Book Reviews


Reviewed by Michal R. Belknap, California Western School of Law and University of California at San Diego

Several years ago this reviewer chaired a session on military law at the annual meeting of the American Society for Legal History. Although the panel included a distinguished foreign visitor and two leading American scholars (one of whom later became the president of the American Society for Legal History), it was larger than its audience. Apparently, not even other specialists in legal history considered military justice very important. As Elizabeth Lutes Hillman accurately observes in the introduction to this marvelous book, it is a subject that has been “almost completely overlooked by scholars of American history and law” (p. 1). As she brilliantly demonstrates, those who overlook it have been making a serious mistake because courts martial provide valuable insights into many facets of American social history during the Cold War era.

Hillman uses the court martial as a vehicle for exploring topics such as race, gender, class, and, above all, sexual orientation that were largely ignored by the traditional battles-and-leaders school of military historians. For her, military justice is worth studying because the political and social changes that transformed America during the Cold War years rippled through the armed forces with special intensity. The racial hierarchies, class distinctions, and models of masculinity that had always distinguished military culture made it especially sensitive to the forces that were transforming the broader society. Because these factors did a great deal to determine whom the armed forces prosecuted and on what charges, court martial records provide unique insights into the dynamics of Cold War society.

Hillman uses them for that purpose. She has mined with incredible thoroughness the published opinions of military courts, as well as of civilian ones that decided cases involving members of the armed forces. Like any good lawyer, she makes extensive use of the relevant law-review literature, but unlike most legal scholars Hillman has also examined both military and civilian archival collections, the holdings of three presidential libraries, doctoral dissertations, and oral histories. She demonstrates a superb command of even marginally relevant secondary literature. In short, this is an extremely impressive piece of research.

What Hillman has done with her research is impressive too. She begins with an outstanding overview of demographic changes in the armed forces from the end of...
World War II to the 1970s and an overview of how the military justice system both operated and evolved during this period. This introductory chapter argues that as the composition of the armed forces changed and as the services adjusted to the demands of the new Uniform Code of Military Justice (introduced in 1951) the military function of the court martial changed, becoming less a means of disciplining miscreant individuals and more a demonstration of military values.

The most important of these values, Hillman seems to feel, was heterosexuality. But court martial records reveal that the Cold War military also supported masculine privilege and esteemed both racial exclusivity and authoritarian leadership. Hillman follows her introductory overview with five chapters that demonstrate these values at work in various kinds of cases. The way she groups these types of cases together is, to say the least, unusual. Indeed, most lawyers, accustomed to categorizing cases under standard legal headings, such as crimes against property and crimes against the person, will find it downright weird. Historians are likely to find her approach consistently creative but sometimes productive of results that are not entirely persuasive.

A case in point is chapter 3, “Threats to ‘the Very Survival of the Nation,’” which deals with what Hillman characterizes as “political dissent” and “sexual dissent.” In it she discusses prosecutions for homosexuality, along with those of spies, defectors, Korean War prisoners-of-war accused of collaborating with the enemy, and dissenters within the Vietnam-era armed forces. Counterintelligence agents viewed individuals in all of these categories as likely to compromise military secrets, but it is doubtful that anyone else would see much connection between gays and the others—or at any rate, that anyone but Hillman would. She views homosexuals as being prosecuted for “sexual dissent,” just as the others were prosecuted for “political dissent.” This is a brilliant insight. Unfortunately, it also produces a chapter that is somewhat lacking in internal coherence.

Chapter 6 suffers from a similar problem, although ironically for the opposite reason. Its subject is courts martial of officers, a rather infrequent occurrence in the Cold War military. The chapter actually has a unifying thesis: that the military’s expectations of officers (as role models and personifications of military values) influenced prosecutions of almost every type of crime. But this thesis becomes completely lost because two-thirds of the chapter is about prosecutions for only one type of offense: homosexual activity. These pages include an excellently researched and presented section on the crimes of a gay retired Navy rear admiral, Selden Hooper. But its brilliance cannot entirely compensate for the imbalance of the chapter as a whole.

Chapter 2 also devotes considerable attention to homosexuality. Although this chapter, like chapter 3, brings together quite different types of cases, it, unlike chapter 3, has a strong unifying thesis: that military training and the demands of military service called for types of conduct that, if carried too far, had to be punished by the court martial system. These paradoxes involved violence and all-male intimacy—subjects that, at first glance, do not seem to have much to do with each other. However, Hillman does a masterful job of helping the reader see how they really posed similar problems for the armed forces.

In chapter 4 she again provides illuminating insights into the way the military
dealt with a diverse group of crimes by showing that all of them served to expose essential contradictions between military life and family life. One such offense was the most common of all in the armed forces, absence without leave (AWOL). Those who committed this crime generally did so because of the need to provide for their families. The second group of offenses included ones such as bigamy, adultery, and the violation of marriage regulations, which the armed forces prosecuted because they undermined the authority of marriage and, even worse, subverted an image of military service that recruiters and government leaders sought to project. The final group of offenses related to domestic violence, which a culture of male dominance and female deference, along with the ready availability of weapons on military bases, tended to encourage, but that was as underprosecuted as it was in civilian life. Again in this chapter, Hillman manages to compose a unified and insightful social picture out of cases that a lawyer, thinking in legal categories, would see as presenting significantly different problems.

In chapter 5 she does the opposite, showing how two social phenomena—race and gender—affect a legal issue of particular concern to the military. Comprising mostly young males, the Cold War military wanted sex. Indeed, servicemen had a sense of sexual entitlement, and some of them took by force what they could not win by charm. This was especially so overseas, where most of the available women were non-white. For the Cold War armed forces, bent on preserving racial homogeneity along with male sexual entitlement, overseas deployments posed a dilemma that manifested itself most dramatically in the way the vast discretion built into military justice was exercised in prostitution and rape cases. Courts martial protected women from the aggressively expressed desires of black soldiers far better than from those of white soldiers.

The records of the rape cases demonstrate this. Court martial reports show a great many other things as well. They offer, as Hillman has successfully demonstrated, essential insights into the Cold War military. In her hands these published and unpublished court martial records also provide unique perspectives on the legal and social history of the Cold War era. Even those of her arguments that do not entirely persuade readers will stimulate their thinking. Defending America is a book we all need to read.


Reviewed by Robert James Maddox, Pennsylvania State University

This is an indispensable book for libraries, scholars, and laypeople interested in the Hiroshima debate. In addition to offering a penetrating analysis of the subject, Michael Kort presents a generous array of original source materials, allowing the reader to make independent judgments on a number of disputed issues. The volume is based on
an impressive amount of archival research and demonstrates a mastery of the secondary literature. Kort is even-handed throughout, but does not back away from exposing some of the shabbier formulations that Hiroshima revisionists have fobbed off as scholarship.

The first part of the Columbia Guide consists of a seven-chapter narrative overview that ranges from an essay on the historical controversy over Hiroshima (including the Enola Gay fiasco at the Air and Space Museum in 1995), through the decision-making processes in both the United States and Japan during the spring and summer of 1945, to a final chapter placing the issue within the broader context of the Cold War and after. This section could stand on its own as an excellent introduction to the subject.

In Part II, titled “Key Questions and Interpretations,” Kort analyzes the historiography on ten specific questions that have caused the most disagreements over the decades. “Was Japan ready to surrender before the use of the atomic bomb against Hiroshima? If not, would it have surrendered without the bombing of Nagasaki?” (p. 82) is one example. Another asks “Which event contributed more to Japan’s surrender: the use of atomic bombs or the Soviet declaration of war on Japan?” (p. 107). In addition to providing insightful views on these issues, Kort cites appropriate primary sources found elsewhere in the volume. This enables the reader to make far more informed judgments than would be possible if presented with mere snippets of documents, which usually is the case.

What makes the Columbia Guide truly invaluable is the generous selection of primary source materials, many printed in their entirety. These are organized into seven categories: American civilian documents; American military documents; MAGIC diplomatic summaries (decryptions of messages between the Japanese Foreign Ministry and Japanese embassies abroad); Japanese government and military documents as well as diary entries of Japanese officials; Japanese surrender documents; the “United States Strategic Bombing Survey Summary Report” (a postwar survey which concluded that Japan was on the verge of surrender and would have done so even if the bombs had not been dropped and the Soviet Union had not entered the war); and “Interrogations of Japanese Officials” (most of which contradict the “Summary Report”); and “Statements of Japanese Officials on World War II” compiled by the U.S. Army. Reading these documents provides a feel for what officials on both sides were saying and writing that is difficult to convey second-hand.

Neither Kort’s analytical essays nor his compilation of primary source materials will end debate on many of the issues with which he grapples. On a number of important matters, however, his book absolutely demolishes some of the more fanciful claims that have been made over the years. By far the most important of these is the assertion that the Japanese were on the verge of surrendering in the spring and summer of 1945 and would have done so even if the bombs had not been dropped and the Soviet Union had not entered the war; and “Interrogations of Japanese Officials” (most of which contradict the “Summary Report”); and “Statements of Japanese Officials on World War II” compiled by the U.S. Army. Reading these documents provides a feel for what officials on both sides were saying and writing that is difficult to convey second-hand.

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was not to defeat an already defeated Japan but to enable the United States to practice “atomic diplomacy” toward the Soviet Union.

Scholars of the subject have long known that the “early surrender” thesis is pure fiction.

Those who have perpetrated this myth most often point to the MAGIC intercepts as corroboration. After using the word “surrender” over and over in their own prose, they then cite one or another Japanese message that contains the word “peace” as though the two terms were synonymous. Kort’s presentation at length of the MAGIC intercepts from the summer of 1945 shows the absurdity of such a contention. What the decryptions actually reveal is that Japanese civilian leaders, under the suspicious eye of the military, were trying to arrange a peace that would permit Japan to keep not only its emperor but its prewar empire and imperial system intact. Indeed, when the Japanese ambassador to the Soviet Union suggested that Japan should surrender if the emperor could be retained, which is what revisionists claim was the sole stumbling block, the foreign minister in Tokyo replied that “we are unable to consent to it under any circumstances whatsoever” (p. 284).

The Columbia Guide contains a number of aids to the reader, such as a glossary of military terms and abbreviations, a glossary of names, and an excellent bibliography. Kort and everyone else connected with this enterprise should be commended. The book is a model of its kind.


Reviewed by Robert S. Norris, Natural Resources Defense Council

The book’s seven chapters cover the time period from 1943 to 1957. The opening chapter recounts the often-told story of how Los Alamos became the central scientific laboratory of the Manhattan Project. Hunner, an associate professor at New Mexico State University in Las Cruces, sets the scene describing the evolving community amidst the spectacular landscape of northern New Mexico. General Leslie R. Groves chose the site in November 1942, the first scientists began arriving in the spring of 1943, and by the end of the war the population had soared to nearly 6,000.

Hunner’s contribution to the extensive literature about this unique place is to examine Los Alamos in broader terms than just the scientific ones that are at the center of most accounts. During the war years life was difficult. “Cramped quarters, electrical outages, water shortages, overcrowding, army regulations, censorship, stress, isolation from the outside world, secrecy, mud, cold, and wind all dampened enthusiasm for the project.”

With the end of the war Los Alamos changed dramatically. While staff felt jubilation and pride that the bomb had helped end a horrible war, their feelings were mixed with concern about what sort of world the country was about to enter. Hunner de-
scribes a tension that serves as his main theme. On the one hand is Los Alamos’s struggle to become a normal community occupied by American families who, like their counterparts elsewhere, were searching for security and normalcy in an uncertain world. He describes how a school system was established, how they entertained themselves, practiced their religions, built suitable housing, and pursued the many other activities that constitute normal town life. Juxtaposed against this was the reality that Los Alamos was a unique and privileged enclave, funded by the federal government to fight the Cold War and build bombs that could, if ever used, end civilization, a haunting psychological weight for its inhabitants.

Hunner argues that somewhat unavoidably Los Alamos became the model community for the new atomic age. The media depicted it as a high-tech, Wild West boomtown on the frontlines of the Cold War that showcased the promise of nuclear energy while designing the weapons that supposedly offered security to the nation. In the aftermath of the first Soviet atomic explosion in August 1949 and the outbreak of the Korean War the following year, Los Alamos’s funding and population grew significantly as Washington decided to develop the hydrogen bomb and mass-produce nuclear weapons of every sort.

Not everything was rosy on the mesa though. Hunner describes some of the dysfunctional elements that affected Los Alamos, such as extramarital affairs and alcoholism, the latter a commonplace among the bored housewives living in an isolated community in the early 1950s. Hunner also discusses topics such as class differences and ethnic diversity and the tensions they elicited. When the idea of opening the town was raised, an overwhelming majority wanted to keep the fences up in order to preserve the sense of safety and security. But the fences could not keep the world out. Hunner treats the impact the 1954 J. Robert Oppenheimer security affair had on Los Alamos as a case in point. Finally in 1957 the fences and guardhouses surrounding the residential areas did come down.

Hunner includes three dozen photographs, two maps, 40 pages of notes, and a bibliography that testify to a solidly researched book. A few final pages are spent on more recent events involving waste and abuse at the laboratory, the alleged espionage case of Wen Ho Lee, and a less-than-sterling environmental legacy. The careless environmental and safety practices began decades ago with the dumping of toxic and radioactive wastes in various canyons and open-air experiments involving the detonation of conventional explosives laced with radioactive substances.

As the laboratory enters the 21st century it faces profound challenges. Its main business, designing nuclear warheads is no longer a top priority, and the other activities it is pursuing—such as mapping the human genome or inventing composite materials—may not fill the void.

A couple of minor clarifications and corrections: Oppenheimer’s quotation about “technically sweet” referred to the hydrogen bomb design as of 1951 and not the fission designs during the war, as Hunner implies. The United States built an estimated 66,500 nuclear weapons from 1945 to 1990 (not 23,000), and plutonium does not age quickly. In fact, according to an independent scientific panel that advises the
government, plutonium “primaries of most weapon system types in the stockpile have credible minimum lifetimes in excess of 100 years.”

Hunner has chosen an interesting angle to view Los Alamos and has brought into focus some of the complexities and consequences of living with the bomb at the place where it was born.


Reviewed by Len Scott, Aberystwyth University (UK)

How close was nuclear war in October 1962? As the title of Michael Dobbs’s compelling and evocative book suggests, he believes that we were one minute from midnight on the Doomsday Clock. His arguments and his account are based on extensive research, drawn from U.S., Soviet, and Cuban sources. He interviewed more than 100 veterans of the missile crisis and used archival sources (mainly American) that included raw U.S. intelligence material, from which photographs are produced to fascinating effect in the book. Dobbs’s goal is to “help a new generation of readers relive the quintessential Cold War crisis” (p. xiii). In this task he is highly successful, bringing to bear his skills and experience as a former staff writer and bureau chief for *The Washington Post* to provide a gripping account of what he terms “the human story,” which he claims has been lost in the academic literature. The structure and style of the book help make the crisis into a drama. The aim is to tell the story minute by minute with particular emphasis on the day known in Washington, DC as Black Saturday: 27 October. “If the Cuban missile crisis was the defining moment of the Cold War,” Dobbs argues, “Black Saturday was the defining moment of the missile crisis” (p. xiii). More than one-third of the book is devoted to the day when we may have come closest to the end of history.

A key focus is on often overlooked “accidental figures.” Among others portrayed in the book are Cuban saboteurs trained by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to blow up a copper mine in western Cuba, Soviet cruise missile crews positioning their nuclear weapons to destroy Guantánamo Bay, and the hapless U.S. Air Force pilot whose attempts at celestial navigation were thwarted by the aurora borealis, leaving him flying into Soviet air space as the crisis reached its climax. Dobbs convincingly demonstrates that understanding the crisis and the risk of nuclear war requires far more than just knowing what leaders thought and decided. Yet those leaders are an essential part of the human story, whose role Dobbs explores and portrays as vital to the outcome. One illuminating insight is Che Guevara’s willingness to travel the “path of liberation even when it may cost millions of atomic victims” (p. 245)—an attitude seemingly shared by Fidel Castro. This finding has potentially great significance for understanding the rationality of revolutionary leaders confronted by the logic of nuclear deterrence.
The suggestion that the human story has been ignored in the academic literature reflects a tendency by Dobbs to exaggerate the originality of his contribution. Although he uses material from the work of other historians, his engagement with the literature is limited. The text mentions only a few of the many books on the crisis. The seminal work by Graham T. Allison, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1971), and the pioneering book by Aleksandr Fursenko and Timothy Naftali, "One Hell of a Gamble": Khrushchev, Castro, and Kennedy, 1958–1964—The Secret History of the Cuban Missile Crisis (New York: Norton, 1997), are disparagingly referred to as “supposedly authoritative” (p. 89) because they did not draw on the archival sources that he has successfully exploited. Dobbs’s use of U.S. intelligence material does enable him to show that the dramatic “eyeball to eyeball” confrontation between U.S. and Soviet ships on 24 October did not happen because the Soviet vessels in question were already heading back home. The details and clarification are illuminating, although Fursenko and Naftali showed in “One Hell of a Gamble” in 1997 that Khrushchev and his colleagues decided days before the blockade came into effect that their surface ships would not run the U.S. Navy gauntlet.

*One Minute to Midnight* provides interesting and in places valuable new detail, though the essentials of some episodes have been known for some time. Key aspects of the errant flight of the U-2 spy plane over Siberia were revealed fifteen years earlier in Scott Sagan’s path-breaking *The Limits of Safety: Organizations, Accidents, and Nuclear Weapons* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993). Since 2002, thanks to the efforts of the National Security Archive, Western audiences have known the extraordinary recollections of officers on four nuclear-armed Soviet attack submarines. Additional material, and Dobbs’s engaging style of writing, adds value to these accounts, providing detail and texture. But does he really provide significant new insights? The short answer is yes. In particular he provides important new evidence about Soviet nuclear dispositions in Cuba that deepen our understanding of the risks of inadvertent nuclear war. Dobbs shows how Soviet nuclear command-and-control depended on procedural safeguards that were dependent on the professionalism and self-discipline of the troops involved. Yet how close we were to midnight depends crucially on how close Kennedy was to invading—one of several important debates that Dobbs largely circumnavigates.

What the book makes clear, however, is that despite success in detecting medium-range ballistic missiles (MRBMs), U.S. intelligence failed in its search for nuclear warheads. Nuclear-capable ground launched cruise missiles (GLCMs) were mistaken for non-nuclear coastal defense missiles. Photographic evidence of nuclear storage facilities was discounted because none of the expected additional security measures appeared. Unbeknownst to the CIA, warheads had arrived at one of the MRBM sites. Here, Dobbs’s research is exemplary, drawing from Soviet documents, the recollections of Soviet participants and U.S. intelligence data. We learn, for example, how some of the GLCMs were deployed to their launch positions and prepared for an attack on Guantánamo Bay.

*One Minute to Midnight* is an impressively constructed portrayal of the moment.
when the world came closest to nuclear disaster and how the two sides drew back through a mixture of good judgment and good fortune. The book is history as narrative rather than as debate. For new students of the crisis the brief overview by Don Munton and David A. Welch, *The Cuban Missile Crisis: A Concise History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), might be a better place to start. Nevertheless, *One Minute to Midnight* will surely become indispensable reading for all those concerned with the nuclear history of the Cold War and the contemporary problem of nuclear weapons. For new students of the crisis (as well as old ones), the book will be a rewarding if nevertheless disquieting book to read.

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Reviewed by Jeffrey T. Richelson, National Security Archive

The terrorist attacks of September 2001 served as a catalyst for congressional and academic studies of the failure of U.S. intelligence and security agencies to detect and disrupt the plot. Those studies have also been critiqued by a variety of authors and from a variety of perspectives. Athan Theoharis, whose résumé includes books on the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), begins his new volume by challenging several key conclusions of two investigations: those by the congressional Joint Inquiry into Intelligence Community Activities before and after the Terrorist Attacks of September 11, 2001, and by the National Commission on the Terrorist Attacks upon the United States.

Theoharis notes that both groups complained that the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and FBI failed “to focus” as well as share relevant information and failed to assess the cumulative import of the intelligence gathered about a “probable terrorist attack.” The two bodies, the author reports, also cited “serious gaps” in the collection capabilities of the two organizations as well as the absence of a central analytic entity that could have ensured that intelligence was fully exploited. The underlying problem according to the Joint Inquiry and National Commission was differing “missions, legal authorities, and cultures.”

What was needed, according to those two groups, was better coordination between the CIA and FBI, a more centralized bureaucracy (particularly a director of national intelligence), and (depending on the group) either a new domestic intelligence agency or an FBI with a more aggressive approach, one rooted in a domestic intelligence rather than a law enforcement mentality. The latter mentality, FBI critics charge, equates to a focus on apprehension after a crime rather than long-term surveillance, penetration, and prevention.

But, in laying the groundwork for what is to follow, Theoharis charges that the reports of the two groups “reflect a poor understanding of the long-term history of limited cooperation among the intelligence agencies and the FBI’s long history of
counterintelligence failures.” In addition, he writes, “the FBI’s failure to anticipate Al Qaeda’s surprise attack was not due to insufficient authority, a lack of aggressiveness, or a ‘law enforcement’ culture” (p. 5). Further, he argues that FBI officials had abandoned such a culture more than five decades ago when they began to conduct intelligence operations to detect espionage, sabotage, and subversion.

Over the next seven chapters and 209 pages Theoharis covers the creation of several U.S. intelligence agencies from 1882 through 1978—the Office of Naval Intelligence, Military Intelligence, the FBI, the CIA, and the National Security Agency (NSA). Beyond noting their creation, Theoharis examines many of their battles, particularly those between the CIA and FBI, as well as their cooperative efforts.

A key element of the author’s survey in the first seven chapters is his depiction of an aggressive intelligence establishment, but one that often failed, despite that aggressiveness, to detect threats to the United States—particularly from foreign enemies. The FBI was, at various times, willing to go beyond the law and engage in illegal eavesdropping and surreptitious entry operations. The CIA opened mail to and from the Soviet Union. Meanwhile, the NSA was receiving the cables of foreign governments from U.S. cable companies as well as intercepting the communications of anti–Vietnam War activists.

In chapter 3, Theoharis examines several cases of FBI counterespionage operations, “with two confirming that the failure to anticipate and prevent espionage was due neither to the lack of legal authority nor to a lack of cooperation among the U.S. intelligence agencies” (p. 60). He argues that the cases “underscore the difficulty of anticipating espionage” (p. 60) and that the FBI’s failures occurred because FBI officials had an essentially political conception of potential security threats. The two confirming cases noted by Theoharis involved defections of German agents—examples of pure luck rather than FBI skill. He makes the same argument with regard to the FBI failures to detect Soviet espionage operations: the bureau focused on “the wrong American communists” (p. 70).

In the final two chapters and a brief 48 pages, Theoharis covers the period from 1979 to today. In those pages he discusses the creation of the CIA’s Counterterrorist Center in 1986, the Iran-Contra scandal, and some major espionage cases (Aldrich Ames, Robert Hanssen). He also revisits some of his earlier arguments and provides examples to support his argument that enhanced surveillance powers are unnecessary and unlikely to be productive. He questions the utility of the Terrorist Surveillance Program, the warrantless intercept program approved by President George W. Bush, citing reports from anonymous FBI agents that the program produced a multitude of unproductive leads. He points to failed prosecutions against alleged “sleeper cells” and the apparently inconsequential activities of some of those charged with supporting terrorism. The key to a more effective FBI, indeed more effective intelligence, he argues, is congressional oversight, not expanded surveillance powers.

But although Theoharis provides a well-written history of the domestic intelligence activities of several U.S. intelligence agencies, particularly through 1978, his heavy focus on the past undermines his attempt to criticize current policy. Sometimes the past is prologue, but at other times it is just the past. FBI or CIA failures in the
pre–Cold War or even Cold War eras involve different threats (espionage rather than terrorism) in a world with significantly different technologies available to both sides.

Nor does his abbreviated treatment of the current era permit even an attempt at a full assessment, or as full as is possible with open sources, of the success and failures of the FBI and CIA and the determinants of those success and failures. Thus, FBI complaints about the utility of the Terrorist Surveillance Program might be justified—or they might be a reflection of the FBI’s culture. A more detailed examination would seem to be required before accepting those complaints.

Had more space been devoted to current events, Theoharis would have been able to: examine other terrorist plots that succeeded abroad and the type of surveillance that might have allowed their detection, the surveillance authority possessed by governments in other countries with similar legal traditions, the impact of that authority on counterterrorist operations, and the instances in which the FBI activities have apparently disrupted plots or identified individuals working actively in support of al Qaeda. Instead, Theoharis arbitrarily suggests that the value of the FBI’s enhanced surveillance authority be judged solely by evaluation of the cases identified by the Justice Department as involving sleeper cells.

It is not hard to imagine that some (or even most) enhanced surveillance authority or data-collection and -mining activities may be unnecessary or that they fail to result in preemption of a terrorist strike. But making that case requires an in-depth examination of current events instead of a prolonged focus on the past. Devoting so much attention to the past and so little to the present prevents Theoharis from making a convincing case—if one is to be made.


Reviewed by Benjamin L. Alpers, University of Oklahoma

Dealing with Dictators consists mostly of six case studies of U.S. diplomacy and intelligence analysis: China (1945–1948), the Congo (1960–1963), Nicaragua (1977–1979), Iran (1978–1979), the Philippines (1983–1986), and Iraq (1988–1990). All the case studies except those of China and Iran were originally produced for the Harvard Intelligence and Policy executive program for senior managers in the U.S. intelligence community. From 1986 to 2002, Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government and the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) jointly ran this program, which both of the volume’s editors—the late historian Ernest May and the public policy expert and future George W. Bush administration official Philip Zelikow—helped to run. In their introduction, Zelikow and May write that the volume is intended for two audiences: “students of decisionmaking” and “students of the Cold War” (p. 2). The book may ultimately be of most interest to a third audience: students of more recent U.S.
foreign policy. As a record of how an important group of U.S. public policy experts and foreign-policymakers has considered the challenges they face, *Dealing with Dictators* provides a potentially instructive look at the way the United States came to its current place in world affairs.

*Dealing with Dictators* serves well its first intended audience: students of decision-making. All of the studies provide excellent, detailed accounts of executive-branch policy formation. As the editors note in their conclusion, Harvard's Intelligence and Policy program assumed that its participants knew how to analyze intelligence (p. 203). The program thus focused on what happens to that analysis once it enters the policymaking process. The case studies are designed to put the reader in the position of “a character in this story” (p. 3). They thus omit “retrospective comment or analysis” (p. 3) as well as information that would not have been available to actors at the time. Instead, the case studies provide detailed narratives that focus on the competing views of different U.S. officials and the way those views affected, or failed to affect, the ultimate policy decision of the administration. Without exception, the narratives offer fascinating pictures of policymaking in different administrations, the rivalries within and between different departments and agencies, and the methods used by the intelligence community to encourage policymakers to take its analyses into regard. The authors seem most interested in considering how administrations managed—or failed to manage—to form coherent policies out of these competing views.

This approach works well in highlighting questions of decision-making, but it tends to obscure many other things that would be of interest to the book’s second intended audience, students of the Cold War. For those interested more broadly in the history of the Cold War, *Dealing with Dictators* offers oddly incomplete accounts of the crises on which it focuses. The book puts us at the mercy of the knowledge and concerns of U.S. policymakers of the time, thus obscuring important aspects of the other countries in question and the crises in which they found themselves. The best recent work on similar topics, such as Odd Arne Westad’s *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), takes full advantage of knowledge gained from Soviet and other Cold War-era overseas archives—information that is excluded here, presumably because it would not have been available at the time. While we find out much about U.S. fears regarding the USSR and Chinese Communism, the case study on China is silent about the evidence that has emerged regarding Soviet views of that country. The Iranian case spends much time on contemporary U.S. assessments of the Shah’s character and of Soviet interests in the country, but it offers no retrospective evaluation of the important factors that might allow us to gauge which American policymakers actually better understood them.

The case studies also place their events in a narrow chronological context. The historical background for each case is covered very quickly and often leaves out important details. The Nicaragua case study is nearly silent on the history of U.S. interventions in that country. The Iran case study downplays the importance of the U.S.-backed coup in 1953 that reinstalled the Shah. The Philippines case study does not
even mention the Philippine-American War (1899–1902). The studies also abruptly conclude with the resolution of the diplomatic crises in question, leaving the reader with little information about the long-term impact of the policies they discuss, such as Mobutu Sese Seko’s disastrous 32-year misrule of Zaire.

Nor does the book much address the larger and more general questions about how the United States has dealt—or should deal—with dictatorial friends and foes. Although the case studies often provide fascinating information about the personal background and political views of particular U.S. policymakers, the case studies do not independently assess—or even encourage their readers to assess—the relationship of any of these cases to a larger understanding of the goals of U.S. foreign policy. Unless the U.S. interests at stake were a particular topic of contemporary controversy, the nature of these interests is simply assumed. The authors give no consideration whatsoever to the ideological assumptions that generally underlay U.S. policymaking. The studies often treat Congress and public opinion as bothersome externalities to be managed by executive branch policymakers rather than as potentially valuable policy inputs in a democracy. The cases give little consideration to any possible external limits on the efficacy of American intervention in the affairs of other countries; nor do they discuss international law as a factor that deserves respect in and of itself.

These weaknesses will themselves be of interest to the book’s third, and unintended, audience: those concerned with the current state of U.S. foreign policymaking. *Dealing with Dictators* suggests that the Harvard Intelligence and Policy program viewed the challenges facing U.S. foreign policy as largely internal and bureaucratic. Future historians may be interested in exploring how representative was the tendency of these case studies to downplay the many real limits that law, morality, and politics (domestic and foreign) can, and should, place on U.S. foreign policy.


Reviewed by William Crotty, Northeastern University

This study is related to, and in many respects is a continuation of, David F. Schmitz’s earlier *Thank God They’re on Our Side: The United States and Right-Wing Dictatorships, 1921–1965*. Schmitz is a diplomatic historian and the holder of the Robert Allen Skotheim Chair of History at Whitman College. In the related study, he argued that from the 1920s through the Vietnam War U.S. governments, despite claiming to be promoting democracy worldwide, allied themselves with authoritarian governments. The rationale was that such dictatorships promoted U.S. economic and strategic interests by ensuring stability, order, and predictability. He claims that this not only ran counter to the country’s professed intent to spread democracy, but more often than not placed the United States on the “wrong side of history.”

After World War II the justification was to contain Soviet Communist expan-
sion. One consequence was an inbred hostility to nationalist forces in Latin America, Africa, and elsewhere. To achieve broader strategic objectives, the United States demonstrated a commitment to provide weapons, economic subsidies, diplomatic support, and training in military and interrogation methods to such dictatorships, regardless of the repressiveness of their regimes. On occasion and as deemed necessary, the United States was willing to invade countries (the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Nicaragua, etc.) when it believed the prevailing order was under attack.

The culmination of this thinking, evidenced in both Republican and Democratic administrations, was Vietnam, where the Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon administrations chose to assume the legacy of French colonialism, opposing indigenous Communist nationalist forces and making the war in Southeast Asia a U.S. war. The rationale was to contain Communism. The legacy of the war remains with us.

Schmitz sees in the Vietnam experience another legacy: a rejection of the passivity, submissiveness, and unquestioned trust of the 1950s and earlier decades and an increased public willingness to challenge and oppose the tradition of support for corrupt, inefficient, and often brutal anti-democratic regimes.

The newer study overlaps with and extends the arguments of the previous book, tracing the evolving emphasis on questioning official justifications of decision-makers bound by the traditions of power politics and the commitments of the past. The resulting struggle of opposing visions within the government had—and will continue to have—major consequences for the current and future U.S. role in the world, for perceptions of what constitutes a national threat, for U.S. relations with developing countries, and for the integrity of U.S. commitments to promote human rights.

Relying on impressively thorough research in primary sources, Schmitz develops these themes in assessments of Cold War decision-making and policies (the study extends from the 1960s to the 1980s). The quality of official decision-making and the assumptions made, once documented, can be disturbing. Many of the cases covered in the book are now largely forgotten, at least in the United States: the Kennedy administration’s actions in South America; the Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon administration’s policies in Africa, including the disastrous support of the corrupt, repressive Mobutu Sese Seko in the Congo/Zaire; the commitments of numerous U.S. presidents to white minority governments in South Africa and Rhodesia; the support for the takeover by the colonels in Greece; the Nixon-Kissinger “madmen” psychology in Vietnam (Nixon wanted the North Vietnamese to assume he was an uncontrollable, irrational, anti-Communist, hence the illegal bombing of Cambodia); the embrace of Suharto in Indonesia; the support provided by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency for coups overthrowing elected leaders in Guatemala and Chile. The list goes on and on.

The contradictions in policy and the assumptions underlying such actions serve to reinforce Schmitz’s arguments. A few examples illustrate the nature of the problem. On Vietnam, the critics (a vocal constituency but one with seemingly little influence on government thinking) saw “the war as immoral and damaging to American values and institutions. The United States was supporting a military dictatorship in Saigon that was corrupt, ineffective, unpopular, and ruled through force alone. This made the
policy self-defeating... support for South Vietnam rendered American moral arguments against communist regimes hypocritical and violated American principles” (p. 59).

President Lyndon Johnson, in justifying the escalation of the war, argued that it “was in the defense of America’s national interest in the global struggle against communism, a struggle that was necessary to protect American values against communist regimes that were immoral, brutal, and totalitarian” (p. 58). Nixon believed that the war in Vietnam was Chinese aggression by proxy and could be repeated throughout Asia. On the other hand, “the American presence in Vietnam... was allowing for an ‘extraordinarily promising transformation’ in Asia” (p. 74).

When backing authoritarian governments, “Nixon stated that these countries might not fit the Western ideal of democracy. Americans must recognize that a highly sophisticated, highly advanced political system, which required many countries to developed in the West, may not be best for other nations which... are still in an earlier stage of development.’ What mattered was stability and preventing the spread of communism” (p. 75).

Nixon’s thinking had another ugly side. Presidential aide John Ehrlichman reported that Nixon told him that he thought blacks were “less intelligent and ‘genetically inferior’ to whites” (p. 83). This, along with the Nixon administration’s desire to avert political chaos and violence from a black uprising in South Africa that could lead to a Communist takeover, might partly account for the administration’s emphasis on aid to the white minority government.

On a more positive note, congressional investigations into the abuses of the Vietnam era resulted in statutes restricting such actions, and Jimmy Carter worked to redirect foreign policy to reflect the “decency and generosity” of the American people, arguing that “the United States was its ‘strongest and most effective when morality and a commitment to freedom and democracy have been most clearly employed in our foreign policy’” (p. 147). Such an emphasis broke fundamentally with prior administrations and, not unexpectedly, proved difficult to implement.

Ronald Reagan forcefully returned to the old ways, embarking on what Schmitz describes as an “ideological offensive” intended to achieve democratic ends through the support of “freedom fighters” who could roll back Communist gains in the Third World (p. 195). This initiative was in contrast to the “passive nature of containment.” Reagan believed that the toppling of Communist regimes would end the human rights abuses there.

The Reagan ideological imperative and the administration’s disregard for legal or constitutional restrictions on its actions resurfaced during George W. Bush’s presidency. The excesses of an executive unrestrained by a passive and supportive Congress are alarming, and the consequences have yet to be anticipated. Unfortunately, Schmitz does not move beyond the Reagan presidency.

The policy studies of each of the presidencies are painstakingly researched and thoroughly noted. Schmitz relies heavily on the presidential libraries, the National Archives, National Security Council memoranda and files, State Department and intelli-
gence materials, and the Frank Church papers. At the same time, the book is well written and developed. The thesis is clear and thoroughly documented.

*The United States and Right-Wing Dictatorships*—like Schmitz’s earlier study—effectively and forcefully contributes to a national understanding of actions taken in the name of democracy and directly raises issues about the U.S. democratic system. The book’s scholarship, thoroughness, and thematic focus make it among the best analyses of the tradeoffs that were often seen as necessary during the Cold War.


*Reviewed by Clayton K. S. Chun, U.S. Army War College*

The U.S. Air Force’s spectacular airpower capabilities have resulted from many innovations, including precision-guided munitions (PGMs). These capabilities, which were only a dream before World War II, emerged over several decades, becoming today’s reality. The United States now has the ability to destroy strategic or tactical targets that could not have been attacked in the past because of the potential casualties or collateral damage to civilians or physical infrastructure. This change has given policymakers a choice of options never before envisioned. *Weapons of Choice: The Development of Precision Guided Munitions* by Paul G. Gillespie traces the drive by military officers, engineers, and scientists to create the capabilities that early airpower theorists believed aircraft one day would have. Gillespie provides a fast-paced examination of how and why the U.S. military and industry developed PGMs. Although PGMs have become commonplace in today’s air forces, their evolution began in World War I and made a highly successful debut during the latter half of the Vietnam War.

Gillespie focuses on a particular PGM class, conventional bombs that are interactively guided to their targets, to demonstrate how a fusion of technology, military doctrine, wartime exigencies, and national security policy combined to change the way America wagers war. He describes how air forces tried to bring precision to bomb delivery. These efforts gained speed during World War II, but technological limitations inhibited progress. Despite the military establishment’s focus on nuclear weapons during the early Cold War, the desire to build PGMs never subsided. The loss of aircrew and aircraft, civilian casualties, the explosion of available aerial weapons, and the need to destroy strategic targets during the Korean War only fueled the U.S. Air Force’s drive for greater precision. Technological advances based on previous capabilities or seemingly unrelated components, like lasers and the integrated circuit, led to the PGM advances of the 1960s.

The advent of nuclear weapons did not eliminate the desire for PGMs, but it did undercut much of the momentum behind their development. In the 1950s and early 1960s the U.S. Air Force and Navy continued only minimal PGM development, and much of the military’s conventional tactical capability atrophied as airpower research
focused on nuclear weapon delivery. With the advent of limited war theory in the 1960s, the Kennedy administration worried that conventional forces might not be effective in fighting those sorts of wars. The Vietnam War demonstrated that existing tactical aircraft could conduct conventional attacks but the effectiveness and efficiency of the available ordnance were no better than in World War II or the Korean War. Aircrews failed to destroy targets like the Thanh Hoa Bridge using “dumb bombs” and had to carry out repeated attacks against other targets. These circumstances gave a spur to PGM experimentation. After repeatedly failing to destroy the bridge with un-guided weapons, the Air Force tried PGMs and easily took out the bridge. With the new, more precise weapons, U.S. political and military leaders no longer had to bypass important military targets for fear that a misplaced conventional weapon would create undue collateral damage.

Some U.S. Air Force commanders had bemoaned the limitations of using conventional weapons. This encouraged engineers and scientists to apply existing technology to improve weapons that would later become the laser- and electro-optical-guided systems that are common today. Gillespie’s description of the early efforts to bring these weapons into operation provides the reader with an interesting view of the problems and issues faced by government and industry in trying to prove the merits of such systems. Attack planes needed the ability to concentrate their firepower on the target. Designers approached this requirement by creating weapons that would actively seek out the target. Operation Linebacker, a bombing campaign against North Vietnam mounted in 1972, demonstrated that PGMs increased military commanders’ attack options without requiring massive numbers of ground forces. The operation ultimately helped compel Hanoi to return to the bargaining table.

PGM use began to dominate U.S. Air Force planning, affecting it in a number of ways. Laser-guided weapons, with their increased accuracy and lethality, expanded the range of military options. Aircrews could consistently put a bomb through a window to destroy a command post or laboratory. Coupled with stealthy and global delivery platforms, this capability altered the use of military power and national security policy. The performance of PGMs in the 1991 Persian Gulf War impressed Washington and the other military services—a sign that airpower had come of age. One wonders why the author did not delve more heavily into the Navy’s embrace of PGMs after the Air Force used them with such success in the Persian Gulf War. Airpower became an instrument of choice in some respects and allowed political leaders to use military forces more discriminately and for a wider range of purposes.

Gillespie’s book provides an interesting glimpse into how the introduction of a new technological capability can affect national security policy. He asks daunting questions. For example, can a weapon that reduces casualties and collateral damage make a country even more averse to military and civilian deaths, ultimately curtailing military options? How can military forces use PGMs and airpower against non-state terrorists? One might also ask how the ability to select targets and their impact on an enemy evolved to take advantage of PGM advancement. Intelligence that will permit commanders to foresee the effect of attacking particular targets has been of prime concern to both political and military leaders.
Weapons of Choice presents a fascinating case study of the way technology can radically alter national security and military strategy. Filled with numerous technical details, the book gives readers a fascinating look at how the PGM captured the military’s attention and altered the American way of war.


Reviewed by Timothy J. Galpin, Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory

In the annals of the Cold War, the deeds of the Silent Service were kept highly classified until recently. Those interested in the exploits of submarines had to be content with the amazing feats of the World War II generation as meticulously documented in Clay Blair, Jr.’s *Silent Victory* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1975) or in such classics as Richard “Dick” O’Kane’s *Clear the Bridge* (New York: Presidio Press, 1989). However, with the passage of time and the U.S. victory in the Cold War, a picture has started to emerge of the true contest for dominance beneath the waves by the two most powerful navies the world has ever known. Gannon McHale has added color to that picture with his memoir of life on the USS *Sturgeon* (SSN 637) in the heart of the Cold War, as told from the perspective of an enlisted crewmember.

The concept of “shipmate” is difficult to convey and, though not unique to submarines, certainly is the basis for forming an effective crew from individual sailors. *Stealth Boat*, with its vivid descriptions of the crewmembers as true characters in the drama of life in the “boats,” brings even the uninitiated to an understanding of how lifelong bonds were formed. Every submariner, from seaman to admiral, will easily recognize himself in one or more of the hilarious, zany, and sometimes harrowing sea stories related by McHale about his shipmates over a three-year period from 1967 to 1970.

Worth reading from that perspective alone, *Stealth Boat* is much deeper than a collection of stories about old shipmates and, by extension, the Vietnam-era submarine subculture. More in the literary tradition of Richard Henry Dana, Jr.’s *Two Years before the Mast* (1846), *Stealth Boat* uses those stories to explain life in submarines. The simulated loss of the boat in a dive-trainer underscores that the unrelenting pressure to qualify in submarines is the means by which this fraternity ensures every crewmember can be entrusted to understand the boat and do the right thing in an emergency. A black steward, who has to be protected by his shipmates during liberty call in the South, is one of those “qualified in submarines” who show the author the ropes as a new crewmember. From a different perspective, a new commanding officer’s willingness to navigate in the fog by radar and land the ship without tugs stands in contrast to his conservative predecessor and evokes a fierce pride that begins to bond the crew for deployments to come.

McHale provides true value from a historical perspective as well. Set against a
backdrop of cultural anecdotes, music of the day, and world events delivered in a staccato style, the reality of life beneath the waves unfolds. Although others have done a more meticulous job of documenting the broader role of submarines in fighting the Cold War, as well as the role of Admiral Hyman G. Rickover's naval nuclear power program in revolutionizing the technology of submarines, *Stealth Boat* is unsurpassed in showing the impact on the thoughts and actions of the submariners involved.

In 1968 approximately 400 men were lost with their submarines at sea. As with the loss of USS *Scorpion* (SSN 589), the causes were often unclear even after extensive investigation. But against the backdrop of the Cold War, when U.S. submarines hunted their Soviet counterparts, and vice versa, and when the possibility of groundings and collisions at sea were omnipresent, the crew were often mindful that when they left port they were sailing into harm's way—not just because deliberately submerging a ship beneath the waves is unnatural, but because of what they did there. *Stealth Boat* is at its most compelling when describing close maneuvers against Soviet submarines to record their sound signature or even closer maneuvers to conduct underwater hull surveillance through the periscope.

McHale does not neglect to include in his portraits of the crew a thorough analysis of the commanding officers (COs), the men on whose tactical judgment rested the success of the mission and the safety of the ship. He candidly discusses the impact that the CO has on the crew, comparing the tours of Commander Curtis B. Shellman with his more daring successor, Commander William “Bo” Bohannan. Despite lacking the charisma of Bohannan, Shellman provided the leadership and meticulous attention to detail to ensure that *Sturgeon* was built well and the crew highly trained. It was left to Bohannan, the aggressive ship driver and gifted tactician who took the risks and delivered the spectacular results, to earn the affection of the crew. However, readers should be careful not to draw easy conclusions prematurely and should wait until reading McHale’s “Looking Back” before deciding who was ultimately the more successful skipper.

In McHale’s telling, the USS *Sturgeon* under Bohannan’s command, with steady support from Executive Officer (later Admiral) Bruce DeMars, compares favorably to the famous exploits of Kinnaird McKee in USS *Dace* (SSN 607) or Chester “Whitey” Mack in USS *Lapon* (SSN 661). Not so his final submarine. USS *Dogfish* (SS350) was a Guppy II diesel-electric submarine that was obsolete when McHale joined the crew. The counterpoint could not be clearer than when *Dogfish* flooded on McHale’s first dive because someone left a hatch open! Of course, diesel boat sailors were submariners, too, but McHale’s heart lies with his stealth boat. The motto of USS *Sturgeon* was “First in her class, finest in the fleet!” Maybe she was. This is a memoir worth reading to find out.

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Reviewed by Dan Caldwell, Pepperdine University

This is a collection of articles by seventeen historians that were first presented at a conference at Ohio State University in December 2006 focusing on how U.S. foreign policy fared under the pressures of the late 1960s and 1970s. The contributors include long-established scholars (Fredrik Logevall, Robert Schulzinger, Francis Gavin) as well as more recent analysts of the Nixon administration’s policies (Jeremi Suri, Michael Cotey Morgan) plus some non-American scholars (Robert Bothwell, Jussi Hanhimäki, Margaret MacMillan). Almost all of the authors make use of primary sources in their analyses, and several use archives outside the United States.

In a secretly recorded April 1973 conversation with presidential assistant John Ehrlichman, Richard Nixon commented: “Whatever legacy we have, hell it isn’t going to be in getting a cesspool for Winnetka.” Nixon was partly correct and partly wrong: Foreign policy affected his legacy, but Watergate did too. His friend Clare Booth Luce once said that Nixon’s legacy would be summarized succinctly: “He went to China.” Nixon himself thought that he would be remembered for two things: the opening to China and Watergate, which he called “that silly, silly thing.” The contributors to the volume, particularly David Greenberg, highlight the “cesspool” not of Winnetka but of Watergate: “To understand his foreign policy, one has to understand the man who brought us Watergate” (p. 46). Dominic Sandbrook notes that Watergate had a three-fold impact: on the institution of the presidency, the fall of South Vietnam, and the demise of détente.

But the cesspool of Watergate is not the only underside of the Nixon administration that is evident in this book. Nixon comes across as profane, prejudiced, cynical, paranoid and power hungry. This image of Nixon will not surprise anyone who has looked through the Nixon papers at the U.S. National Archives or the recently transferred collections at the Nixon Library, but it will perhaps be eye-opening to non-specialists. Consider, for example, how Nixon summed up South Asia: “The Pakistanis are straightforward—and sometimes extremely stupid. The Indians are more devious, sometimes so smart that we fall for their line” (p. 251).

Although Henry Kissinger is not the main focus of the book, his image is not helped by it because he comes across as sycophantic and reflects Nixon’s prejudices. Unlike Robert Dallek’s outstanding study of the complex relationship between the two men, *Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Power* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), this volume does not shed much light on one of the more curious relationships of recent American politics.

The book contains chapters on several frequently analyzed subjects, including U.S. grand strategy, the selling of détente, and U.S. policy toward Vietnam, China, and the Arab-Israeli conflict. Jussi Hanhimäki contends that the Nixon-Kissinger grand design “was not a revolutionary shift from earlier policies” and that its central objective was the containment of Soviet power and influence. Other contributors in
the volume, however, note that the Nixon-Kissinger strategy was based on a tripolar rather than a bipolar view of the international system.

Some of the contributors venture down less well-traveled paths and discuss the Nixon-Kissinger policies toward Canada, Ostpolitik, the Helsinki Final Act, South Asia, Latin America, and the economic shocks of August 1971. Perhaps one reason that many analysts have not focused on some of these topics was Nixon’s lack of attention: “Latin America,” he said, “doesn’t matter. People don’t give one damn about Latin America. The only thing that matters in the world is Japan, China, Russia, and Europe” (p. 269).

The major criticism that I have of the book is the absence of a conclusion. Despite the amount of attention devoted to the Nixon-Kissinger policies and the hundreds of articles and books devoted to the subject, this volume offers a fresh perspective, and it would have been helpful to include a conclusion that would summarize the major new findings.

Although I have studied these policies for more than three decades, I learned a great deal from this volume and highly recommend it to specialists and non-specialists alike.


Reviewed by Lloyd C. Gardner, Rutgers University

Richard Nixon vowed that he would reform decision-making so that no bureaucratic consensus could predetermine the president’s options. He would demand options from the National Security Council (NSC) beyond simple acceptance or rejection of what the bureaucracy dished up, enabling the president to know what alternatives existed for dealing with any major crisis, and thereby, it was asserted, freeing him from reliance on policy choices found wanting in the past. Although this sounded like an opening-up of the decision-making process, it really denoted the opposite: his determination to keep decisions inside the White House. Asaf Siniver begins his book with a quotation from a Nixon aide, Bryce Harlow, who warned the president-elect that the vast bulk of State Department permanent employees were liberals who believed that Nixon’s thin margin of victory would prevent the new administration from making any meaningful change in the working of the system or U.S. foreign policy.

The irony that came with these pronouncements, according to Siniver, is that Nixon and Henry Kissinger actually did design a system that provided the information and input for dealing with crises in an effective way, allowing for debate and the hammering out of alternatives. But the new system was largely ignored as decisions were made by the two principal actors, Nixon and Kissinger, whose personalities proved to be the key factors in the process. Siniver is left to suggest that despite this limitation, the Nixon administration’s crisis-management system proved useful as a
foil against which the two men carried out their desired policies. Thus, the success or failure of the redesigned NSC—which Siniver says replaced the flimsy operations of Lyndon Johnson’s years—should not be judged on whether the policies that were followed emerged in that body. The role of such machinery, he argues, is not to make the decisions, but to “help” the president make the right decisions.

Other observers might find this a tenuous claim, particularly given the evidence that Siniver then presents when studying four crises: the 1970 Cambodian incursion, the September 1970 Jordanian crisis, the 1971 Indo-Pakistani War, and the 1973 Yom Kippur War. Kissinger’s NSC sought from the outset to centralize information, and therefore possible options, in the hands of Kissinger himself. All memoranda prepared in the NSC were signed by Kissinger, and all memoranda from the Department of State were filtered so that the president would need to read only the national security adviser’s conclusions. Kissinger held endless meetings, according to one of his experts, William Quandt, so that the NSC would adopt the Kissinger-Nixon worldview, “and people did begin to say phrases and see things in this way” (p. 48).

The NSC meetings on the Cambodian incursion, however, revealed the true role of the NSC as a deliberative body in the Nixon administration. The president had probably predetermined that he was going into Cambodia, no matter what the experts said. But when Vice President Spiro Agnew suggested that even the plans under consideration pussyfooted around the issue of taking out the entire threat from Cambodia, it sent the president into a tizzy for supposedly being one-upped on the toughness scale. The decision for the incursion led to an almost wholesale departure from the NSC and perhaps marked the turning point in other ways on the march to wiretapping NSC aides and Watergate.

In the Yom Kippur War crisis the impact of Watergate was already being felt as Nixon and Kissinger carried on a duel over how to manage the war to increase U.S. influence by balancing Israel off against the Arab countries while keeping the Soviet Union from gaining any leverage. When the tide of battle seemed to turn against Israel, Nixon received a clear warning that unless Kissinger’s stalling tactics on an airlift of arms came to an end the Israelis would turn to their allies in Congress to force action in their favor. Kissinger’s manipulations were not quite at an end, however. He managed to shift all blame for the delay onto the shoulders of Defense Secretary James Schlesinger.

Kissinger felt relieved that he had managed to carry off the president’s strategy without alienating the Arab countries and had preserved U.S. influence over oil supplies to the West. Nixon, meanwhile, was blunt in talking with members of the inner council, the Washington Special Actions Group, telling them that the airlift was essential. “We can’t get so much to them [the Israelis] that they will be arrogant, but we can’t be in the position where Israel puts pressure on Congress for us to do more” (p. 104).

Of course, the problems did not end there. The oil boycott imposed by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries and the sharp price increases came immediately after the airlift to Israel. Subsequently, the Soviet Union’s “ultimatum” sparked a U.S. global military alert, and this was followed by late-night meetings at which
Kissinger in effect acted as president while Nixon was absent, apparently incapacitated at a moment of great decision. As Siniver notes, the machinery that had been established to deal with crises was all but ignored and U.S. policy instead depended on the flawed decisions of two egocentric men. “The two most important decisions—the airlift to Israel and the DefCon alert—depict a different picture of decision-making. Rather than careful consideration of objectives and courses of action, they were characterized by manipulation and misjudgment” (p. 217).

One comes away from this book wondering whether it is ever possible to construct a crisis-machinery system that can discuss issues and churn out alternatives that will be acceptable to leaders with their own agendas. Cambodia was the beginning of the troubles for the Nixon presidency, whereas the outcome of the Yom Kippur War and Kissinger’s diplomacy managed to avoid an immediate catastrophe. Even readers who are not interested in Siniver’s long presentation of political science theories about decision-making are likely to be intrigued by his case studies, which are based on archival research and discuss issues of concern to all students of U.S. foreign policy.


Reviewed by Nathan Alexander, Troy University

In late 1969 nearly 60 percent of Americans believed that U.S. military involvement in Vietnam was a mistake. The Democratic Party’s presidential candidate in 1972, George McGovern, advocated the total withdrawal of U.S. forces from Southeast Asia. In 1968, Republican presidential candidate Richard Nixon had declared that if he were elected, he would end the war in Vietnam. By April 1970 Nixon had reduced troop strength by nearly half. A year later, U.S. force levels had declined to around 50,000, and they dwindled ed to insignificant levels by the time the Paris peace treaty was signed in 1973. By March 1973, 59 percent of Americans identified the high cost of living as the most important problem facing the United States, and only 7 percent identified Vietnam. Regardless of the war’s outcome, most Americans after 1968 got what they wanted: military disengagement from Vietnam. To say that the United States “lost” the war in Vietnam is less accurate than to say the country changed its priorities.

Since the mid-1970s, a split has developed among historians over whether the United States might have prevailed in South Vietnam. An orthodox school, believing broadly that the war was not winnable, argues that American idealism was misplaced: Ngo Dinh Diem, these scholars contend, was a dictator who had little popular support, particularly when compared to Ho Chi Minh. The orthodox school believes that U.S. officials failed to understand the historical appeal of Vietnamese nationalism and were wont to view Communism as a monolithic force binding together different na-
tionalities that should have been treated separately. U.S. military efforts, according to this school, were also thwarted by dysfunctional civil-military relations.

Revisionist historians have generally argued that a different military strategy might have prevented Saigon’s ignominious collapse in April 1975. Harry G. Summers argued in *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War* (Presidio, CA: Novato Press, 1982) that barricading the demilitarized zone (DMZ) as well as Laotian and possibly Thai infiltration routes would have prevented guerrillas from being replaced and resupplied. William Colby in *Lost Victory: A Firsthand Account of America’s Sixteen-Year Involvement in Vietnam* (Chicago: Contemporary Books, 1989) averred that the United States should have focused on pacification and counterinsurgency instead of trying to engage major enemy units, as it did in 1965 and 1966. In his view, a different military strategy applied earlier might have brought victory.

Marc Jason Gilbert and others in the orthodox school responded to the revisionists in Gilbert’s edited volume, *Why the North Won the Vietnam War* (New York: Palgrave, 2002). An invasion of North Vietnam or Laos, they argued, would have been “worthless” because the war in the South was indigenous or at least indigenously supported. Moreover, a more aggressive U.S. strategy would have resulted in Chinese intervention. They insisted that a different military strategy (such as Colby’s) would not have worked because the Saigon government was too corrupt to employ a pacification strategy early in the war and the U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, was committed to a large-scale war of attrition, which precluded considering other strategies. Gilbert concludes by accusing revisionists of “choosing information selectively and ignoring what contradicts their beliefs.” The revisionists, he contends, ignore “the reality of Vietnamese nationalism” and are often just right-wing ideologues.

Mark Moyar’s *Triumph Forsaken: The Vietnam War, 1954–1965,* the first of a projected two-volume history of the Vietnam War, presents itself as a major revisionist text. Its principal argument is that Diem was a legitimate nationalist leader who prosecuted the war successfully against the Communists. Diem’s overthrow and assassination in 1963, according to Moyar, resulted from botched communications between Washington and Saigon, as well as the opportunism and ignorance of Ambassador Elbridge Durbrow and later Henry Cabot Lodge. Moyar argues that the war effort, effective under Diem, was crippled by the ensuing political instability. Had Diem lived, Moyar contends, “it is highly doubtful that the United States would have needed to introduce . . . troops . . . Quite possibly, indeed, South Vietnam could have survived under Diem without the help of any US ground forces.”

Historians have misunderstood the Diem years, Moyar says, because they have paid too much attention to the writing of journalists David Halberstam and Neil Sheehan. Both were unfairly critical of Diem (Halberstam got much of his information on the South Vietnamese officer corps from the Communist agent Pham Xuan An) and supported the coup as a way of more swiftly remaking South Vietnam into a more democratic government. When Diem’s overthrow proved disastrous, both continued to write about Diem’s incompetence as the cause of the coup instead of acknowledging their own misunderstanding and complicity.
Journalists were not the only ones who misled Americans about Vietnam. John Paul Vann, the hero of Neal Sheehan’s Pulitzer Prize–winning book *A Bright Shining Lie: John Paul Vann and America in Vietnam* (New York: Random House, 1988), was responsible, Moyar argues, for the high casualties of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) at the Battle of Ap Bac in 1963. Vann, however, found an easy way of shifting the blame from himself, convincing a gullible Sheehan into believing that South Vietnamese incompetence was at fault. Pressuring the South Vietnamese to “reform” too often became a disguise for crude American ethnocentrism.

Moyar argues that large-scale U.S. military intervention in South Vietnam was necessitated by Diem’s assassination and President Lyndon Johnson’s timid response to North Vietnamese provocations. Johnson generally ignored the Joint Chiefs of Staff (who in 1964 called for sending ground troops into North Vietnam and using joint ARVN and U.S. forces to cut off Laotian supply routes), relying instead on his civilian experts (inherited from John F. Kennedy) who were enamored of Thomas Schelling’s “limited war” theory and believed (falsely, according to Moyar) that the war in the South was self-sustaining. Although Johnson and his cabinet attempted to send “signals” to North Vietnam about their limited intentions, the North (and China) interpreted these signals as indicating a lack of U.S. resolve. By early 1964 most infiltrators were Northerners, and by the end of the year the North had effectively invaded South Vietnam, this time with Chinese backing.

*Triumph Forsaken* is written as an aggressive polemic. Moyar argues that Ho Chi Minh was principally a Marxist-Leninist and that his reliance on Soviet and Chinese allies belies his historical reputation as a nationalist, especially when compared with Diem. Vietnamese history, he maintains, can hardly be characterized as “driving out invaders.” Rather, insfighting and relying on foreign powers for assistance is the “primary chord” of Vietnam’s “national song.” Moyar contends that Johnson’s belief in the “Domino Theory” was based on sound knowledge of historical and regional politics and that new evidence demonstrates that cutting off the Ho Chi Minh trail would have proven decisive in defeating Communist aggression. Former North Vietnamese colonel Bui Tin concurs rather bluntly with this assessment in his *From Enemy to Friend: A North Vietnamese Perspective on the War* (Annapolis: US Naval Institute Press, 2002). The Vietnam War, Moyar concludes, was “a wise war fought under foolish constraints.”

*Triumph Forsaken* has many points in common, as Moyar acknowledges, with the orthodox position. After more than 500 pages, Moyar has shifted the origins of the “quagmire” from American meddling in Southeast Asia in the late 1950s to a specific incident: the U.S.-backed overthrow of Diem in 1963. No longer do America’s military men and Diem’s supporters—Maxwell Taylor, Durbrow, and President Kennedy (in Moyar’s view)—represent “misdirected idealism”; instead this label falls to Halberstam, Sheehan, and Stanley Karnow. Moyar believes that U.S. civil-military relations were dysfunctional. Even today, Americans would be more inclined to blame William Westmoreland for the war in Vietnam than to blame Halberstam.

Where Moyar differs from the orthodox school is in his assessment of the U.S. government’s appreciation of Vietnamese nationalism. The orthodox school tends to
see U.S. involvement in Vietnam as monolithic and self-serving. Moyar argues for a more nuanced view. Diem, he maintains, was a legitimate nationalist figure, and at times the United States worked effectively to support him against the Communist-supported Ho Chi Minh. As the war began to attract wide opposition, U.S. officials were increasingly willing to overlook the differences between Ho Chi Minh’s Marxist centralism and the authoritarianism of Diem. The language of ethnic nationalism became a way of describing the conflict that concealed the aggressive expansionism of North Vietnam and implied that the United States had no business in this Vietnamese affair. Frances Fitzgerald, in *Fire in the Lake: The Vietnamese and Americans in Vietnam* (New York: Back Bay Books, 2002), famously describes the Viet Cong as “Confucian-Marxists,” a strange hybrid term that might conceivably have rationalized Soviet and Chinese meddling in Vietnam without branding it “imperialist.”

By 1967 the New Left was calling for U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam on the grounds that the war was a civil war among Vietnamese. In 1969 Richard Nixon, using the same logic, complied by withdrawing U.S. combat troops from Vietnam, substituting a policy of “Vietnamization.” The “ethnic-nationalist” description of the war served two purposes and united Nixon with his critics. First, as an ideology, the description rationalized the precipitate (or desirable, if you were a critic) withdrawal of U.S. troops from South Vietnam. Second, it guaranteed Nixon his “peace with honor.” Recasting the war in monolithic ethnic terms put the burden of survival on South Vietnam instead of its patron, the United States. By substituting the language of ethnic identity for the language of politics (democrat versus Communist), the flawed 1973 agreement came with a built-in excuse for failure.

Gilbert in his edited volume accuses revisionist historians of seeing the war’s outcome as contingent on U.S. actions and ignoring those of “the Vietnamese.” Moyar has radically challenged this notion in two ways. First, with regard to the “Vietnamese perspective,” he insists, 32 years after the fall of Saigon, that we must still ask “Which nationalism? Which Vietnamese?” Second, to historians content with recasting the war in monolithic ethnic terms, Moyar asks, could there be anything more ideologically decisive than facilitating North Vietnam’s hegemony? Even if this was the preferred belief as far as Americans and North Vietnamese were concerned in 1973, it is hardly a good basis nowadays for assessing the South Vietnamese, whose history remains a lacuna in the orthodox interpretation of the war.