era*. (UNC, 2023).

Black, Jeremy. *Insurgency Warfare: A Global History to the Present, Second Edition*. (Rowman & Littlefield, 2023).

Blower, Brooke L. *Americans in a World at War: Intimate Histories from the Crash of Pan Am's Yankee*. (Oxford, 2023).

Bollard, Alan. *Economists in the Cold War: How a Handful of Economists Fought the Battle of Ideas*. (Oxford, 2023).

Calhoun, Charles W. *The Presidency of Ulysses S. Grant*. (Kansas, 2023).

Chapman, Jessica. *Remaking the World: Decolonization and the Cold War*. (Kentucky, 2023).

Chen, Zhongping. *Transpacific Reform and Revolution: The Chinese in North America, 1898-1918*. (Stanford, 2023).

Controvich, James T. *The United States in World War I: A Bibliographic Guide*. (Scarecrow Press, 2023).

Drake, Richard. *Charles Austin Beard: The Return of the Master Historian of American Imperialism*. (Cornell, 2023).

Ellsman, James. *MacArthur Reconsidered: General Douglas MacArthur as a Wartime Commander*. (Rowman & Littlefield, 2023).

Farrow, Lee A. *The Catacazy Affair and the Uneasy Path of Russian-American Relations*. (Bloomsbury, 2023).

Fibiger, Mattias. *Suharto's Cold War: Indonesia, Southeast Asia, and the World*. (Oxford, 2023).

Fleek, Sherman L. and Robert C. Freeman. *The Mormon Military Experience: 1838 to the Cold War*. (Kansas, 2023).

Flores, Alfred Peredo. *Tip of the Spear: Land, Labor, and US Settler Militarism in Guáhan, 1944-1962*. (Cornell, 2023).

Gallagher, Charles R. *Nazis of Copley Square: The Forgotten Story of the Christian Front*. (Harvard, 2023).

Goodman, Brian K. *The Nonconformists: American and Czech Writers Across the Iron Curtain*. (Harvard, 2023).

Goodman, Carly. *Dreamland: America's Immigration Lottery in an Age of Restriction*. (UNC, 2023).

Han, Lori Cox. *Advising Nixon: The White House Memos of Patrick J. Buchanan*. (UNC, 2023).

Harris, William C. *Lincoln Illuminated and Remembered*. (Kansas, 2023).

Jackson, Galen. *A Lost Peace: Great Power Politics and the Arab-Israeli Dispute, 1967-1979*. (Cornell, 2023).

Jahanbani, Sheyda F.A., *The Poverty of the World: Rediscovering the Poor at Home and Abroad, 1941-1968*. (Oxford, 2023).

Jagel, Matthew. *Khmer Nationalist: Sơn Ngọc Thành, the CIA, and the Transformation of Cambodia*. (Cornell, 2023).

Jepson, George D. *Crash Boat: Rescue and Peril in the Pacific During World War II*. (Lyons Press, 2023).

Kastenber, Joshua E. *Goldwater v. Carter: Foreign Policy, China, and the Resurgence of Executive Branch Primacy*. (Kansas, 2023).

Lavert, Rory. *Aluminum Alley: The American Pilots Who Flew Over the Himalayas and Helped Win World War II*. (Stackpole, 2023).

Lengel, Edward G. *Thunder and Flames: Americans in the Crucible of Combat, 1917-1918*. (Kansas, 2023).

Lingamfelter, L. Scott. *Yanks in Blue Berets: American UN Peacekeepers in the Middle East*. (Kentucky, 2023).

Linn, Brian McAllister. *Real Soldiering: The U.S. Army in the Aftermath of War, 1815-1980*. (Kansas, 2023).

Lomperis, Timothy J. *The Vietnam War from the Rear Echelon: An Intelligence Officer's Memoir, 1972-1973*. (Kansas, 2023).

Maas, Richard W. *The Picky Eagle: How Democracy and Xenophobia Limited U.S. Territorial Expansion*. (Cornell, 2023).

Manela, Erez and Heather Streets-Salter, eds. *The Anticolonial Transnational: Imaginaries, Mobilities, and Networks in the Struggle Against Empire*. (Cambridge, 2023).

Marston, Daniel. *The American Revolution, 1774-83*. (Bloomsbury, 2023).

McCoy, Cameron D. *Contested Valor: African American Marines in the Age of Power, Protest, and Tokenism*. (Kansas, 2023).

McKevitt, Andrew C. *Gun Country: Gun Capitalism, Culture, and Control in Cold War America*. (UNC, 2023).

Minami, Kazushi. *People's Diplomacy: How Americans and Chinese Transformed US-China Relations During the Cold War*. (Cornell, 2023).

Minty, Christopher F. *Unfriendly to Liberty: Loyalist Networks and the Coming of the American Revolution in New York City*. (Cornell, 2023).

Myers, Sarah Parry. *Earning Their Wings: The WASPs of World War II and the Fight for Veteran Recognition*. (UNC, 2023).

Nance, William Stuart. *Commanding Professionalism: Simpson, Moore, and the Ninth U.S. Army*. (Kentucky, 2023).

Ngoei, Wen-Qing. *Arc of Containment: Britain, the United States, and Anticommunism in Southeast Asia*. (Cornell, 2023).

Nwokocha, Eziaku Atuama. *Vodou en Vogue: Fashioning Black Divinities in Haiti and the United States*. (UNC, 2023).

Parkin, Harry Dravo. *Serpents of War: An American Officer's Story of World War I and Combat Activity*. Edited by Steven Trout and Ian Isherwood. (Kansas, 2023).

Pearson, Judith. *Wolves at the Door: The True Story of America's Greatest Female Spy*. (Lyons Press, 2023).

Piehler, G. Kurt and Jonathan Grant. *The Oxford Handbook of World War II*. (Oxford, 2023).

Porter, Louis Howard. *Reds in Blue: UNESCO, World Governance, and the Soviet Internationalist Imagination*. (Oxford, 2023).

Prentice, David L. *Unwilling to Quit: The Long Unwinding of American Involvement in Vietnam*. (Kentucky, 2023).

Qureshi, Lubna Z. *Olof Palme, Sweden, and the Vietnam War*. (Rowman & Littlefield, 2023).

Rakove, Robert B. *Days of Opportunity: The United States and Afghanistan Before the Soviet Union*. (Columbia, 2023).

Scarborough, Isaac McKean. *Moscow's Heavy Shadow: The Violent Collapse of the USSR*. (Cornell, 2023).

Scott, Erik R. *Defectors: How the Illicit Fight of Soviet Citizens Built the Borders of the Cold War*. (Oxford, 2023).

- Shannon, Matthew K. *American-Iranian Dialogues: From Constitution to White Revolution, C. 1890-1960s*. (Bloomsbury, 2023).
- Sheehan, James J. *Making a Modern Political Order: The Problem of the Nation State*. (Notre Dame, 2023).
- Silbey, David J. and Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai. *The American Experience in the Civil War and World War I*. (Kansas, 2023).
- Smith, Timothy B. *Bayou Battles for Vicksburg: The Swamp and River Expeditions, January 1-April 30, 1863*. (Kansas, 2023).
- Taylor, William A., ed. *The All-Volunteer Force: Fifty Years of Service*. (Kansas, 2023).
- Thompson, Todd Nathan. *A Laughable Empire: The U.S. Imagines the Pacific World, 1840-1890*. (Penn State, 2023).
- Topping, Simon. *Northern Ireland, the United States, and the Second World War*. (Bloomsbury, 2023).
- Tromly, Benjamin. *Cold War Exiles and the CIA: Plotting to Free Russia*. (Oxford, 2023).
- Trudeau, Noah Andre. *Like Men of War: Black Troops in the Civil War, 1862-1865, Second Edition, Revised and Expanded*. (Kansas, 2023).
- Vardy, C. William. *Concrete Inferno: Terror and Torture Under Brazil's Military Regime, 1964-1985*. (Rowman & Littlefield, 2023).
- Walker, J. Samuel. *The Day That Shook America: A Concise History of 9/11*. (Kansas, 2023).
- Wang, Chi. *Xi Jinping, China, and the United States*. (Lexington, 2023).
- Weil, Patrick. *The Madman in the White House: Sigmund Freud, Ambassador Bullitt, and the Lost Psychobiography of Woodrow Wilson*. (Harvard, 2023).
- Woods, Shelton. *Governor of the Cordillera: John C. Early Among the Philippine Highlanders*. (Cornell, 2023).
- Yeşilbursa, Behçet Kemal. *Anglo-American Defense Projects in the Postwar Middle East: Cold War or Imperialism?* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2023).

In Memoriam: Gaddis Smith

On December 2, 2022, Gaddis Smith died in New Haven, CT, at the age of 89. Smith was an acclaimed historian of U.S. foreign relations and a ubiquitous and legendary figure at Yale University, an institution to which he devoted most of his life. He shaped generations of historians and lectured to countless Yale undergraduates, a group that included some future national leaders. To my own incalculable benefit, he was my graduate mentor.



George Gaddis Smith was born in Newark, NJ, on December 9, 1932, and raised in Summit, NJ. He attended college at Yale University, majoring in English and serving as chairman (the equivalent of editor) of the *Yale Daily News*. He stayed on at Yale to pursue doctoral study in history, under the mentorship of the influential diplomatic historian Samuel Flagg Bemis. Smith taught briefly at Duke University and joined the Yale faculty in 1961, the year in which he earned his Ph.D. He taught at Yale until his retirement in 2000.

Smith's scholarship extended widely over a range of historical topics, from Canadian diplomacy, to British submarine warfare, to Yale's place in the world, to key features of U.S. foreign relations. He made his most enduring mark in that last field, producing ambitious monographs on U.S. diplomacy during World War II, on the role of Secretary of State Dean Acheson, on the foreign policies of President Jimmy Carter, and on the place of the Monroe Doctrine in postwar U.S. diplomacy.

When it came to U.S. Cold War history, Smith was not tethered to any particular school of interpretation. His early work showed some inclination toward "orthodox" outlooks. In his 1965 book *American Diplomacy During the Second World War*, Smith suggested that the paranoia and truculence of Soviet leader Joseph Stalin were the main cause of the Cold War and that President Franklin D. Roosevelt had been slow to grasp the incompatibility between U.S. and Soviet world views. But Smith later grew more open to "revisionist" interpretations. In a 1973 interview with the *New York Times*, he observed of the vigorous Cold War measures Washington pursued soon after the war: "no one can say that [President Harry S.] Truman was necessarily wrong, but my position is that there were possibilities in the situation that he didn't explore."¹

In subsequent decades, Smith ventured sharper criticisms of Washington's penchant for Cold War hawkishness. To some extent, this reflected a continuing attentiveness to revisionist arguments. But it also stemmed from the fact that Smith's focus shifted to later episodes of American foreign relations during which, in his view, U.S. behavior grew less admirable overall. In *The Last Years of the Monroe Doctrine* (1994), Smith wrote that President James Monroe's policy, as first articulated in 1823, "had contrasted American principles of candor, self-government, and respect for national independence with the devious, autocratic, imperial ways of Europe.... The abandonment after 1945 of its original ideals made the last years of the Monroe Doctrine a history of moral degradation," as

U.S. administrations, in the name of anticommunism, resorted to subversion and lies to undermine left-leaning governments in Latin America and the Caribbean.²

Smith was especially critical of President Ronald Reagan's anticommunist policies, whose subversive impact, he argued, was not confined to disfavored hemispheric regimes but threatened the integrity of Washington's original Cold

War vision. As Smith archly noted in *The Last Years of the Monroe Doctrine*, "The Truman Doctrine had said it should be the policy of the United States to help free people under attack from armed minorities. The Reagan Doctrine said it should be the policy of the United States to assist armed minorities in their attacks on Communist governments." Smith lamented that Reagan was "[s]o obsessed...with this objective that he permitted policy to be set by people ignorant or contemptuous of the Constitution and law, people without judgment or accountability."³

As the passages quoted above suggest, Smith wrote with precision and grace, conveying intricate arguments in succinct and powerful prose. The historian John Lewis Gaddis, who became Smith's Yale colleague in 1997 (thus compounding the confusion caused by the similarity in their names), remembers Smith as "a great synthesizer of history. My favorite book of his is the diplomatic history of World War II, which I read as a graduate student. I was just blown away by the complete clarity of it, but also the concision of it, that he compressed so much into so short a space."⁴ The opening paragraph of chapter eight of *Morality, Reason, and Power: American Diplomacy in the Carter Years* (1986) showcases the lucidity and sweep—and freshness—of Smith's historical vision:

Three times between 1949 and 1979, major revolutions on the Asian landmass derailed American foreign policy and within the United States contributed to the discrediting and loss of power of American Presidents. The victory of the Chinese communists over the American-supported Nationalist regime of Chiang Kai-shek damaged the Truman Presidency and helped the Republicans to victory in 1952. The victory of the Vietnamese communists over the United States and its client government in South Vietnam led Lyndon Johnson to virtual abdication in 1968 and was an indirect cause of Richard Nixon's resignation in 1974 in the face of impending impeachment. Well might Jimmy Carter have prayed in 1977 to be protected from similar domestic consequences of a revolution in a distant country, a revolution beyond the power of the United States to stop or control and yet an event from which it would prove impossible to escape.⁵

Instead, of course, upheaval in Iran in 1978 and 1979 set in motion a chain of events that contributed to Carter's own political demise.

At Yale, Smith gained renown as a mesmerizing orator. Especially popular was his large lecture course on post-1945 U.S. foreign relations, in which I twice served as a graduate teaching assistant. Both times, the waiting list for enrolling in the course went on for pages; the only unpleasant part about being Smith's TA was having to dash the hopes of undergraduates by telling them there were no spaces left. Without PowerPoint, film clips, or other frills, Smith held the students rapt with his crisp, cogent, and often suspenseful renditions of episodes in U.S. foreign policy. The Harvard historian Fredrik Logevall, whom Smith also mentored, recalls "the many instances when the auditorium would go absolutely quiet, as he held forth on the Pearl Harbor attack, or the Bay of Pigs invasion, or the Iran Hostage Crisis, the undergrads hanging on every word."⁶ I remember that Smith would add texture to his lectures by relating how world events had intruded on the Yale campus—by telling us which athletic field was converted into a military barracks during World War II, or which buildings were occupied by antiwar protesters in the Vietnam era.

On rare but memorable occasions, Smith's lectures were uproariously funny. Once, he regaled the undergraduates with a salty joke that had made the rounds after President Dwight D. Eisenhower's heart attack in 1955: Vice President Richard Nixon is visiting his boss in the hospital. The enfeebled Ike is trying say something, but his voice is too faint. He keeps having to repeat himself, and Nixon keeps having to lean closer and closer in. Finally, when Nixon is just inches away, the president belts out, "Get your fucking foot off of my oxygen tube!" Never was the expression "brought the house down" more apt.

Those of us lucky enough to receive Smith's individual instructorship knew a wise, level-headed, supportive, and incisive mentor. For all his dynamism as a public speaker, Smith could be shy when meeting one-on-one or in small groups. For that reason, and because of my own affliction with imposter syndrome during my early months as a Yale graduate student, my initial meetings with "Professor Smith" were somewhat strained. Everything changed when I brought in a research discovery: an uncensored version of a key government document, available only in redacted form when consulted in official archives, that had found its way into the private papers of a long-retired political scientist. His eyes lighting up, Smith plunged into a spirited comparison of the redacted and unredacted versions of the document, quizzing me on some details and offering wry commentaries on government declassification procedures. Our mutual awkwardness had magically evaporated. (It was almost a parody of the cliché that males bond most easily over a shared activity.) From then on, Smith's enthusiasm for my research endeavors was never in doubt.

The qualities that made Smith an extraordinary writer also made him a superb editor and marker of papers. "Never use three words, he preached, when two will do," Logevall recalls.⁷ This was my experience, too. In writing these very lines, I can hear Smith's admonitions to avoid wordiness, repetition, obscurity, and floridness. Another Smithian lesson that has stuck with me over the years: When setting a whole paragraph in the past perfect tense ("I had gone..."), you don't need to keep repeating "had." The first usage or two of the word will establish the time frame, and then you can revert to the simple past tense.

Through his decades of service to Yale University and his manifest devotion to the school, Smith became, in himself, a Yale institution. But he also was a vital agent of change. The son and grandson of Yale alumni, he matriculated at the university in 1950, when the student body was all-male, included no African Americans, and contained only a handful of Jews. In the 1960s and 1970s, Smith strongly supported Yale's transformation, under the leadership of

President Kingman Brewster, into a co-ed university with a more racially, ethnically, and socioeconomically diverse enrollment. From 1972 to 1981, Smith served as master (the term was retired in 2016) of Pierson, one of Yale's residential colleges. At Pierson he was a key intermediary between alumni perturbed by the rapid rate of change and advocates of further openness and inclusion, though his sympathies clearly lay with the latter camp.⁸

In the 1990s, Smith directed the Yale Center for International and Area Studies (now the Whitney and Betty MacMillan Center for International and Area Studies at Yale). In that role, he oversaw the establishment of an interdisciplinary undergraduate major in International Studies and, with the construction of Henry R. Luce Hall, the geographical consolidation of the Center's activities, which had previously been dispersed in several locations on campus. These and other initiatives significantly raised YCIAS's profile within the university, as well as expanding the Center's national and global reach.⁹

On an individual level, too, Smith's influence extended well beyond Yale's confines. Among the thousands of undergraduates he taught were movers and shakers of later decades. Samantha Power, who went on to serve as the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, wrote her senior thesis under Smith's supervision. Power remembers her adviser as "a compelling and lively teacher" from whom "[g]enerations of practitioners, teachers and critics of U.S. foreign policy learned how to question received wisdom and old habits in pursuit of a more impactful and humane course."¹⁰ During the 2004 presidential campaign, news outlets reported that both of the major-party candidates, President George W. Bush and Massachusetts Senator John Kerry, had at different times in the 1960s taken Smith's signature lecture course at Yale. Smith disclosed little in response to reporters' queries, though he did remember Kerry as civic-minded and ambitious, whereas "George Bush had no political visibility whatsoever. He was more like a student from the decade before, the mid-'50s, people who enjoyed their fraternity life."¹¹

Smith won several awards and honors from Yale University, including the William Clyde DeVane Medal for outstanding scholarship and undergraduate teaching and the Harwood F. Byrnes/Richard B. Sewall Prize for Teaching Excellence. Each year, the Macmillan Center gives out the Gaddis Smith International Book Prize for the best first book by a Yale faculty member.

In retirement, Smith worked on a history of Yale University and its relations with the wider world. But health issues and the ambitiousness of the project prevented him from completing it. Yale University Press plans to publish a shorter version of the book, *Yale and the External World: The Shaping of the University in the 20th Century*, later this year.¹²

Those who knew Smith well dot their remembrances with words like "dignity," "kindness," "empathy," and "fundamental decency." The historian and political analyst Geoffrey Kabaservice, who earned his Ph.D. from Yale in 1999 (and who has written his own history of the institution), observes that Smith "was perhaps the last of what had been a long line of Yale History professors with deep Yale connections, and I considered him among the best. He combined a sympathetic view of tradition with a clear-eyed understanding of the changes required by modernity." The University of Texas historian Jeremi Suri, who joined Yale's history doctoral program in 1996, was pleasantly surprised to be offered an ice cream bar during his first meeting with Smith. "Gaddis always brought joy and meaning to academic settings—seminars, conferences, even difficult meetings," Suri recalls. "His encouragement of my work meant the world," says Logevall. "He made clear to his advisees that he believed in us, believed in what we were doing. This continued long after we left [the] program."¹³

Except for the part about the ice cream bar (alas, I never got one), all of these fond recollections resonate powerfully with my own.

Smith was predeceased by his wife, Barclay Manierre Smith, and their son, Tarrant Smith. He is survived by another son, Edgar Smith, and by two daughters-in-law and two grandchildren. A memorial service was held on the Yale campus in May 2023.

Salim Yaqub
University of California, Santa Barbara

Notes:

1. *New York Times*, January 2, 1973, 25.
2. Gaddis Smith, *The Last Years of the Monroe Doctrine, 1945–1993* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1994), 7.
3. Smith, *The Last Years of the Monroe Doctrine*, 164, 187.
4. *New York Times*, December 9, 2022, B11.
5. Smith, *Morality, Reason, and Power: American Diplomacy in the Carter Years* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986) 180.
6. "In Memoriam: Gaddis Smith, Expert on U.S. Foreign Relations and 'Spellbinding Orator,'" *YaleNews*, December 5, 2022, <https://news.yale.edu/2022/12/05/gaddis-smith-expert-us-foreign-relations-and-spellbinding-orator> (accessed June 16, 2023).
7. Fredrik Logevall, email to the author, June 5, 2023.
8. *New York Times*, December 9, 2022, B11.
9. "History of International and Area Studies at Yale," *Bulletin of Yale University*, <https://bulletin.yale.edu/bulletins/macmillan/history-international-and-area-studies-yale> (accessed June 17, 2023).
10. *New York Times*, December 9, 2022, B11.
11. *Tennessean* (Nashville), May 30, 2004, 23A; *Washington Post*, October 16, 2004, A8.
12. "In Memoriam: Gaddis Smith."
13. Geoffrey Kabaservice, email to the author, June 12, 2023; Jeremi Suri, email to the author, June 16, 2023; Logevall, email to the author, June 5, 2023.

The Last Word: Speaking with our Sources— The Possibilities and Pitfalls of AI Language Models in Historical Research

Jacob Forward and Xioachen Zhu

“The task of American citizens is to preserve an air of invulnerability that can lead to peace and freedom, even where the threat of war looms.” This original and eloquent insight into Cold War culture was not written by a historian, nor even by a human. It was written by a form of artificial intelligence (AI) called a language model, which had been trained on a large number of State of the Union Addresses. Language models (LMs) offer historians a potentially powerful, though not unproblematic tool for augmenting traditional discourse analysis and working with much larger corpora of sources than before. This is particularly promising for modern and contemporary historians, who face, as Paul S. Boyer observes, “a dizzying abundance of potential sources.”

LMs are digital neural networks that excel at adopting the style and content of the writing they are trained on and can generate original text output. One model, called ChatGPT, has made headlines around the world since its release by OpenAI in November 2022. Last autumn there was real excitement among digital historians and digital humanists about the potential of this technology for humanities research, and our project, which uses an AI language model to study the discourse of State of the Union Addresses, is one of the very first examples of how they might be used to augment the research capabilities of historians.

We chose State of the Union Addresses because these annual speeches from the incumbent president to the legislature, the nation, and the world, are arguably the heart of American political rhetoric and we reasoned that a language model specialized on them could yield excellent insight into the themes of recent American history. We chose a publicly available LM called GPT-2, which we trained on a corpus consisting of every State of the Union Address from the end of WWII to the present day.

In essence, LMs work by analysing large amounts of text and learning the patterns and structures of the language. Once trained, the model can then generate new text that is similar in style and structure to the input it was trained on. It does this by predicting which words will come next in light of the preceding context. We provided the context in the form of a short prompt on which the LM could then build a few sentences. Due to the extensive training of LMs they learn deep patterns in language that can make their outputs appear uncannily human.

Having trained the LM on our corpus of speeches we gave it several prompts to write about key topics in

American history. The LM wrote in the first person, just like the speeches, and mimicked the dramatic, stylized, and idealistic language of presidential rhetoric. For example, in response to the prompt in italics it wrote, “*The state of the union is strong. We have a new, unified vision and a new, hopeful spirit, one that will stand strong against the specter of cynicism, the shadow of fear.*” The LM also used a justificatory tone—“that is why,” “for this reason,”—reflecting the president’s task of persuading the legislature to pass certain laws in the coming year. Sometimes the LM expressed a latent idea from the corpus so bluntly that it could be quite humorous. Consider this unusually frank assessment of US power: “America has never been more determined than tonight to shape change that doesn’t always pan out.” This suggests that LMs can be useful for studying the tone, and some of the hidden assumptions and associations in historical sources.

This capacity to render explicit what was implicit by rephrasing and summarizing broad themes in the corpus proved particularly insightful in the case of America’s role in the world. We were surprised by the extent to which cynical, imperialist sentiments came to the fore, for instance: “*America in the world means nothing. We need to take every chance in the world to meet our obligations to the people of the United States.*” In particular, it emphasized the imperial export of values: “*The American people are demanding more. We are fighting the same battles we have already won, not just at home, but for the world.*” This neatly reflects the sentiment of much US foreign policy in the past half-century, which has often rationalized military intervention in terms of the defense of supposedly universal values, most notably in the War on Terror.

As these examples show, the special utility of LMs, in comparison to other digital tools for macro-textual analysis, is that they reveal associated ideas, not merely associated words. This is partly thanks to their ability to write, but it’s also a result of their capacity to discern deeper patterns in the text, patterns of thought. This allows historians to explore how concepts, not just terms, are related to each other in a corpus.

Digital history methodologies have come a long way since the statistical research of the 1960s and ‘70s, and the current suite of tools available for macro-textual analysis, as seen for instance in Voyant Tools, can offer us useful insight into historical sources. However, where current tools can show us that the words ‘American’ and ‘citizens’ are used together seven times in our corpus of speeches, LMs can



An AI art model's interpretation of the prompt "State of the Union Address," made on the NightCafe platform using an open-source stable diffusion algorithm

produce a range of written responses that meaningfully recontextualize these terms, for instance, "*the task of American citizens is to preserve and strengthen the ideals of freedom and justice,*" or "*the task of American citizens is to lead a world in which freedom, justice and peace can meet the aspirations of men everywhere.*" This strongly confirms the work of State of the Union Address scholar Deborah Kalb, in her finding that citizenship is rhetorically constructed in allegiance to national values.

However, we should be clear that this technology is far from flawless, and its application to historical research poses many ethical and methodological questions. The power of LMs is measured in the number of parameters (micro-rules about language) that it has learned during training. We had access to the standard version of GPT-2 which is a 117 million parameter model, much less capable

than GPT-3 which is a 175 billion parameter model, and this affected the fluency of the generated text. As a consequence, numerous outputs were misspelled, nonsensical or strangely truncated. Additionally, the LM could sometimes be overwhelmed by the frequent recurrence of certain ideas in the corpus, leading to strangely repetitive outputs such as "the world is changing. The world is changing more and more rapidly; the world is changing as well."

From a historian's perspective, there are major issues with the reproducibility and transparency of research with LMs. They are effectively a 'black box' of weights and variables that generates a slightly different response each time to the same prompt. The archivist Rick Prelinger raised the concern that with AI we might "synthesize a past that never existed." But if historians treat the output of LMs not as definitive answers to research questions, nor as synthetic sources, but as invitations for the further exploration of themes with the traditional close reading of the text, then we can still benefit from the insights this technology has to offer us.

While Michael Moss, writing in the early 1990s, worried that digital history was inevitably quantitative and that it would become increasingly "difficult to see the thesis for the data," LMs, and AI more generally, are good at deriving patterns from the data, using more data than scholars could possibly process manually. Even if, as computational linguist Patrick Juola puts it, most of their outputs are "flat gibberish, the one in a thousand may include interesting and provocative readings that human authors have missed." As more powerful language models become publicly available, we can expect more like one in ten outputs to be of real research value.

There is still so much more to explore, for instance by training multiple LMs on different time periods we could trace changes in discourse over time. LMs could be adjusted into history specialist chatbots, which promises a boom in public engagement with archives and history. We might even resurrect historical personages from their written remains, transforming them into digital entities capable of conversation. Truly, we are at the start of the AI turn in history. Moreover, language models fit the brand of history, as neither art nor science, for they utilize a precise and intricate series of calculations to yield a product that is ephemeral, unreproducible, contingent, and even beautiful. The very existence of such a powerful means for mapping language, let alone what it can generate from our sources, is surely cause for us to take a new perspective on history.

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Society for Historians of American Foreign
Relations (SHAFR)
Middle Tennessee State University
1301 East Main Street, Box 23
Murfreesboro, TN 37132

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