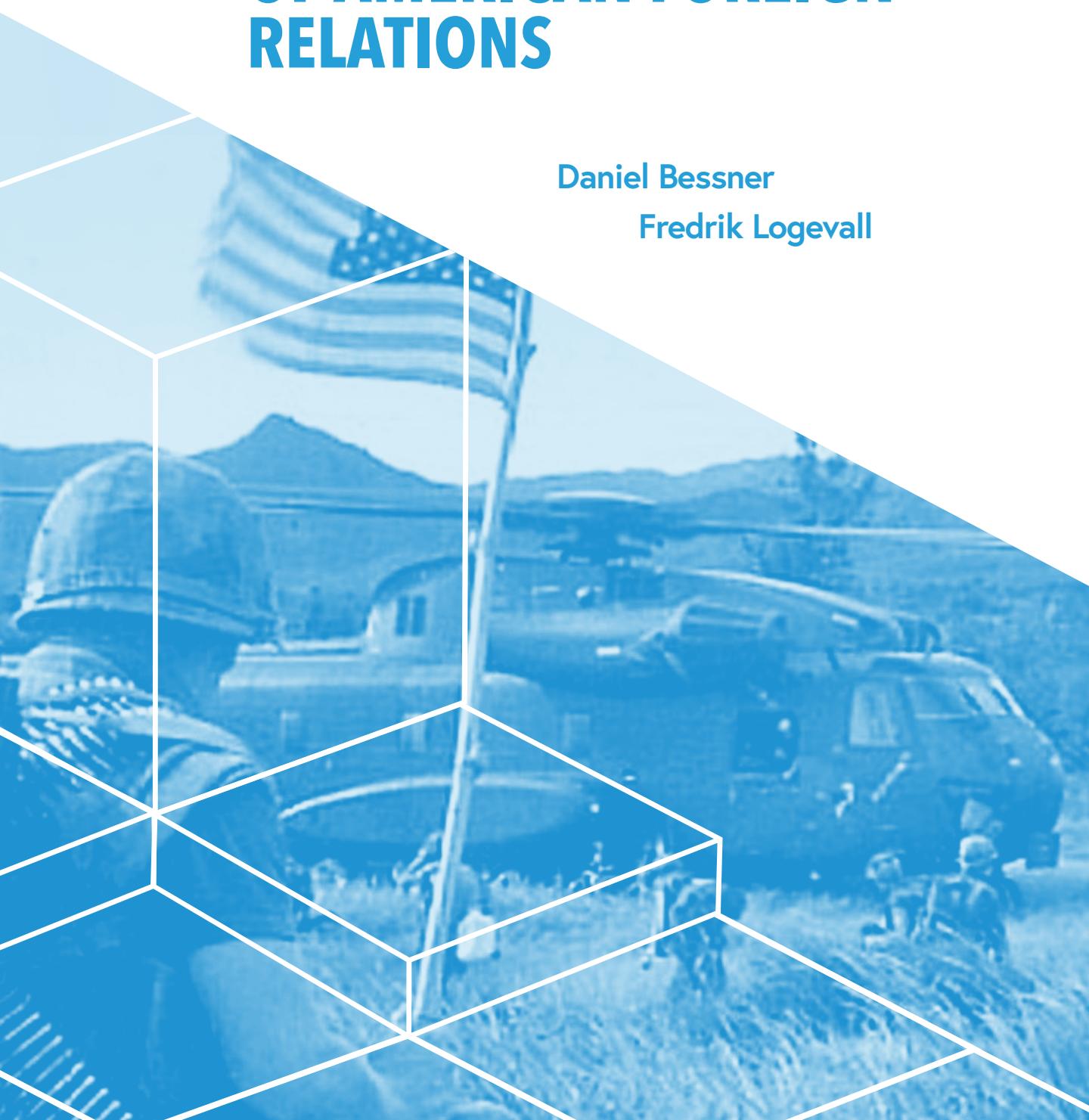




RECENTERING THE UNITED STATES IN THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF AMERICAN FOREIGN RELATIONS

Daniel Bessner

Fredrik Logevall



In the last three decades, historians of the "U.S. in the World" have taken two methodological turns — the international and transnational turns — that have implicitly decentered the United States from the historiography of U.S. foreign relations. Although these developments have had several salutary effects on the field, we argue that, for two reasons, scholars should bring the United States — and especially, the U.S. state — back to the center of diplomatic historiography. First, the United States was the most powerful actor of the post-1945 world and shaped the direction of global affairs more than any other nation. Second, domestic processes and phenomena often had more of an effect on the course of U.S. foreign affairs than international or transnational processes. It is our belief that incorporating the insights of a reinvigorated domestic history of American foreign relations with those produced by international and transnational historians will enable the writing of scholarly works that encompass a diversity of spatial geographies and provide a fuller account of the making, implementation, effects, and limits of U.S. foreign policy.

Part I: U.S. Foreign Relations After World War II

The history of U.S. foreign relations in the American academy is uniquely situated between two broader fields: international history (the study of international society, the international system, and inter-, supra-, and substate interactions), and U.S. history (the study of domestic processes and events).¹ Since the early 1990s, the historiography of post-1945 U.S. foreign relations has been shaped by

two trends that have emphasized the former rather than the latter. To begin with, the "international turn" (*turn* being the standard term among historians to denote major shifts in disciplinary emphasis) has underlined the ways in which foreign nation-states, peoples, and cultures have influenced American foreign relations, and how American foreign relations have informed the lives of people living abroad.² In addition, the "transnational turn" has highlighted that nonstate and transstate processes, organizations, and movements have often

1 As this sentence suggests, this article refers explicitly to the American academy. In other academic contexts, especially the United Kingdom and Europe, the fields of international and transnational history have different histories.

2 For the sake of style, in this essay we use the adjectives "U.S." and "American" interchangeably, though we recognize that "American" does not necessarily refer to the United States.



impacted American global behavior.

In important respects, these two trends have had salutary effects on the scholarship and the field more broadly, demonstrating that historians must frequently look beyond the United States and its government if they are to understand fully the origins, development, and consequences of U.S. foreign policy. In particular, the international and transnational turns have had three crucial benefits. First, international history has underlined the agency of foreign peoples by showing that conditions “on the ground” have shaped U.S. policy’s impact in myriad ways.³ That is to say, it has demonstrated that although the United States is the world’s most powerful nation, it has often been constrained, and sometimes informed, by the actions of weaker states and groups. In this way, the international turn has “de-exceptionalized” the history of U.S. foreign policy by placing it in a comparative or global context. Second, the transnational turn has established that nonstate actors, people-to-people relations, and transstate processes have regularly influenced American policy and the nation’s relations with the rest of the globe. Finally, the two turns have together helped diversify the scholarship in U.S. foreign relations history, especially in terms of incorporating women into the professional fold.⁴ The overall effect of the outpouring of scholarship over the past three decades has been to deepen and broaden scholars’ understanding of America’s role in the world and the field itself.

Nevertheless, in this article we argue that the turns to international and transnational history have led historians, at least implicitly, to deemphasize unduly subjects that traditionally stood at the center of the historiography of U.S. foreign relations: policymaking and its relationship to the projection of power. Simply put, since the end of the Cold War many historians of the “U.S. in the World” — the current, if somewhat awkward, designation of choice — have examined this history in relation to its international and transnational contexts, which has had the effect of downplaying the domestic institutions and processes that, we argue, are crucial to understanding why American decision-makers have made the policies they have. Thus, while we are rapidly gaining a deeper understanding of the impact and limits of American

power abroad and the ways in which foreign actors and conditions have shaped the implementation of U.S. foreign policy, we do not know nearly enough about topics such as the institutionalization of the national security state; the perceived political imperatives that have shaped foreign policymaking; the role of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and other military voices in U.S. foreign relations; the impact of interest groups on foreign policy; the elite networks that have shaped U.S. decision-making; the emergence, character, and limits of the bipartisan consensus that has underwritten the American empire since at least 1945; and, in the broadest sense, the nature of U.S. national power and the American political-military state.

In no way do we wish to deny the utility of international or transnational approaches to the history of U.S. foreign relations. Rather, we are arguing that these approaches, while crucial, do not fully explain why the United States — particularly the U.S. state and associated institutions — acted in the world as it did. More to the point, we believe that the recent turn toward international and transnational history, which has encouraged historians to train their analytical lenses on non-American actors and states, has tended to tacitly deemphasize three important realities of U.S. — and, indeed, global — history since 1945. First, the United States has been, by far, the most dominant nation of the post-1945 world, sufficiently powerful that whenever it has intervened in a particular world region, it has exerted a major (and often decisive) impact. Throughout the postwar era and down to today, the United States has enjoyed more military, political, economic, ideological, social, cultural, scientific, and technological power than any other nation — and by a colossal margin. To use the metaphor of our solar system, the United States is the sun that delimits the entire system’s structure. Though other states may have followed their own unique trajectories, they all have orbited around America. As Marilyn Young argued in 2002, “for the past fifty years, the United States has been the most powerful country in the world,” and therefore all nations “had little choice but to engage the centrality of American power.”⁵ (Years earlier, Raymond Aron made the same key point: “In each period the principal actors [in the international system] have determined the system more than they have been

3 For the ways in which the term “international history” has been used, see, Paul A. Kramer, “Power and Connection: Imperial Histories of the United States in the World,” *American Historical Review* 115, no. 5 (December 2011): 1383–85, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23309640>.

4 The Committee on Women in SHAFR (Nicole Ansloover et al.), “The Status of Women in Diplomatic and International History, 2013–2017: A Follow-Up Report,” *Passport: The Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations Review* 49, no. 3 (January 2019): 50–58.

5 Marilyn B. Young, “The Age of Global Power,” in *Rethinking American History in a Global Age*, ed. Thomas Bender (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 275.

determined by it.”⁶) Although it is not possible nor desirable for diplomatic history to be defined by methodological nationalism, it is also true that, after 1945, the United States was not merely “a nation among nations,” but was rather a global hegemon whose state exerted unprecedented influence on international affairs.⁷

Second, the U.S. state has been the chief maker and implementer of American foreign policy.⁸ While in some instances nonstate actors, nongovernmental organizations, and international institutions have been influential, when it comes to the subject of U.S. foreign relations, government agencies and departments have been more important — they have had more causal impact on the nation’s relationship to the rest of the world and on the world itself. State power, we must always remind ourselves, matters, and as such we must give deep and sustained attention to the wielders of that power. In the case of the United States, that means, above all, the presidency and the executive agencies of the federal government. After all, in every foreign country, American executive politics is a topic of major, even pressing concern. Why? Because foreign peoples know what most of us based in the United States also intuitively know: that since World War II the occupant of the Oval Office has had an extraordinary impact on the direction of global affairs. Foreign peoples might even know this better than those who reside in the United States, as it is they who most directly suffer the often malign influence of the U.S. state. That this influence is circumscribed in important and sometimes unforeseen respects, that American presidents often find themselves stymied in unexpected ways, and that U.S. power abroad is often limited, does not refute the point. If historians hope to un-

derstand the course of post-1945 U.S. foreign policy and international politics, they must take seriously the governmental and other elites who formulated and implemented this policy and must therefore immerse themselves in American archival sources.

Third, we argue that domestic processes and phenomena — elections, institutions, coalition-building, business interests, ideologies, individual pride, and careerist ambition — often have had more of an effect on the course of U.S. foreign relations than international processes. “The primacy of domestic politics,” the historian Fritz Fischer famously called it with respect to Germany and the outbreak of World War I — we’re suggesting that the same applies to many American foreign policies enacted after 1945.⁹ Because of the tremendous geographic advantages afforded by two oceans and the presence of geopolitically weak neighbors, as well as the sheer power of U.S. military might, Americans have not had to concern themselves with external realities to the degree that others around the world did — they could afford to remain parochial. Or, as Young put it, “Fundamentally, other countries simply do not have much purchase on the American imagination.”¹⁰ Thus, in contrast to structural realists such as Kenneth N. Waltz and John J. Mearsheimer, we do not believe that the actors who comprised the American state ever merely reacted to “objective” international considerations. Instead, these considerations were always filtered through domestic frameworks and processes that gave them new meaning.¹¹ Accordingly, the international and transnational turns don’t actually help us answer key questions about the sources and nature of U.S. power, even as they teach us a great deal about the effects and limits of American foreign policy. For all these reasons, an important task

6 Raymond Aron, *Peace & War: A Theory of International Relations* (London: Routledge, 2003 [1966]), 95.

7 Walter LaFeber’s assertion from almost four decades ago is worth recalling: “The present world system, to a surprising extent, has been shaped not by some imagined balance-of-power concept but by the initiatives of Woodrow Wilson and his successors. The United Nations, multilateral trade institutions, ideas about self-determination and economic development, determining influences on international culture, and strategic military planning have sprung from the United States more than from other actors in the global theater.” “Responses to Charles S. Maier, ‘Marking Time: The Historiography of International Relations,’ *Diplomatic History* 5, no. 4 (October 1981): 362, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7709.1981.tb00788.x>. We are not, of course, saying that U.S. international relations remained static after 1945. We are, however, arguing that despite relative shifts in power, from the end of World War II until today the United States has been the most influential military, economic, political, social, and cultural force on earth.

8 Domestic historians of the United States have recently refocused their own attentions on the history of the American imperial state. See, James T. Sparrow, *Warfare State: World War II Americans and the Age of Big Government* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Ira Katznelson, *Fear Itself: The New Deal and the Origins of Our Time* (New York: Liverlight, 2013); Anne M. Kornhauser, *Debating the American State: Liberal Anxieties and the New Leviathan, 1930–1970* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015); Jennifer Mittelstadt, *The Rise of the Military Welfare State* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015); and William Bendix and Paul J. Quirk, eds., “Governing the Security State,” special issue, *Journal of Policy History* 28, no. 3 (July 2016). For other takes on the importance of the U.S. state to 20th-century history, see, Brent Cebul, Lily Geismer, and Mason B. Williams, eds., *Shaped by the State: Toward a New Political History of the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018).

9 Fritz Fischer, *Krieg der Illusionen: Die deutsche Politik von 1911 bis 1914* (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 1969).

10 Young, “The Age of Global Power,” 275–76. This is also a main theme in Campbell Craig and Fredrik Logevall, *America’s Cold War: The Politics of Insecurity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

11 Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Co., 1979); and John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: Norton, 2001).



for historians of U.S. foreign relations in the coming years will be to recenter the United States and concentrate their analytical lenses more squarely on its domestic history.

Skeptical readers will wonder if we're making our case rather too strongly. Surely, they will say, most scholars in the field accept the centrality of U.S. power, of the U.S. state, and of domestic imperatives to the history of the United States in the world. But implicit recognition of these realities does not mean that the complexities of these historical phenomena are being worked out in detail. Indeed, the inherent difficulties of international history (which requires one to work in multiple national archives, read documents in numerous languages, and triangulate the interests of various state, suprastate, and substate actors) and transnational history (which requires one to trace often-elusive flows of people, ideas, and capital across time and borders) make this an almost impossible task. Put simply, in our considered judgment international and transnational historians collectively deemphasize the above realities, even if most would admit them.

Our call to recenter the United States does not mean we are advocating for a return to the time when diplomatic history meant just that — the history of high-level interactions among governments — and when the impact of U.S. foreign policy on peoples abroad was downplayed or even ignored. Indeed, one of the most exciting and productive developments in the field of foreign relations history in the past 30 years has been its expansion to include previously marginalized voices, and we hope and expect for such work to continue. We are also not suggesting that every historian study the American state and ignore the plethora of organizations and movements that inform the nation's overseas actions and relationships. Rather, we are calling for two things: first, a rebalancing in which the study of U.S. foreign policy, and in particular the domestic history of policymaking, reclaims a — not the — central place in the scholarship; and second, a general recognition that the overweening power of the United States in the period after 1945 enabled the nation to set the terms of international

relations, *even as* these terms were often resisted. If historians heed our call, in the coming years it will be possible to incorporate the insights of a re-invigorated domestic history of American foreign relations with those produced by international and transnational historians. This will enable the writing of scholarly works that encompass a diversity of spatial geographies and provide a fuller account of the making, implementation, effects, and limits of U.S. foreign policy.

Part II: Historicizing the International and Transnational Turns

Over the past four decades, scholars have repeatedly implored historians of U.S. foreign relations to adopt a broad perspective that places American policymaking in an international or comparative context.¹² Doing so, historians like Sally Marks argued in the 1980s, would force diplomatic historians to recognize that the most important sources for U.S. foreign policy were frequently foreign in origin. As Marks put it, "Although the American government can and does undertake major policy initiatives, it is often reacting to situations or policies elsewhere."¹³ By developing the requisite linguistic skills that would enable them to use foreign archival sources, diplomatic historians could, according to critics like Marks, combat the ethnocentrism and exceptionalism that limited their scholarship.

Until the Cold War's end, however, internationalists in this Marksian sense remained a minority within the subfield of diplomatic history — the majority of historians were reticent about taking an international turn. Walter LaFeber gave voice to many in the field when he argued in 1981 that, given the reality of U.S. dominance after World War I, it would "be misleading if all parts of the [international] 'system' are considered to be roughly equal, or if the influence of that system on the United States is assumed to be as great as the American influence on the system."¹⁴ The majority of LaFeber's colleagues shared this perspective, and, in fact, doubted whether one could write sophisticat-

¹² Charles S. Maier, "Marking Time: The Historiography of International Relations," in *The Past Before Us: Contemporary Historical Writing in the United States*, ed. Michael Kammen (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), 356–57; "Responses to Charles S. Maier," 356–58; Sally Marks, "Review: The World According to Washington," *Diplomatic History* 11, no. 3 (Summer 1987): 265–82, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24911732>; Christopher Thorne, "Review: After the Europeans: American Designs for the Remaking of Southeast Asia," *Diplomatic History* 12, no. 2 (Spring 1988): 201–08, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24911763>; and Akira Iriye, "The Internationalization of History," *American Historical Review* 94, no. 1 (February 1989): 1–10, <https://doi.org/10.1086/ahr/94.1.1>.

¹³ Marks, "The World According to Washington," 266.

¹⁴ "Responses to Charles S. Maier," 362.

ed international history involving several states.¹⁵ As Richard H. Immerman remarked in 1990, international history

requires the practitioner to be sensitive to the personal, social, cultural, economic, geopolitical, ideological, systemic, and other considerations that influence each nation's foreign outlook and postures, each's fears, values, interests, objectives, and available resources, and each's estimations of its own power and perceptions of its allies and enemies.¹⁶

This was, he averred, impossible — it simply lay beyond the capacity of even the most tireless and talented researcher. Moreover, it was the sad reality that in the era of the Cold War many foreign archives remained closed to Western researchers. For these reasons, on the eve of the Soviet Union's collapse most diplomatic historians considered their field to be part and parcel of a broader American history.

This consensus, however, began to fray with the end of the Cold War and the piecemeal opening of archives from the (soon-to-be-former) Communist Bloc.¹⁷ In the summer of 1990, the deteriorating Soviet Union started to release previously classified materials.¹⁸ These releases, as John Lewis Gaddis noted in 1991, led many scholars to conclude that “[t]he prospects for a truly ‘international’ approach to Cold War history had suddenly brightened.”¹⁹ Furthermore, in late 1990, at the urging

of Gaddis and William Taubman, the MacArthur Foundation awarded the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars a grant of \$987,100 to establish the Program on International History of the Cold War (which eventually became the Cold War International History Project), which was intended to, first, gather, translate, and disseminate documents from the Communist Bloc, and, second, begin building a community of scholars dedicated, to borrow Gaddis' phrasing, to “reassessing the Cold War from the perspective of the ‘other side.’”²⁰ The availability of new sources and the financial support of the MacArthur Foundation engendered a newfound interest in international history among diplomatic historians.

During the 1990s, international history received the imprimatur of several leading members of the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations (SHAFR), diplomatic history's chief scholarly association.²¹ None made a bigger splash than Michael H. Hunt, who in his 1990 SHAFR presidential address advocated multinational, multilanguage research as a means to broaden and enrich scholarship.²² Hunt's program quickly won enthusiastic support within the field and the broader profession.²³ It is not difficult to see why. First and foremost, the international turn allowed historians to address novel questions using new sources recently made available from the previously inaccessible “other side.” More prosaically, by the early 1990s the field of diplomatic history had been riven by 25 years of paradigm disputes that pitted “orthodox”

15 Robert J. McMahon, "The Study of American Foreign Relations: National History or International History?" *Diplomatic History* 14, no. 4 (October 1990): 554–64, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7709.1990.tb00108.x>; Richard H. Immerman, "The History of U.S. Foreign Policy: A Plea for Pluralism," *Diplomatic History* 14, no. 4 (October 1990): 574–83, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7709.1990.tb00110.x>; and Thomas G. Paterson, "Defining and Doing the History of American Foreign Relations: A Primer," *Diplomatic History* 14, no. 4 (October 1990): 584–601, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7709.1990.tb00111.x>.

16 Immerman, "The History of U.S. Foreign Policy," 575.

17 For the importance of archival openings to the writing of international history, see, Michael J. Hogan and Thomas G. Paterson, "Introduction," in *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations*, 1st ed., ed. Michael J. Hogan and Thomas G. Paterson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 6–7; Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 7; Jeremi Suri, "The Cold War, Decolonization, and Global Social Awakenings: Historical Intersections," *Cold War History* 6, no. 3 (August 2006): 361, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14682740600795519>; and Thomas W. Zeiler, "The Diplomatic History Bandwagon: A State of the Field," *Journal of American History* 95, no. 4 (March 2009): 1060–61, <https://doi.org/10.2307/27694560>.

18 John Lewis Gaddis, "The Soviet Side of the Cold War: A Symposium: Introduction," *Diplomatic History* 15, no. 4 (October 1991): 525, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7709.1991.tb00145.x>.

19 Gaddis, "The Soviet Side of the Cold War," 525. As this quote indicates, Gaddis, and many in his intellectual generation, viewed international history primarily as bipolar, East-West history, bypassing non-communist countries of the Global South.

20 Gaddis, "The Soviet Side of the Cold War," 525. On Gaddis' and Taubman's roles in founding the project, see, John Lewis Gaddis, "May be You Can Go Home Again," *H-Diplo Essay* 208, March 27, 2020, 5, <https://issforum.org/essays/PDF/E208.pdf>. Also see, "Woodrow Wilson Center Grants," MacArthur Foundation, accessed March 20, 2020, <https://www.macfound.org/grants/?page=2&q=Wilson+Center&.ajax=true#grant-search>. The MacArthur Foundation continued to fund the Wilson Center's Cold War project. In 1995, the foundation granted the project \$750,000, which it did again in 1998. In 2001, the foundation provided the project with another \$550,000. In 2008, it granted the project a further \$500,000, which it did again in 2012 and 2016.

21 More research needs to be done on the apparent disconnect between the fact that, at the very height of America's post-Cold War global hegemony, diplomatic historians decided to deemphasize U.S. power in their scholarship.

22 Michael H. Hunt, "Internationalizing U.S. Diplomatic History: A Practical Agenda," *Diplomatic History* 15, no. 1 (January 1991): 1–11, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7709.1991.tb00116.x>.

23 Howard Jones and Randall B. Woods, "Origins of the Cold War in Europe and the Near East: Recent Historiography and the National Security Imperative," *Diplomatic History* 17, no. 2 (April 1993): 270, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7709.1993.tb00550.x>.



historians against “revisionists,” who themselves battled “post-revisionists” and “corporatists.”²⁴ Many scholars of foreign relations were weary of this squabbling, which, they insisted, made it difficult for nonspecialists to understand their work and prevented the field from presenting a united front to outsiders. As Melvyn P. Leffler argued in his 1995 SHAFR presidential address, “to make significant contributions to the larger enterprise of American history,” diplomatic historians needed to “overcome our own tendencies to fragment into ... warring schools of interpretation.”²⁵ Embracing international history enabled scholars of foreign relations to move beyond their paradigm wars.²⁶

The international approach also enjoyed the benefit of appealing to scholars on all sides of the political spectrum. Those on the left could use foreign archives to give voice to previously neglected populations affected, often negatively, by American foreign policy. More conservative historians, meanwhile, could use recently declassified ma-

terials from the Communist Bloc to demonstrate that the Soviet Union was as bad as they had always claimed. Moreover, many historians were convinced that after the Cold War, U.S. power was in decline and multilateralism was on the rise, which necessitated the examination of non-American actors.²⁷ Finally, since the 1970s, diplomatic historians had believed that social and cultural historians looked askance at their work because they focused largely on elite white men, which primed scholars entering the field to endorse a historiographical trend that encouraged them to examine and give agency to Western and nonwhite — or, at the very least, non-Anglo — actors.²⁸

The rise of international history was soon everywhere to be seen, and essays that explored the holdings of foreign archives began to appear in droves.²⁹ Additionally, the use of such foreign materials became an important source of professional recognition and a key way by which the significance of a given monograph, scholarly article, or

24 In brief, orthodox historians took a positive view of the motivations behind U.S. foreign relations, while revisionists linked U.S. foreign policy to the search for foreign markets. In contrast to revisionists, post-revisionists emphasized the centrality of security to U.S. foreign policymaking, while corporatists underlined the importance of institutions. The best account of these approaches is found in Steven Hurst, *Cold War US Foreign Policy: Key Perspectives* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005).

25 Melvyn P. Leffler, “Presidential Address: New Approaches, Old Interpretations, and Prospective Reconfigurations,” *Diplomatic History* 19, no. 2 (March 1995): 177, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7709.1995.tb00655.x>.

26 Though it is difficult to quantify, the change in tone in *Diplomatic History*, the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations’ journal, between the 1980s and today is striking. Gone, for the most part, are the sometimes-rancorous — yet intellectually exciting — disputes of the past.

27 See the essays contained in Michael J. Hogan, ed., *The End of the Cold War: Its Meaning and Implications* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

28 For diplomatic historians, social history, and the former’s feelings of inadequacy and oppression, see, Charles R. Lilley and Michael H. Hunt, “On Social History, the State, and Foreign Relations: Commentary on ‘The Cosmopolitan Connection,’” *Diplomatic History* 11, no. 3 (July 1987): 243, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7709.1987.tb00016.x>; Thomas G. Paterson, “Introduction,” in “A Round Table: Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations,” *Journal of American History* 77, no. 1 (June 1990): 96, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2078640>; Michael H. Hunt, “The Long Crisis in U.S. Diplomatic History: Coming to Closure,” *Diplomatic History* 16, no. 1 (January 1992): 115, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7709.1992.tb00492.x>; Jerald A Combs, “Review of *The Cambridge History of American Foreign Relations, Volume 1, The Creation of a Republican Empire, 1776–1865*, by Bradford Perkins, et al.,” *American Historical Review* 99, no. 1 (February 1994): 178–79, <https://doi.org/10.1086/ahr/99.1.178>; Walter LaFeber, “The World and the United States,” *American Historical Review* 100, no. 4 (October 1995): 1029, <https://doi.org/10.1086/ahr/100.4.1015>; Leffler, “New Approaches,” 177; Elizabeth Cobbs Hoffman, “Diplomatic History and the Meaning of Life: Toward a Global American History.” *Diplomatic History* 21, no. 4 (October 1997): 499–500, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-7709.00086>; Robert J. McMahon, “Toward a Pluralist Vision: The Study of American Foreign Relations as International and National History,” in *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations*, 2nd ed., ed. Michael J. Hogan and Thomas G. Paterson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 37–38; and Erez Manela, “Untitled,” Email on H-Diplo Discussion, March 28, 2009.

29 Odd Arne Westad, “The Foreign Policy Archives of Russia: New Regulations for Declassification and Access,” *The Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations Newsletter* 23, no. 2 (June 1992): 1–10; Melvyn P. Leffler, “Inside Enemy Archives: The Cold War Reopened,” *Foreign Affairs* 75, no. 4 (July/August 1996): 120–35, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/1996-07-01/inside-enemy-archives-cold-war-reopened>; Jonathan Haslam, “Russian Archival Revelations and Our Understanding of the Cold War.” *Diplomatic History* 21, no. 2 (April 1997): 217–28, <https://doi.org/10.1111/0145-2096.00065>; Odd Arne Westad, “Secrets of the Second World: The Russian Archives and the Reinterpretation of Cold War History,” *Diplomatic History* 21, no. 2 (April 1997): 259–71, <https://doi.org/10.1111/0145-2096.00068>; and Max Paul Friedman, “It’s Not a Jungle Out There: Using Foreign Archives in Foreign Relations Research,” *The Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations Newsletter* 29, no. 4 (December 1998): 22–29. In the 2000s, many articles organized specifically around new archival revelations also began to appear. See, A. Stykalin, “The Hungarian Crisis of 1956: The Soviet Role in the Light of New Archival Documents,” *Cold War History* 2, no. 1 (October 2001): 113–44, <https://doi.org/10.1080/71399938>; Vojtech Mastny, “The New History of Cold War Alliances,” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 4, no. 2 (Spring 2002): 55–84, <https://doi.org/10.1162/152039702753649647>; Jonathan Haslam, “Archival Review: Collecting and Assembling Pieces of the Jigsaw: Coping with Cold War Archives.” *Cold War History* 4, no. 3 (April 2004): 140–52, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1468274042000231196>; Martin Grossheim, “Revisionism in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam: New Evidence from the East German Archives,” *Cold War History* 5, no. 4 (November 2005): 451–77, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14682740500284804>; Wolfgang Mueller, “Stalin and Austria: New Evidence on Soviet Policy in a Secondary Theatre of the Cold War, 1938–53/55,” *Cold War History* 6, no. 1 (February 2006): 63–84, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14682740500395444>; Isabella Ginor and Gideon Remez, “Un-Finnished Business: Archival Evidence Exposes the Diplomatic Aspect of the USSR’s Pre-Planning for the Six Day War,” *Cold War History* 6, no. 3 (August 2006): 377–95, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14682740600795568>; Irina Mukhina, “New Revelations from the Former Soviet Archives: The Kremlin, the Warsaw Uprising, and the Coming of the Cold War,” *Cold War History* 6, no. 3 (August 2006): 397–411, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14682740600795584>; Natalia I. Yegorova, “Russian Archives: Prospects for Cold War Studies,” *Cold War History* 6, no. 4 (November 2006): 543–48, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14682740600979311>; and Wilfried Loth, “The German Question from Stalin to Khrushchev: The Meaning of New Documents,” *Cold War History* 10, no. 2 (May 2010): 229–45, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14682740903065438>.

PhD dissertation was judged.³⁰ As a consequence of these trends, institutions dedicated to international history were either created or expanded. Besides the Cold War International History Project, which emerged from the aforementioned MacArthur Foundation grant, in 1997 Harvard established the Project on Cold War Studies, which, in 1999, founded the *Journal of Cold War Studies* to publish scholarly articles based on foreign (especially Soviet bloc) sources.³¹ Spurred by declassified foreign materials, the financial support of these types of groups, and the desire to be on the cutting edge, by the dawn of the new millennium many diplomatic historians had moved decidedly away from an emphasis, to borrow Leffler's phrasing, on "the perceived interests of policymakers in Washington."³² Indeed, several prominent history departments, including those at the University of Texas at Austin, the University of California at Berkeley, the University of Chicago, Columbia, Harvard, Princeton, Temple, the University of Virginia, and the University of Wisconsin at Madison, started programs in international history.³³ Needless to say, the sheer costs required to conduct international research — the need to travel to and live in distant countries, spend years learning difficult languages, etc. — reinforced inequalities within the field: Those at rich institutions benefited while those at poor institutions suffered.³⁴

But the international turn was not the only one diplomatic historians made in the 1990s and 2000s. They also took a transnational turn that deemphasized the centrality of state-to-state relations and,

Something important, though, was lost. Subjects central to the history of U.S. foreign relations — presidential decision-making, diplomacy, partisan politics, the resort to military force, state-making — were deemphasized.

in particular, the U.S. state, to the history of U.S. foreign relations. Trends within the broader field of American history encouraged this move. Bolstered by the emergence of "globalization" as the dominant phenomenon of the post-Cold War world and the rise in importance of nonstate actors like multinational corporations and terrorist organizations, in the last 30 years, manifold U.S. historians have argued that scholars must analyze the ways in which American history has been shaped by trans-

³⁰ One can witness the shift in prestige from national to international history by comparing the pieces written by two recipients of the Stuart L. Bernath Lecture Prize, which the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations awards to promising young scholars. Whereas in 1990, Richard H. Immerman delivered a lecture focused on Dwight D. Eisenhower, in 2000 Odd Arne Westad addressed "the new international history of the Cold War." Richard H. Immerman, "Confessions of an Eisenhower Revisionist: An Agonizing Reappraisal," *Diplomatic History* 14, no. 3 (July 1990): 319–42, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7709.1990.tb00094.x>; and Odd Arne Westad, "The New International History of the Cold War: Three (Possible) Paradigms," *Diplomatic History* 24, no. 4 (October 2000): 551–65, <https://doi.org/10.1111/0145-2096.00236>. Furthermore, in the June 2000 edition of the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations' newsletter, Thomas Schoonover published an essay that included tables that listed evidence of foreign research found in footnotes located in articles in *Diplomatic History*, the *Pacific Historical Review*, the *Journal of American History*, and works that won the Stuart L. Bernath Scholarly Article and Stuart L. Bernath Book Prizes (which are awarded by the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations to an essay written by a junior scholar and a first book on U.S. foreign relations history, respectively). The implication was clear: Foreign research, to some degree, indicated a piece of scholarship's significance. Thomas Schoonover, "'It's Not What We Say, It's What We Do: The Study and Writing of U.S. Foreign Relations in the United States,'" *The Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations Newsletter* 31, no. 2 (June 2000): 31–36.

³¹ Mark Kramer, "Editor's Note," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 1, no. 1 (Winter 1999): 1–2, <https://doi.org/10.1162/15203970152521872>.

³² Melvyn P. Leffler, "Bringing It Together: The Parts and the Whole," in *Reviewing the Cold War: Approaches, Interpretations, Theory*, ed. Odd Arne Westad (London: Frank Cass, 2000), 54. For more on the international turn, see, Hoffmann, "Diplomatic History and the Meaning of Life," 500–01; Tony Smith, "New Bottles for New Wine: A Pericentric Framework for the Study of the Cold War," *Diplomatic History* 24, no. 4 (October 2000): 567–91, <https://doi.org/10.1111/0145-2096.00237>; Westad, "New International History"; Odd Arne Westad, "Introduction: Reviewing the Cold War," in *Reviewing the Cold War: Approaches, Interpretations, Theory*, 5; Akira Iriye, "Internationalizing International History," in *Rethinking American History in a Global Age*, 47–62; Jessica C.E. Glenow-Hecht, "A Global Group of Worriers," *Diplomatic History* 26, no. 3 (July 2002): 481–82, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7709.00320>; Frank Costigliola and Thomas G. Paterson, "Defining and Doing the History of United States Foreign Relations: A Primer," in *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations*, 2nd ed., 10–34; McMahon, "Toward a Pluralist Vision," 41–44; C.A. Bayly et al., "AHR Conversation: On Transnational History," *American Historical Review* 111, no. 5 (December 2006): 1447–48, <https://doi.org/10.1086/ahr.111.5.1441>; Akira Iriye, "Environmental History and International History," *Diplomatic History* 32, no. 4 (September 2008): 643, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7709.2008.00717.x>; Zeiler, "The Diplomatic History Bandwagon," 1060–62; Matthew Connelly, "SHAFR in the World," *Passport: The Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations Review* 42, no. 2 (September 2011): 4–7; Westad, "Exploring the Histories," 54; Frank Costigliola and Michael J. Hogan, "Introduction," in *America in the World: The Historiography of American Foreign Relations Since 1941*, 2nd ed., ed. Frank Costigliola and Michael J. Hogan (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 1–4; Curt Cardwell, "The Cold War," in *America in the World: The Historiography of American Foreign Relations Since 1941*, 2nd ed., 110; Andrew Johnstone, "Before the Water's Edge: Domestic Politics and U.S. Foreign Relations," *Passport: The Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations Review* 45, no. 3 (January 2015): 25; and Lien-Hang Nguyen, "Revolutionary Circuits: Toward Internationalizing America in the World," *Diplomatic History* 39, no. 3 (June 2015): 413, <https://doi.org/10.1093/dh/dhv026>.

³³ Connelly, "SHAFR in the World," 6.

³⁴ For more on the costs of international history, see, Benjamin R. Young, "Wealth, Access, and Archival Fetishism in the New Cold War History," *History News Network*, Aug. 23, 2019, <https://historynewsnetwork.org/article/172318>.



national flows of people, ideas, and capital, as well as by nonstate actors.³⁵ This perspective, which swept the field, often implicitly downgraded the government's significance to history.

Somewhat surprisingly for members of a subfield whose *raison d'être* had traditionally been the analysis of the state, many foreign relations historians embraced the transnational turn with enthusiasm.³⁶ Why did they do so? Similar to other Americanists, they were impressed by processes of globalization and the impact of nonstate actors, both of which seemed to demonstrate the decreasing prominence of the state to political, economic, social, and cultural life.³⁷ Moreover, transnational history provided an opportunity for diplomatic historians to, as Thomas W. Zeiler put it, "reintegrate themselves into the mainstream of the historical profession (in which [they] were once the leaders)" but from

which they had long felt excluded.³⁸ After all, who better than diplomatic historians, who had taken an international turn that encouraged them to work abroad, to help Americanist colleagues familiarize themselves with the foreign archives upon which transnational history relied? Indeed, within a remarkably short amount of time — less than 10 years — the examination of nonstate and transnational actors, movements, and processes became popular topics in the subfield.³⁹

By 2020, the international and transnational approaches had become central to the study of U.S. foreign relations. Much of this scholarship, it must be emphasized, was excellent — deeply researched, conceptually sound, and highly instructive in illuminating areas of the "U.S. in the World" that had been little examined in the past. We ourselves have adopted international and transnational approach-

35 Ian Tyrrell, "American Exceptionalism in an Age of International History," *American Historical Review* 96, no. 4 (October 1991): 1031–55, <https://doi.org/10.1086/ahr/96.4.1031>; Michael McGerr, "The Price of the 'New Transnational History,'" *American Historical Review* 96, no. 4 (October 1991): 1056, <https://doi.org/10.1086/ahr/96.4.1056>; David Thelen, "Of Audiences, Borderlands, and Comparisons: Toward the Internationalization of American History," *Journal of American History* 79, no. 2 (September 1992): 432–62, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2080034>; Amy Kaplan, "'Left Alone with America': The Absence of Empire in the Study of American Culture," in *Cultures of United States Imperialism*, ed. Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 3–21; Donald E. Pease, "New Perspectives on U.S. Culture and Imperialism," in *Cultures of United States Imperialism*, 22–37; Leila J. Rupp, "Constructing Internationalism: The Case of Transnational Women's Organizations, 1888–1945," *American Historical Review* 99, no. 5 (December 1994): 1571–72, <https://doi.org/10.1086/ahr/99.5.1571>; "A Note to Readers on Internationalization of the JAH," *Journal of American History* 85, no. 4 (March 1999): 1279, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jahist/85.4.1279>; David Thelen, "Rethinking History and the Nation-State: Mexico and the United States," *Journal of American History* 86, no. 2 (September 1999): 438–52, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2567038>; David Thelen, "The Nation and Beyond: Transnational Perspectives on United States History," *Journal of American History* 83, no. 3 (December 1999): 965–75, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2568601>; Ian Tyrrell, "Making Nations/Making States: American Historians in the Context of Empire," *Journal of American History* 86, no. 3 (December 1999): 1015–44, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2568604>; Thomas Bender, "The LaPietra Report: A Report to the Profession," Organization of American Historians, September 2000, <http://www.oah.org/about/reports/reports-statements/the-lapietra-report-a-report-to-the-profession/>; Eric Foner, "American Freedom in a Global Age," *American Historical Review* 106, no. 1 (February 2001): 1–16, <https://doi.org/10.1086/ahr/106.1.1>; Louis A. Pérez Jr., "We Are the World: Internationalizing the National, Nationalizing the International," *Journal of American History* 89, no. 2 (September 2002): 562–63, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3092173>; Bayly et al., "On Transnational History," 1441–64; Marcus Gräser, "World History in a Nation-State: The Transnational Disposition in Historical Writing in the United States," *Journal of American History* 95, no. 4 (March 2009): 1038–52, <https://doi.org/10.2307/27694559>; and Matthew Pratt Guterl, "Comment: The Futures of Transnational History," *American Historical Review* 118, no. 1 (February 2013): 130–39, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ahr/118.1.130>. For the major transnational reinterpretations of American history, see, Thomas Bender, *A Nation Among Nations: America's Place in World History* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006); Carl Guarneri, *America in the World: United States History in Global Context* (Boston: McGraw-Hill Higher Education, 2007); and Ian Tyrell, *Transnational Nation: United States History in Global Perspective Since 1789* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

36 Zeiler, "The Diplomatic History Bandwagon," 1054; and Thomas ("Tim") Borstelmann, "A Worldly Tale: Global Influences on the Historiography of U.S. Foreign Relations," in *America in the World: The Historiography of American Foreign Relations Since 1941*, 2nd ed., 341. For the centrality of the state to diplomatic history, see, Anders Stephanson, "Diplomatic History in the Expanded Field," *Diplomatic History* 22, no. 4 (October 1998): 595, <https://doi.org/10.1111/0145-2096.00140>; Hoffmann, "Diplomatic History and the Meaning of Life," 501; and Zeiler, "The Diplomatic History Bandwagon," 1071–73.

37 Stephanson, "Expanded Field," 595; Thomas W. Zeiler, "Just Do It! Globalization for Diplomatic Historians," *Diplomatic History* 25, no. 4 (October 2001): 529–51, <https://doi.org/10.1111/0145-2096.00286>; Iriye, "Internationalizing International History," 53; Akira Iriye, "The Transnational Turn," *Diplomatic History* 31, no. 3 (June 2007): 375, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7709.2007.00641.x>; Borstelmann, "A Worldly Tale," 339–41, 350–51; Thomas "Tim" Borstelmann, "Presidential Column: Exploring Borders in a Transnational Era," *Passport: The Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations Review* 45, no. 3 (January 2015): 6; and Emily S. Rosenberg, "Considering Borders," in *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations*, 3rd ed., ed. Frank Costigliola and Michael J. Hogan (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 193–95.

38 Zeiler, "Just Do It!" 551. See also, Kristin Hoganson, "Hop Off the Bandwagon! It's a Mass Movement, Not a Parade," *Journal of American History* 95, no. 4 (March 2009): 1087–88, <https://doi.org/10.2307/27694564>.

39 Brad Simpson, "Bringing the Non-State Back In: Human Rights and Terrorism since 1945," in *America in the World: The Historiography of American Foreign Relations Since 1941*, 2nd ed., 260–83; and Barbara J. Keys, "Nonstate Actors," in *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations*, 3rd ed., 119–34. See also, Akira Iriye, "A Century of NGOs," *Diplomatic History* 23, no. 3 (July 1999): 421–35, <https://doi.org/10.1111/0145-2096.00175>; Mark H. Lytle, "Review Essay: NGOs and the New Transnational Politics," *Diplomatic History* 25, no. 1 (January 2001): 121, <https://doi.org/10.1111/0145-2096.00252>; Gienow-Hecht, "A Global Group of Worriers," 482; Costigliola and Paterson, "Defining and Doing the History of United States Foreign Relations," 10–11; Akira Iriye, "Culture and International History," in *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations*, 2nd ed., 254; Iriye, "The Transnational Turn"; Manela, "untitled"; Joel Isaac and Duncan Bell, "Introduction," in *Uncertain Empire: American History and the Idea of the Cold War*, ed. Joel Isaac and Duncan Bell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 4; Westad, "Exploring the Histories of the Cold War," 54; Gutler, "The Futures of Transnational Histories," 131–32; Mark Philip Bradley, "The Charlie Maier Scare and the Historiography of American Foreign Relations, 1959–1980," in *America in the World: The Historiography of American Foreign Relations Since 1941*, 2nd ed., 20; W. Fitzhugh Brundage, "An Appeal Unimpaired," *Passport: The Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations Review* 44, no. 3 (January 2014): 37; Federico Romero, "Cold War Historiography at the Crossroads," *Cold War History* 14, no. 4 (2014): 687, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14682745.2014.950249>; and Borstelmann, "Exploring Borders," 6.

es in our own work, as have our students.⁴⁰ Something important, though, was lost. Subjects central to the history of U.S. foreign relations — presidential decision-making, diplomacy, partisan politics, the resort to military force, state-making — were deemphasized. Even more important, the sheer ability of the United States to shape the character of international systems, processes, and events was downplayed. Therefore, while the international and transnational turns were salutary developments in many respects, they were also problematic. In particular, they sometimes had the effect of distorting the past by attributing too much causal force to international and transnational actors. To demonstrate this phenomenon, we now turn to examining the historiography of the Vietnam War (by which we mean what is sometimes referred to as the Second Indochina War, as distinct from the First, or French, Indochina War), which has emerged as one of the topics most affected by the intellectual developments of the last 30 years.⁴¹

Part III: The Vietnam War in Domestic, International, and Transnational Perspective

For a long time during and after the Vietnam War, the literature was dominated by American accounts addressing U.S.-centered questions. Even before the guns fell silent in 1975, a consensus took hold among many authors that successive presidential administrations had blundered into a struggle they did not understand, on behalf of a series of Saigon governments that lacked authority and popular support, and which were riven by infighting and corruption. American leaders, according to

this “orthodox” view, chose disastrously to intervene in a struggle in which their adversaries — the Communist government in Hanoi originally led by Ho Chi Minh, and the southern insurgency known as the National Liberation Front — enjoyed the bulk of nationalist legitimacy. Though U.S. forces fought ably and effectively, these authors claimed, they faced an impossible task because no strategic victory was possible. Or, to be more precise, the political struggle was always more important than the military struggle, and therefore the United States and its South Vietnamese allies never had a realistic chance of winning.

Thus David Halberstam’s widely influential book, *The Best and the Brightest*, which appeared in 1972, described how hubris and a historical sense of inevitability had pulled American leaders, step by step, into the “quagmire” of Vietnam.⁴² And thus Frances Fitzgerald’s Pulitzer Prize-winning *Fire in the Lake*, published the same year, argued that Americans foolishly blundered into another people’s history, blithely ignorant of Vietnamese nationalism’s resiliency.⁴³ In the context of Vietnam’s culture and history, Fitzgerald argued, America’s awesome military might was ultimately irrelevant, powerless to halt the inexorable force of Ho’s nationalist revolution. As such, for Fitzgerald, as for Halberstam, it was pointless to talk of alternative U.S. strategies that might have brought success in the struggle: No such options existed, as the enterprise was doomed from the start. Other early accounts that endorsed this basic line of argument — though they differed among themselves in other important respects — included works by Chester Cooper, Daniel Ellsberg, Bernard Fall, George Herring, Paul Kattenburg, and Hans Morgenthau.⁴⁴

This consensus view, which still has broad sup-

40 Among the recent PhD dissertations Fredrik Logevall has directed are, Irene V. Lessmeister, *Between Colonialism and Cold War: The Indonesian War of Independence in World Politics, 1945–1949*, PhD Dissertation, Cornell University, 2012; Hajimu Masuda, *Whispering Gallery: War and Society During the Korean Conflict and the Social Constitution of the Cold War, 1945–1953*, PhD Dissertation, Cornell University, 2012; Sean Fear, *Republican Saigon's Clash of Constituents: Domestic Politics and Civil Society in U.S.–South Vietnamese Relations, 1967–1971*, PhD Dissertation, Cornell University, 2016; Fritz Bartel, *The Triumph of Broken Promises: Oil, Finance, and the End of the Cold War*, PhD Dissertation, Cornell University, 2017; and Matthias Fibiger, *The International and Transnational Construction of Authoritarian Rule in Island Southeast Asia, 1969–1977*, PhD Dissertation, Cornell University, 2018. Additionally, Logevall’s *Embers of War* is an international history and Bessner’s *Democracy in Exile* is a transnational history, and both authors make extensive use of foreign language materials in their work. Fredrik Logevall, *Embers of War: The Fall of an Empire and the Making of America’s Vietnam* (New York: Random House, 2012); and Daniel Bessner, *Democracy in Exile: Hans Speier and the Rise of the Defense Intellectual* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018).

41 The Second Indochina War is also sometimes referred to as the Second Vietnam War, the American War in Vietnam, or, in Vietnam, as the American War.

42 David Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest* (New York: Random House, 1972).

43 Frances Fitzgerald, *Fire in the Lake: The Vietnamese and the Americans in Vietnam* (Boston: Little Brown, 1972).

44 Bernard B. Fall, *The Two Viet-Nams: A Political and Military Analysis* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1967); Chester L. Cooper, *The Lost Crusade: America in Vietnam* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1970); Daniel Ellsberg, *Papers on the War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972); George C. Herring, *Vietnam: An American Ordeal* (St. Louis, MO: Forum Press, 1976); George C. Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950–1975* (New York: Wiley, 1979); and Paul M. Kattenburg, *The Vietnam Trauma in American Foreign Policy, 1945–75* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1980). For Morgenthau’s take on Vietnam, which was contained in a series of articles, see, Jennifer W. See, “A Prophet Without Honor: Hans Morgenthau and the War in Vietnam, 1955–1965,” *Pacific Historical Review* 70, no. 3 (August 2001): 419–48, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1525/phr.2001.70.3.419>; Ellen Glaser Rafshoon, “A Realist’s Moral Opposition to War: Hans J. Morgenthau and Vietnam,” *Peace and Change* 26, no. 1 (January 2001): 55–77, <https://doi.org/10.1111/0149-0508.00178>; and Lorenzo Zambernardi, “The Impotence of Power: Morgenthau’s Critique of American Intervention in Vietnam,” *Review of International Studies* 37, no. 3 (July 2011): 1335–56, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210510001531>.



port among students of the war, was never without challengers. Beginning in the late 1970s, a “revisionist” interpretation gained a foothold, arguing two principal points. First, U.S. intervention was entirely justified on national security grounds. In the zero-sum game that was the Cold War, so the claim went, an easy communist success in a strategically important area like Vietnam would have grievously harmed U.S. interests by emboldening the Soviets and Chinese to be more aggressive elsewhere or by encouraging “Third World” governments to shift their allegiance to the Communists. Second, revisionists insisted that the war was far from unwinnable. Indeed, some revisionists maintained that victory was well on the way to being achieved on two separate occasions: during the presidency of Ngo Dinh Diem (1955–63) and in the aftermath of

A problem, however, emerges when the scholarship gives equal or near-equal causal weight for the war’s military, political, economic, and social course to non-American or transnational actors.

the Tet Offensive of early 1968. In both instances, revisionists affirmed, American actions forestalled success. On one hand, Washington officials failed to stick with Diem and even helped engineer his ouster in a coup d'état. On the other hand, after Tet they foolishly chose not to press the advantage when communist forces were allegedly reeling.⁴⁵

The revisionist argument won enthusiastic backing in some quarters, including at America’s military academies, but it was always a minority view

among serious scholars of the war. Despite their differences, however, both the orthodox and revisionist interpretations were U.S.-centric, in terms of their analysis as well as in the sources upon which they relied. As a result, for a long time much of the history written about this long and bitter struggle was, to borrow Gaddis Smith’s earlier description of the scholarship on the Cold War, “the history of one hand clapping.”⁴⁶

Over the past two decades, an important shift has occurred. Historians, influenced by the international and transnational turns, have broadened their research focus to include Vietnamese, Chinese, and Soviet archival materials, which now bolster the voluminous English- and French-language sources upon which the earlier historiography of the war was premised.⁴⁷ In so doing, scholars have

produced a more well-rounded picture of the struggle that has brought needed attention to North Vietnamese decision-making as well as to South Vietnamese culture, politics, and society. Not least, we now have a much better understanding of the Diem years, thanks to studies illuminating the complexities of southern Vietnamese political conditions from both the view

of the Saigon government and the perspectives of its domestic opponents. We also know more about how U.S. rivals, most importantly the People’s Republic of China and the Soviet Union, attempted to shape the war. Furthermore, some historians have started to place the conflict in its wider transnational context, exploring the role religious and nongovernmental organizations and movements played in the war, while still others have begun to focus on northern as well as southern Vietnamese

45 Notable revisionist works include, Guenter Lewy, *America in Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); Harry G. Summers, Jr., *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1981); Lewis Sorley, *A Better War: The Unexamined Victories and Final Tragedy of America’s Last Years in Vietnam* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1999); and Mark Moyar, *Triumph Forsaken: The Vietnam War, 1954–1965* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006). Even while the war was still ongoing, President Richard M. Nixon tried to build support for an argument that anticipated later revisionist claims. See, e.g., “Key Points to Be Made with Respect to Vietnam Agreement,” Folder “Vietnam 2,” n.d., H.R. Haldeman Files, Richard Nixon Presidential Library, as cited in, Jeffrey P. Kimball, “Peace with Honor: Richard Nixon and the Diplomacy of Threat and Symbolism,” in *Shadow on the White House: Presidents and the Vietnam War, 1945–1975*, ed. David L. Anderson (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993), 152–83.

46 Gaddis Smith, “Glasnost, Diplomatic History, and the Post-Cold War Agenda,” *Yale Journal of World Affairs* 1, no. 1 (Summer 1989): 50.

47 See, e.g., Chen Jian, “China and the First Indo-China War, 1950–54,” *China Quarterly*, no. 133 (March 1993): 85–110, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741000018208>; Chen Jian, “China’s Involvement in the Vietnam War, 1964–69,” *China Quarterly*, no. 142 (June 1995): 356–87, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741000034974>; Mari Olsen, *Solidarity and National Revolution: The Soviet Union and the Vietnamese Communists, 1954–60* (Oslo: Institutt for Forsvarsstudier, 1997); Qiang Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950–1975* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Yang Kuisong, “Changes in Mao Zedong’s Attitude Toward the Indochina War, 1949–1973,” *Cold War International History Project Working Paper* no. 34, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2002, 6–11; and Ilya Gaiduk, *Confronting Vietnam: Soviet Policy Toward the Indo-china Conflict, 1954–1963* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003).

attitudes and policies in the war's final years.⁴⁸

This recent work is hugely important, and we can expect more excellent research exploring the non-U.S. dimensions of the war in the years to come as more archival materials in Vietnam and elsewhere become available and as more scholars gain the linguistic ability to work with them. To the extent that this new work has the effect of decentering the United States, however, it carries a risk: specifically, that too many interpretations of the war become ahistorical by attributing too much causal force for the war's course to local and transnational actors. One sees this in the increasingly common conception of the Vietnam conflict as primarily a civil war into which the United States imprudently stumbled. This view, which to be sure can already be identified in some of the orthodox literature, is not so much wrong as incomplete. The struggle unquestionably pitted Vietnamese against Vietnamese. It bears emphasizing that, as numerous scholars have shown, skirmishing among and within rival anti- and pro-colonial factions had commenced well before France made its bid to reclaim control of Indochina after World War II, and may have erupted into some sort of violent conflict whether or not Western powers intervened.⁴⁹ Still, it's unlikely that, absent first French and then American military intervention, there would have

been a decades-long, large-scale, and, especially, globalized, Vietnam War at all.⁵⁰ As Daniel Ellsberg averred more than four decades ago in the documentary *Hearts and Minds*, "A war in which one side [i.e., the Republic of Vietnam] is entirely financed and equipped and supported by foreigners is not a civil war." (He might have added that the Democratic Republic of Vietnam too had major outside assistance, especially from China, even if this aid was always dwarfed by what the United States provided to Saigon.) In Ellsberg's view, Americans should not have asked whether "we were on the wrong side in the Vietnamese war"; instead, they should have recognized that "we are the wrong side."⁵¹ Andrew J. Bacevich recently echoed Ellsberg's claim in his review of Ken Burns and Lynn Novick's documentary *The Vietnam War*, asserting that "[t]he United States screwed up not because it picked the wrong side in the Vietnam conflict, but because it stuck its nose where it didn't belong."⁵²

Of course, none of the recent international and transnational histories deny the centrality of the United States to the war in Vietnam. Indeed, many include sophisticated analyses of U.S. motivations and decision-making. A problem, however, emerges when the scholarship gives *equal or near-equal* causal weight for the war's military, political, economic, and social course to non-American or trans-

48 The new scholarship is voluminous, but see, e.g., Tran Thi Lien, "The Catholic Question in North Vietnam: From Polish Sources 1954–56," *Cold War History* 5, no. 4 (November 2005): 431–52, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14682740500284747>; Mark Philip Bradley, *Vietnam at War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Mark Atwood Lawrence, *The Vietnam War: A Concise International History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Pierre Journoud, "Diplomatie informelle et réseaux transnationaux. Une contribution française à la fin de la guerre Vietnam," *Relations Internationales* 2, no. 138 (2009): 93–109, <https://doi.org/10.3917/ri.138.0093>; Meredith H. Lair, *Armed with Abundance: Consumerism and Soldiering in the Vietnam War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011); Harish C. Mehta, "North Vietnam's Informal Diplomacy with Bertrand Russell: Peace Activism and the International War Crimes Tribunal," *Peace and Change* 37, no. 1 (January 2012): 64–94, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0130.2011.00732.x>; Lien-Hang Nguyen, *Hanoi's War: An International History of the War for Peace in Vietnam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012); Heather Marie Stur, *Beyond Combat: Women and Gender in the Vietnam War Era* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Jessica M. Chapman, *Cauldron of Resistance: Ngo Dinh Diem, the United States, and 1950s Southern Vietnam* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013); Jessica M. Frazier, *Women's Antiwar Diplomacy During the Vietnam War Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013); Edward Miller, *Misalliance: Ngo Dinh Diem, the United States, and the Fate of South Vietnam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013); Judy Tzu-Chun Wu, *Radicals on the Road: Internationalism, Orientalism, and Feminism During the Vietnam Era* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013); Pierre Asselin, *Hanoi's Road to the Vietnam War, 1954–1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014); Nguyen, "Revolutionary Circuits"; Tuong Vu, *Vietnam's Communist Revolution: The Power and Limits of Ideology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Jessica Elkind, *Aid Under Fire: Nation Building and the Vietnam War* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2016); Christopher Goscha, *Vietnam: A New History* (New York: Basic Books, 2016); Fear, "Republican Saigon's Clash of Constituents"; Geoffrey C. Stewart, *Vietnam's Lost Revolution: Ngo Dinh Diem's Failure to Build an Independent Nation, 1955–1963* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Sophie Quinn-Judge, *The Third Force in the Vietnam Wars: The Elusive Search for Peace, 1954–75* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2017); and Simon Toner, "Imagining Taiwan: The Nixon Administration, the Developmental States, and South Vietnam's Search for Economic Viability, 1969–1975," *Diplomatic History* 41, no. 4 (September 2017): 772–98, <https://doi.org/10.1093/dh/dhw057>.

49 Indeed, the skirmishing regularly turned violent, suggesting that the previous view of a largely unified and coherent Vietnamese nationalism was misplaced. Nor should we necessarily presume, as historians often have, that the Communists were destined to prevail in this internal struggle.

50 This is not to deny Christopher Goscha's important point that the inter- and intra-factional disputes might have become *more* violent absent the French and later the American wars, or his corollary claim that the necessities of anti-colonial warfare proved vitally important in giving the Viet Minh the necessary discipline and military skill to eventually rule the entire country. However, these disputes would have played out locally and would have had little effect on the United States or the broader international system. See, Christopher Goscha, *Vietnam, Un Etat né de la guerre* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2011). On the longer-term Vietnamese roots of the conflict, see also, Christopher Goscha, *Vietnam or Indochina?: Contesting Conceptions of Space in Vietnamese Nationalism, 1887–1954* (Copenhagen: NIAS Books, 1995); François Guillemot, *Dai Viêt, indépendance et révolution au Viêt-Nam: l'échec de la troisième voie (1938–1955)*, PhD Dissertation, École Pratique des Hautes Études, 2003; Shawn Frederick McHale, *Print and Power: Confucianism, Communism, and Buddhism in the Making of Modern Vietnam* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004); Shawn McHale, "Understanding the Fanatic Mind? The Viet Minh and Race Hatred in the First Indochina War (1945–1954)," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 4, no. 3 (Fall 2009): 98–138, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1525/vs.2009.4.3.98>; Charles Keith, *Catholic Vietnam: A Church from Empire to Nation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012); and Brett Reilly, "The Sovereign States of Vietnam, 1945–1955," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 11, nos. 3–4 (Summer-Fall 2016): 103–39, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1525/jvs.2016.11.3-4.103>.

51 *Hearts and Minds*, directed by Peter Davis (1974; Chicago, IL: Home Vision, 2002), DVD.

52 Andrew J. Bacevich, "Past All Reason," *The Nation*, Sept. 19, 2017, <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/the-vietnam-war-past-all-reason/>.



national actors. That is, the problem comes in the implicit decentering of the United States from the struggle when the war's history so clearly underlines America's centrality to it. In the aftermath of World War II, French leaders made the decision to put down by force of arms the Ho Chi Minh-led Vietnamese revolution. The violent conflict that followed quickly became America's almost as much as France's — Washington footed much of the bill, supplied most of the weaponry, and pressed French policymakers to hang tough when their will slackened. Long before American ground troops set foot in Indochina, the United States was the principal player in making the struggle what it became, and its importance only grew as time went on.⁵³ Though the (ostensibly temporary) partition of Vietnam in 1954 was not primarily an American gambit, and though the basic political structure of what became South Vietnam was already then emerging, the U.S. role in building up and sustaining that state was from the start vital in shaping its, and the subsequent conflict's, character.⁵⁴

When large-scale fighting resumed in 1965, the Lyndon B. Johnson administration tried hard to get Allied nations to commit ground forces under the "More Flags" program, but the results were modest — it was Washington that committed millions of troops to the war effort, and it was Washington that dropped some 8 million tons of bombs on North Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos between 1962 and 1973.⁵⁵ The war-fighting capabilities of Saigon and Hanoi could not, and never did, come anywhere near America's, even when Hanoi was aided by China and the Soviet Union. Although Washington found from an early point that its influence over South Vietnamese political developments was limited, this did not seriously hamper its ability to

prosecute the war as it saw fit. The fact remains that only the United States sprayed some 19 million gallons of defoliants on South Vietnam in an attempt to deny enemy forces jungle cover and food, and only the United States spent billions on nation-building programs and other nonmilitary activities that prolonged and defined the conflict.⁵⁶

When one combines the insights of the new scholarship with those of the old, it is clear that American policy bore major responsibility for a war that generated some three million deaths, perhaps two-thirds of them civilians, and immense physical destruction in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos.⁵⁷ To repeat, we are not claiming that absent Western intervention postcolonial Vietnam necessarily would have been at peace — some sort of internal conflict was likely inevitable. Neither are we maintaining that the United States ever had political control of South Vietnam — it very clearly did not. The United States also did not determine the conflict's end — after all, it lost the war (although the American public's growing unwillingness to pay the cost of continued fighting certainly affected the timing of the Paris Peace Accords). What we are asserting, however, is that without the massive U.S. intervention any postcolonial conflict in Vietnam would have taken a very different, more localized, form, one having at most a marginal impact on American and global diplomacy, politics, and society.

Ultimately, ours is an argument about causality, and specifically about constructing causal hierarchies.⁵⁸ Methodologically, we are in accord with E.H. Carr, who argued in his classic work *What Is History?* that historians must not simply list X number of causes of whatever phenomenon they are investigating, but rather must distinguish among them in an attempt to establish a ranking

53 See, Logevall, *Embers of War*.

54 This is not to argue that the United States installed Diem or that he was an American creation. U.S. officials knew little about him in the spring of 1954, and moreover he had his own power base in Vietnam. But the U.S. role in his ascension to power was nonetheless crucial. See, Logevall, *Embers of War*, 588–90; and Miller, *Misalliance*.

55 Fredrik Logevall, *Choosing War: The Lost Chance for Peace and the Escalation of the War in Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 175–96; and Fredrik Logevall, "America Isolated: The Western Powers and the Escalation of the War," in *America, the Vietnam War, and the World: Comparative and International Perspectives*, ed. Andreas W. Daum, Lloyd C. Gardner, and Wilfried Mausbach (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 175–96.

56 As Max Hastings remarked: "An extraordinary aspect of the decision-making in Washington between 1961 and 1975 was that Vietnamese were seldom if ever allowed to intrude upon it. Successive administrations ignored any claims by the people who inhabited the battlefields to a voice in determining their own fate: business was done in a cocoon of Americanness." Max Hastings, *Vietnam: An Epic Tragedy, 1945–1975* (New York: Harper, 2018), 121. We're grateful to Andrew Preston for this reference.

57 See here the penetrating analysis in Christian G. Appy, "What Was the Vietnam War About?" *New York Times*, March 26, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/26/opinion/what-was-the-vietnam-war-about.html>. With respect to the "Vietnamese civil war" argument, Appy suggests a counterfactual "thought experiment. What if our own Civil War bore some resemblance to the Vietnamese 'civil war'? For starters, we would have to imagine that in 1860 a global superpower — say Britain — had strongly promoted Southern secession, provided virtually all of the funding for the ensuing war and dedicated its vast military to the battle. We must also imagine that in every Southern state, local, pro-Union forces took up arms against the Confederacy. Despite enormous British support, Union forces prevailed. What would Americans call such a war? Most, I think, would remember it as the Second War of Independence. Perhaps African-Americans would call it the First War of Liberation. Only former Confederates and the British might recall it as a 'civil war.'"

58 Of course, not all histories of U.S. foreign relations must be centrally concerned with causality, and there are many worthy historical topics able to legitimately elide such issues.



of importance.⁵⁹ In the case of Vietnam, it becomes all but impossible to imagine large-scale war after 1954 absent the decision of three successive U.S. administrations to build up, sustain, and defend by force of arms the government of South Vietnam. There is no question that Hanoi's decision-making also influenced the course of the war, but it's surely telling that through the spring of 1965 North Vietnamese leaders hoped to avoid a major military conflict with the United States.⁶⁰ Put another way: Without the United States, the history of the Viet-

namese struggle would have looked very different.

One occasionally hears the argument that a certain decentering of the United States in the scholarship on Vietnam is warranted because all the U.S.-related questions about the war have already been examined. But this seems misguided. To cite only a few examples, we need more studies on the process by which the Americanization of the war deepened between 1965 and 1967; the growing disillusionment within the Johnson administration with the war; the bureaucratic politics of the war;

59 E.H. Carr, *What Is History?* (New York: Vintage, 1961). One way to establish causal hierarchies is to do so through careful counterfactual analysis, which, by bringing to the fore plausible but unrealized alternatives to what actually occurred, can convey the differing dimensions of past, contingent situations. Though counterfactuals have a negative reputation among many professional historians, thinking about alternatives is, in fact, an indispensable, if usually implicit, part of the historian's craft — we can judge the forces that won out only by comparing them with those that were defeated. Simply put, the investigation of unrealized alternatives provides crucial insight into why things occurred as they did. See, e.g., Jon Elster, *Logic and Society: Contradictions and Possible Worlds* (Toronto: John Wiley & Sons, 1978), especially chapter 6; Geoffrey Hawthorn, *Plausible Worlds: Possibility and Understanding in History and the Social Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Niall Ferguson, *Virtual History: Alternatives and Counterfactuals* (London: Penguin Press, 1997); Philip E. Tetlock and Geoffrey Parker, "Counterfactual Thought Experiments," in *Unmaking the West: "What-If?" Scenarios that Rewrite World History*, ed. Philip E. Tetlock, Richard Ned Lebow, and Geoffrey Parker (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 14–44; and Fredrik Logevall, "Presidential Address: Structure, Contingency, and the War in Vietnam," *Diplomatic History* 39, no. 1 (January 2015): 4–5, <https://doi.org/10.1093/dh/dhu072>.

60 As Sophie Quinn-Judge recently argued in an *H-Diplo* roundtable, "studies of 'Hanoi's War' foreground the hardline, aggressive nature of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) throughout the American Vietnam War. They go back to the original U.S. interpretation of the war as a case of Communist aggression against an independent RVN [Republic of Vietnam]. Saigon's flaunting of the Geneva final statement on the holding of nationwide elections in 1956 and the legitimate right of the DRV to fight for unification (that they thought they had won in 1954) are down-played. In other words, there is no dramatic new evidence that the war was initiated by Hanoi or was Hanoi's responsibility." Sophie Quinn-Judge's response in George Fujii, "H-Diplo Roundtable XX, 6 on Sophie Quinn-Judge's *The Third Force in the Vietnam War: The Elusive Search for Peace, 1954–1975*," *H-Diplo*, Oct. 8, 2018, <https://networks.h-net.org/node/28443/discussions/2671535/h-diplo-roundtable-xx-6-sophie-quinn-judge-third-force-vietnam>. For the contrary view that suggests it was Hanoi that initiated the major escalation in 1965, see, Asselin, *Hanoi's Road*; and Zachary Shore, "Provoking America: Le Duan and the Origins of the Vietnam War," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 17, no. 4 (Fall 2015): 86–108, https://doi.org/10.1162/JCWS_a_00598. An analysis that assigns broadly equal responsibility to both sides is Goscha, *Vietnam*, chaps. 7–9.



the growth in congressional assertiveness on Vietnam in the late 1960s and early 1970s; and the war's lasting effects on global finance and the demise of Bretton Woods, among other topics. Nonetheless, we appreciate that, as the new histories of Vietnam demonstrate, the United States was never omnipotent and was never able to rule by fiat, and to understand the war in all its dimensions we must study non-U.S. and transnational actors. Indeed, an exciting future undertaking would be to integrate Vietnamese and other non-U.S. sources with the rich — and recently declassified — archival materials available at repositories across the United States.⁶¹ And certainly, scholars should be wary of explicit or implicit claims that international and transnational approaches are more important merely because they emphasize the non-U.S. dimensions of the story and draw on non-English-language sources.

Furthermore, the history of U.S. foreign affairs during the Vietnam War highlights the salience of several points we made in this article's introductory section: First, that the United States was the most dominant nation in the post-1945 world, that this dominance was recognized by all global policymakers, and that U.S. power enabled Washington to shape the character of conflicts in which it involved itself; second, that the American state was the chief maker of foreign policy; and finally, that domestic determinants were the primary, if not only, sources of U.S. foreign policy.

To a degree difficult to fully recapture today, World War II witnessed the emergence of the United States to a position of predominant power in global, and especially Asian, affairs. Even before the defeat of the Japanese Empire in the summer of 1945, all sides in the incipient struggle for Indochina grasped just how important the American role was likely to be in the postwar world. "What will the Americans do?" was the question that resonated in the halls of power in Paris, London, Hanoi, Saigon, Chongqing, and Moscow. Small wonder that on Aug. 30, 1945 — before Japan officially surrendered — Ho Chi Minh sent a letter to President Harry S. Truman asking for the Viet Minh to be involved in any Allied discussion regarding Vietnam's postwar status. (Truman, similar to Woodrow Wilson before him, ignored Ho.) The Vietnamese leader was right to worry about U.S. policy. As described above, American resources soon enabled the French to maintain their tenuous — and bloody

— hold on the country for almost a decade, before the Americans themselves assumed responsibility for the newly created Republic of Vietnam. As Ho's appeal to Truman reveals, long before France's defeat at Dien Bien Phu in 1954, North Vietnamese leaders recognized an emergent United States, not an enfeebled France, as their principal foe, and adjusted their strategy accordingly.⁶²

In fact, from the start of the conflict in 1945–1946 until the fall of Saigon 30 years later, the American state did much to determine the course of the First and Second Indochina Wars. To be sure, other actors, especially North Vietnam, South Vietnam, China, and the Soviet Union, as well as nongovernmental organizations of various kinds, influenced the conflict in various ways, but on balance it was American officials ensconced in the White House, Defense Department, State Department, and CIA who exerted the most profound effect on the wars. Moreover, U.S. policymakers' decisions were motivated mainly by the notion of "credibility," in two specific senses. First, the Cold War led decision-makers to be concerned with the geopolitical credibility of the United States. Would Western European allies trust America to defend them if it failed to stop the ever-growing communist menace in Southeast Asia? Would the nations of the emergent "Third World" conclude that capitalism was feckless if South Vietnam fell? In other words, the logic of the Cold War compelled U.S. policymakers to intervene in Vietnam. Put crudely and counterfactually: No Cold War, no American military intervention in Vietnam. Second — and more important — from beginning to end, perceived domestic political imperatives were crucial to the formation of U.S. policy toward Vietnam. For each of the six presidents who dealt with Vietnam after World War II (Truman through Gerald Ford) the struggle there mattered principally, if not solely, because of the damage it could do to their domestic political position. Presidential administrations always viewed the stakes in Vietnam — and the millions of Vietnamese killed and maimed during the wars — through the prism of their own domestic interests, anxieties, and experiences. For these reasons, the key to understanding America's role in the Indochina Wars ultimately lies not in Vietnam, or in the broader international community, or in various transnational movements, but at home.

61 In addition to the Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, and Ford presidential libraries, there is abundant material available at the National Archives and Records Administration in College Park, MD, the Library of Congress in Washington, DC, the National Security Archive in Washington, DC, and the Vietnam Center and Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University in Lubbock, TX. The personal papers of individual policymakers and lawmakers are scattered at institutions across the country.

62 This is a theme in Logevall, *Embers of War*.

Part IV: The U.S. in the World after the International and Transnational Turns

The Vietnam War is only one of several topics central to post-1945 U.S. and global history that a domestic perspective steeped in American sources can help illuminate. First and foremost, historians must analyze the rise of U.S. hyperpower, primacy, and unilateralism. (Henry R. Luce's notion of an "American Century," articulated in 1941, has had its share of critics, but the label has stuck for a reason.⁶³) Though foreign archival materials are not without utility in the quest to understand U.S. dominance — indeed, they can teach us much about how leaders overseas viewed that emerging dominance, and adjusted to it — the most important source material for explicating the formation and exercise of U.S. power (if not its effects) is located in presidential and other American archives. Second, historians do not yet know enough about the origins and operation of the bipartisan consensus that has, since World War II, assumed U.S. primacy and hegemony. How and why did policymakers, lawmakers in Congress, think tank analysts, mainstream journalists, and other elites in the United States come to share similar assumptions about U.S. globalism that remained remarkably stable over a long period of time?⁶⁴

Third, we need to learn more about the peculiar evolution of the U.S. national security state. One of the major developments of the post-World War

II American state was the creation of a network of parastate institutions — e.g., think tanks, corporations, nongovernmental organizations, and university research centers — that worked primarily on government contracts. Furthermore, after 1945 the official organizations of the state, especially those groups concerned with war-making, significantly increased in size. Though several historians have examined this subject, much more work on the ways in which the postwar national security state grew and spread its tentacles throughout American society remains to be done.⁶⁵ Relatedly, we should know more about how the executive branch and the "imperial presidency" came to accrue enormous authority over Congress in matters of war and foreign policy.⁶⁶ Fourth, historians have tended to elide, or at least deemphasize, the central role domestic politics played in determining U.S. foreign relations during the Cold War. Since 1945, electoral considerations, the machinations of special interest lobbying groups, and the vagaries of political coalitions have profoundly shaped U.S. foreign policy, yet we do not know enough about this complex process.⁶⁷ Indeed, historians have largely ceded this scholarly ground to political scientists.

Fifth, the steady marginalization of elite-centered or "traditional" military history — i.e., the study of strategy, tactics, and the influence of high-ranking military officers on foreign affairs — in the American academy has engendered significant gaps in diplomatic historians' understanding of U.S. pow-

⁶³ Henry R. Luce, "The American Century," *Life*, Feb. 17, 1941, 61–65.

⁶⁴ Several books have examined aspects of this topic. See, Michael J. Hogan, *A Cross of Iron: Harry S. Truman and the Origins of the National Security State, 1945–1954* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Craig and Logevall, *America's Cold War*; and Stephen Wertheim, *Tomorrow, the World: The Birth of U.S. Global Supremacy in World War II* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020).

⁶⁵ See, Hogan, *Cross of Iron*; Aaron L. Friedberg, *In the Shadow of the Garrison State: America's Anti-Statism and Its Cold War Grand Strategy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000); and Douglas T. Stuart, *Creating the National Security State: A History of the Law that Transformed America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008). For some works that examine nongovernmental and parastate national security organizations, see, Michael E. Latham, *Modernization as Ideology: American Social Science and "Nation Building" in the Kennedy Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Donald L.M. Blackmer, *The MIT Center for International Studies: The Founding Years, 1951–1969* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Center for International Studies, 2002); Nils Gilman, *Mandarins of the Future: Modernization Theory in Cold War America* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003); David C. Engerman, *Know Your Enemy: The Rise and Fall of America's Soviet Experts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Inderjeet Parmar, *Foundations of the American Century: The Ford, Carnegie, and Rockefeller Foundations in the Rise of American Power* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011); Joy Rohde, *Armed with Expertise: The Militarization of American Social Research During the Cold War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013); Osamah F. Khalil, *America's Dream Palace: Middle East Expertise and the Rise of the National Security State* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016); and Bessner, *Democracy in Exile*.

⁶⁶ See, Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Imperial Presidency* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973); and Jeremi Suri, *The Impossible Presidency: The Rise and Fall of America's Highest Office* (New York: Basic Books, 2017).

⁶⁷ See, for some examples, Ernest R. May, *The Making of the Monroe Doctrine* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975); Melvin Small, *Democracy and Diplomacy: The Impact of Domestic Politics on U.S. Foreign Policy, 1789–1994* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); Craig and Logevall, *America's Cold War*; Thomas Alan Schwartz, "Henry, ...Winning an Election Is Terribly Important: Partisan Politics in the History of U.S. Foreign Relations," *Diplomatic History* 33, no. 2 (April 2009): 173–90, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7709.2008.00759.x>; Fredrik Logevall, "Domestic Politics," in *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations*, 3rd ed., 151–67; Jussi M. Hanhimäki, "Global Visions and Parochial Politics: The Persistent Dilemma of the 'American Century,'" *Diplomatic History* 27, no. 4 (September 2003): 423–47, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-7709.00363>; Julian E. Zelizer, *Arsenal of Democracy: The Politics of National Security—From World War II to the War on Terrorism* (New York: Basic Books, 2010); and Andrew L. Johns, *Vietnam's Second Front: Domestic Politics, the Republican Party, and the War* (Lexington: University Press of Kansas, 2010).



er.⁶⁸ In a nation in which the budget of the Defense Department has long dwarfed that of the State Department, we must know more about how military elites informed, and in some cases drove, U.S. foreign policy. Sixth, historians ought to analyze the impact that intelligence and the intelligence community have had on U.S. foreign affairs. In the last several years, the CIA and other groups have declassified massive amounts of material that could transform our understanding of America's role in the world, and these documents should occupy a central place in future scholarship.

Finally, historians have not explored fully the concatenation of political, economic, cultural, and ideological factors that have encouraged the United States to engage in what Bacevich has pungently referred to as "permanent" or "endless" war.⁶⁹ In the eight decades that have elapsed since Pearl Harbor, the United States has been in a state of near-constant war and has deployed military force abroad scores of times. We must know more about why and how this state of affairs came to be. Of course, this list of topics could be expanded, and every historian will have her own specific set of subjects in which she is most interested. The important point is that each of the above topics is America-centric and best explored through deep immersion in U.S. archives.⁷⁰

There are several important steps scholars can take to help recenter the United States in the historiography of U.S. foreign relations. First, prospective graduate students who intend to focus

on U.S.-centered histories of foreign policy and decision-making should be admitted to doctoral programs at the same rate as those who intend to adopt international and transnational approaches in their work. Second, prize and fellowship committees should give full consideration to works examining U.S. decision-making and the role of domestic determinants, including partisan politics, careerism, and elections, in shaping it. Finally, scholars should organize conferences and panels with the explicit purpose of bridging the gaps between domestic, international, and transnational historians. In particular, such gatherings should emphasize the importance of establishing causal hierarchies, which might provide a means of integrating the insights of recent international and transnational scholarship with those of domestic-focused histories.

Buoyed by the end of the Cold War and the rise of globalization, in the 1990s and 2000s U.S.-based diplomatic historians took international and transnational turns that moved their subfield away from methodological nationalism. While these turns in some ways reinvigorated the field, their broad adoption threatens to ahistorically reify a unique historical moment — that of post-Cold War neoliberal capitalist globalization — by reading this moment into the past. Though scholars must of course be always on the lookout for innovative ways of analyzing history, we must also be careful not to embrace innovation for innovation's sake. After 1945, the United States was the most

68 On the marginalization of military history, see, Robert M. Citino, "Military Histories: Old and New: A Reintroduction," *American Historical Review* 112, no. 4 (October 2007): 1070, <https://doi.org/10.1086/ahr.112.4.1070>; and Tami Davis Biddle and Robert M. Citino, "The Role of Military History in the Contemporary Academy," *Army History* 96 (Summer 2015): 26, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26300415>. For an account that disagrees with military historians' claims of marginalization, see, Ann M. Little, "Here We Go Again: Military Historian Complains that No One Teaches or Writes About Military History Any More, Part Eleventy-billion," *Historiann*, March 19, 2016, <https://historiann.com/2016/03/19/here-we-go-again-military-historian-complains-that-no-one-teaches-or-writes-about-military-history-any-more-part-eleventy-billion/>.

69 Andrew J. Bacevich, *Washington Rules: America's Path to Permanent War* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2010); and Andrew J. Bacevich, "Ending Endless War: A Pragmatic Military Strategy," *Foreign Affairs* 95, no. 5 (September/October 2016), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2016-08-03/ending-endless-war>. Mary L. Dudziak's *War-Time* is an exception that proves the rule. See, Mary L. Dudziak, *War-Time: An Idea, Its History, Its Consequences* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012). For an earlier take on a similar subject, see, Michael S. Sherry, *In the Shadow of War: The United States since the 1930's* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995).

70 Though our concern in this article has been with the international and transnational turns, one may also speak of a "cultural turn" in diplomatic history that has done much to enrich the field. In the last three decades, a plethora of historians have demonstrated the myriad ways in which race, gender (both femininity and masculinity), sexuality, religion, human rights, consumerism, developmentalism, domesticity, and other structures and ideologies shaped the formulation and use of U.S. power. See, e.g., Brenda Gayle Plummer, *Rising Wind: Black Americans and U.S. Foreign Affairs, 1935–1960* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Frank Costigliola, "'Unceasing Pressure for Penetration': Gender, Pathology, and Emotion in George Kennan's Formation of the Cold War," *Journal of American History* 83, no. 4 (March 1997): 1309–39, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2952904>; Penny M. Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937–1957* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997); Robert D. Dean, *Imperial Brotherhood: Gender and the Making of Cold War Foreign Policy* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001); Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East, 1945–2000* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Gilman, *Mandarins of the Future*; Petra Goedde, *GIs and Germans: Culture, Gender, and Foreign Relations, 1945–1949* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003); Christopher Endy, *Cold War Holidays: American Tourism in France* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Elizabeth Borgwardt, *A New Deal for the World: America's Vision for Human Rights* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005); Penny M. Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006); Seth Jacobs, *America's Miracle Man in Vietnam: Ngo Dinh Diem, Religion, Race, and U.S. Intervention in Southeast Asia* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004); Donna Alvah, *Unofficial Ambassadors: American Military Families Overseas and the Cold War, 1946–1965* (New York: New York University Press, 2007); Andrew Preston, *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith: Religion in American War and Diplomacy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012); Barbara J. Keys, *Reclaiming American Virtue: The Human Rights Revolution of the 1970s* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014); Daniel Immerwahr, *Thinking Small: The United States and the Lure of Community Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015); Nancy H. Kwak, *A World of Homeowners: American Power and the Politics of Housing Aid* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015); and Sarah B. Snyder, *From Selma to Moscow: How Human Rights Activists Transformed U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018).

powerful nation in the world; when it wanted to, it shaped global affairs; and it usually did so for domestic reasons. As such, to understand the history of the U.S. in the world, we must recenter the United States. 

Daniel Bessner is Anne H.H. and Kenneth B. Pyle Associate Professor in American Foreign Policy in the Henry M. Jackson School of International Studies at the University of Washington. He is the author of *Democracy in Exile: Hans Speier and the Rise of the Defense Intellectual* (Cornell University Press, 2018).

Fredrik Logevall is Laurence D. Belfer Professor of International Affairs and Professor of History at Harvard University. His new book, *JFK: Coming of Age in the American Century, 1917–1956* (Random House), will be published in September 2020.

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