IN THE SHADOW OF THE COLD WAR

American Foreign Policy from George Bush Sr. to Donald Trump

TIMOTHY J. LYNCH

In the Shadow of the Cold War

This book offers a bold reinterpretation of the prevailing narrative that US foreign policy after the Cold War was a failure. In chapters that retell and reargue the key episodes of the post–Cold War years, Lynch argues that the Cold War cast a shadow on the presidents that came after it and that success came more from adapting to that shadow than in attempts to escape it. When strategic lessons of the Cold War were applied, presidents fared better; when they were forgotten, they fared worse. This book tells the story not of a revolution in American foreign policy, but of its essentially continuous character from one era to the next. While there were many setbacks between the fall of Soviet communism and the opening years of the Trump administration, from Rwanda to 9/11 and Iraq to Syria, Lynch demonstrates that the United States remained the world's dominant power.

TIMOTHY J. LYNCH is Associate Professor in American Politics at the University of Melbourne. He is an award-winning author and editor of several important books on foreign policy, including *Turf War: The Clinton Administration and Northern Ireland* (Ashgate, 2004) and *US Foreign Policy and Democracy Promotion* (coeditor, Routledge, 2013), *After Bush: The Case for Continuity in American Foreign Policy* (coauthor, Cambridge, 2008), and the two-volume *Oxford Encyclopedia of American Military and Diplomatic History* (2013).

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University of Melbourne

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To Michael Lynch, my father

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All errors of fact and interpretation are my own.

Introduction

> History is not ... a cookbook offering pretested recipes. It teaches by analogy, not by maxims. It can illuminate the consequences of actions in comparable situations, yet each generation must discover for itself what situations are in fact comparable.
>
> —*Henry Kissinger, 1979*[1]

The Cold War ended not with a bang but with a picnic. On August 19, 1989, Miklós Németh, the Hungarian prime minister, opened his nation's border with Austria – for a few hours, he thought. The supposed "pan-European picnic" at Sopron, Hungary that afternoon led to the exodus of hundreds of East Germans into Austria and thus into the free West. When Soviet troops stationed in Hungary did not deploy to prevent this – as Németh feared they might – the Cold War was over. Within three months the Berlin Wall had fallen; within fourteen months the two Germanys were reunited; within three years of the picnic, the Soviet Union itself ceased to exist.[2]

Since that afternoon in 1989, the world has resisted easy labeling. Most of the twentieth century can be neatly parceled into distinct eras: World War I, the interwar years, the Great Depression, World War II, the nuclear era, the Cold War. Labels provide a reassuring terrain for students of history; compartmentalizing the world is often a necessary

[1] Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company, 1979), p. 54.

[2] The story of the picnic is told by Victor Sebestyen, *Revolution 1989: The Fall of the Soviet Empire* (London: Phoenix, 2010), pp. 311–314.

first step to comprehending it. At the end of the Cold War, however, the labels for what came next became more various but less reliable. Despite efforts to craft a "new world order" after the formal collapse of America's great enemy, the Soviet Union in December 1991, no label describing that order has stuck. We still define the era in which we live now against the era that preceded it: the *post–Cold War world*.

This might seem like a subject for mere academic debate. But it also lends credibility to the thesis that because the world entered a new era of complexity, the tools of American power, supposedly more successful in simpler times, have been inadequate to meet it. Whereas the great wars of the last century were decisively turned by the intervention of the United States, since the end of the Cold War, American interventions – military, economic, or diplomatic – have had, according to several accounts, rather more mixed impacts. Increasing global complexities make foreign policy more difficult. This, according to the argument, goes some way to explaining the patchy performance of US presidents in foreign affairs for over three decades. None seemed to grasp that the world had shifted. Each devised a label for the world he inherited; none succeeded in making it permanent. The most obvious example, examined in this book, is the War on Terror. Invented by President George W. Bush in response to an event of unambiguous clarity even if of disputed meaning – the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 – the label itself has never commanded a consensus: "too reductive ... war cannot be made on a tactic ... too easily construed as a war on Islam ... paints a grey world in black and white...." President Barack Obama never spoke of a War on Terror even as he continued to wage it, killing more terrorists than his predecessor. Thus, we find ourselves in a distinct historical moment, the parameters of which are fluid and disputed. How, this book asks, did America cope with such a world?

The short answer is "not badly." The contention in what follows is neither a paean to American greatness nor to the perfection of its foreign policy. Claims of greatness and perfection in any human activity should be treated with caution. Rather, the book casts a sympathetically critical eye over American engagement with the world from the fall of Soviet communism through the opening years of the Trump administration. In this period there were calamitous failures resulting in the diminution of US power and/or the loss of lives, American and non-American. There were damning failures of political will, as in Rwanda, and of military hubris, as in Iraq. The attacks of 9/11 and the intelligence failings that led to them highlight myriad deficiencies. Two decades after the Cold War ended, American

capitalism looked far from triumphant, as the Great Recession, which took hold in 2008, was evidence. And yet, potentially disastrous as these and other episodes were, the United States remained the world's preeminent power, indebted, certainly, but still preeminent and indispensable. This, I argue, is more because of American foreign policy than despite it.

Readers should not, therefore, expect a blanket defense of US power in the modern era, but an accounting that recognizes its durability, elasticity, and popularity – *not* its infallibility. Its durability is the subject of much academic debate. In the 1970s, predictions of US decline were commonplace and yet it was the Soviet Union that died. In the decades after 9/11, a similar debate had "declinists" again prophesying America's replacement by more ancient powers – like China and India. However, the election of Barack Obama in 2008 and of Donald Trump in 2016 were at least suggestive of an American capacity to remake the terms of international debate and query predictions of imminent decline.

American "elasticity," as Lawrence Freedman has argued, continued to account for much of its foreign policy success:

> American power is based on alliances rather than colonies and is associated with an ideology that is flexible, potentially universal and inherently subversive of alternative ideological forms. Together they provide a core of relationships and values to which America can return even after it has overextended itself in a particular area or decided that intervention in a particular conflict was imprudent and that withdrawal is necessary.[3]

By any number of measures – from immigration levels to popular culture – American popularity increased in the post–Cold War decades. Despite a rise in anti-Americanism in the early 2000s and late 2010s – much of it focused on the perceived character flaws of George W. Bush and Donald Trump – the nation remained the number-one destination for foreign students. Twenty-four percent of the world's emigrants, according to a 2010 Gallup Poll, wanted to move there. Seventy percent of immigrants in the United States still believe in the American dream.[4] In 2016, the United States issued over one million green cards; China issued 1,576.[5] Apart from a few outlier states, there were no nations who had a vested interest

[3] Lawrence Freedman, A Subversive on a Hill, *National Interest* [online], May 7, 2009; nationalinterest.org/article/a-subversive-on-a-hill-3096.

[4] David Brooks, The East Germans of the 21st Century, *New York Times*, January 29, 2018.

[5] See Mike Ives, China Wants to Attract More Foreigners (of a Certain Kind), *New York Times*, February 23, 2017.

in the waning of American influence in the decades after 1989. India and China moved toward the American model rather than away. Warring parties, from Israel/Palestine to Northern Ireland, invariably wanted Washington in their corner. American diplomatic and military might have remained popular, even essential, commodities – as regime change in Libya in 2011 proved. America's most infamous enemies became loose credit and jihadi terrorists.

THE ARGUMENT OF THE BOOK

In telling the story of the post–Cold War years, this book makes two related arguments. First, the Cold War cast a shadow on the presidents that came after it. They did not always have to be aware of operating within that shadow – indeed, several claimed to have moved beyond it – but it nevertheless conditioned how they made foreign policy the way they did, and why. That shadow was the cause of considerable continuity of foreign policy from one era to the next and of continuity in the post–Cold War years themselves. The end of the Cold War was not a decisive turning point, and neither was 9/11. Second, success came more from adapting to that shadow than from attempts to escape it. When the strategic lessons of the Cold War were applied, presidents fared better. When they were forgotten, they fared worse. These arguments are made in chapters that retell and reargue the central episodes of US foreign policy from the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 to the opening years of the Trump administration after 2017.

Despite the initial rhetoric of George H. W. Bush, president at the end of the Cold War, his foreign policy ultimately failed to transcend that conflict. Similarly, Bill Clinton's efforts to abandon what he called the "old think" of the Cold War were short-lived. He came to rely on Cold War strategies – like containment, in the case of Iraq, and institutions like North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) – to craft his foreign policy legacy. George W. Bush, despite the drama of 9/11, waged a War on Terror with powerful analogies to the war on communism. Barack Obama, born in 1961, matured personally and politically, like his successor, in a world divided along Cold War lines. Donald Trump, like so many presidents before him, made Russia central to his foreign policy and was determined to contain Chinese power; articles in *Foreign Affairs* urged him to apply Cold War strategies to his contemporary predicaments – not to forget them.[6] It would

[6] See Michael Mandelbaum, The New Containment: Handling Russia, China, and Iran, *Foreign Affairs* 98, 2 (March/April 2019): 123–131.

be remarkable were these leaders, nurtured in the Cold War, not susceptible to its strategic lessons. It is more remarkable still to suppose that the foreign policy establishment and personnel of the American government could as quickly forget them.[7] As Henry Kissinger argued, "the convictions that leaders have formed before reaching high office are the intellectual capital they will consume as long as they continue in office."[8]

This book represents an effort to tell the story not of a revolution in American foreign policy but of its essentially continuous character from one era to the next. While the world was in many ways different after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the response of the United States to this "new world order" – for both good and ill – was essentially unaltered. Further, rather than a turning point, 9/11 caused President Bush to refashion but not to revolutionize an approach basic to every president since Harry S Truman. It is an approach that endured into the Obama years and has unfolded since, if somewhat disjointedly, in Donald Trump's. To understand US foreign policy after the Cold War, our essential lens is the Cold War itself.

This theme of continuity, which provides one part of the book's thesis, is complemented by a second, which argues that, given the challenges facing it after the Cold War, US foreign policy was not a study in failure. Rather, during this period, American power grew; its supposed challengers did not emerge; states like China and India wanted to be on the American side; despite its enormous power and purported arrogance, the United States earned very few enemies in the post–Cold War years; Russia, its Cold War opponent, was unable to secure many new friends; dictators anathema to US interests and values were toppled; European allies preferred an engaged America to a detached one. Such successes, the book argues, are owed to the adaptation, not abandonment, of Cold War thinking in this supposedly new world.

WHAT WAS THE COLD WAR AND WHY HAS ITS SHADOW BEEN SO LONG?

Since its beginning, academic debate about the Cold War has been fierce. We can identify four key approaches to the cause and nature of the conflict. Traditional or orthodox scholars find fault in Soviet behavior.

[7] See Patrick Porter, Why America's Grand Strategy Has Not Changed: Power, Habit, and the U.S. Foreign Policy Establishment, *International Security* 42, 4 (Spring 2018): 9–46.
[8] Kissinger, *White House Years*, p. 54.

It was the power ambitions of the Kremlin, informed by a mixture of ideological and geostrategic imperatives, that obliged Washington to contain them. Arthur Schlesinger Jr. argued this in the 1940s and 1950s. Richard Pipes and Robert Conquest maintained this position throughout the course of the conflict. Their bogeymen were, among others, Joseph Stalin, Nikita Khrushchev, and Fidel Castro. Once the USSR ceased to act on these impulses, and loosened its grip at home and abroad, in the last decade of its existence, the Cold War was essentially over. John Mueller has argued this persuasively.[9]

Revisionist scholars reverse this characterization. For them, the Cold War was the product of American aggression and imperialism. William Appleman Williams, most impressively, posited this interpretation of the conflict in *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (1959).[10] His bogeymen, among many others, were Harry Truman, Richard Nixon, and John Foster Dulles (Eisenhower's dour secretary of state). The Soviet Union, though not blameless, acted to negate American economic expansionism. Rather than the Cold War being the product of communist ideology, it was the result of American wars of imperial domination, most notably in Vietnam. American ideology, claimed revisionists, was to blame.

Postrevisionism, a phenomenon of the later Cold War, sought to balance the orthodox and revisionist interpretations. Rather than the Cold War being the fault of one side or the other, it was misunderstanding and miscommunication between them that heightened tension. If relations had been better managed, a drawn-out conflict might have been avoided. The United States and the USSR had, after all, been allies in World War II. John Lewis Gaddis was a leader of this "post-revisionist synthesis," as it was called, until he moved to a more neo-orthodox position in the 1990s. He did so because access to previously secret Russian documents revealed the ideological motivation behind much Soviet behavior. Gaddis's *Now We Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (1998) is a masterful accounting of the new evidence, though many scholars dispute his conclusions.

[9] Arthur Schlesinger Jr., *The Vital Center: The Politics of Freedom* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1949); Richard Pipes, *Communism: A History* (New York: Random House, 2001); Robert Conquest, *The Dragons of Expectation: Reality and Delusion in the Course of History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2004); John Mueller, What Was the Cold War About? Evidence from Its Ending, *Political Science Quarterly* 119, 4 (Winter 2004/05): 609–631.

[10] William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*, 50th anniversary edition (New York: W. W. Norton, 2009).

His post–Cold War writing is indicative of the fourth approach to the conflict, grounded in access to Soviet sources – not all of it in agreement with Gaddis (see the work of Melvyn Leffler and Marc Trachtenberg, for example).[11]

All wars, of course, are subject to academic debate. The Cold War, however, is especially problematic because it was not a "normal" war. These tend to be short and hot; the Cold War was long and mostly cold. It has no precise beginning or end. While occasionally violent, it never descended into a military conflagration between its two protagonists, the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Instead, proxies in Latin American, Africa, and Asia did most of the killing and dying on behalf of Washington or Moscow. The international historians Odd Arne Westad and Paul Chamberlin document this impressively.[12] In World War II, two sides fought a bloody war until the capitals of one lay in ruins and its leaders were dead or captured. When this was achieved, the war ended. While it saw each side plan and plot the destruction of the other – with nuclear weapons more than able to accomplish this objective – the Cold War never actually saw it happen. When the USSR "lost," it was not under American occupation, but was dependent on Western aid. Its leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, did not commit suicide or face a criminal trial but, rather, was fired by the men who had originally hired him (his fate thereafter was to earn millions on lucrative lecture tours in the West).

The United States, by the same token, found it had won without ever really having to kill Russians, as it had Germans and Japanese between 1941 and 1945. There were no victory parades to mark the end of the Cold War as there had been to mark victory in 1945. George Kennan, the architect of America's containment strategy in the Cold War, was amazed. It was, he said, "hard to think of any event more strange and startling, and at first glance inexplicable, than the sudden and total disintegration and disappearance … of the great power known

[11] John Lewis Gaddis, *Now We Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); Melvyn Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind: The United States, the Soviet Union, and the Cold War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007); Marc Trachtenberg, *The Cold War and After: History, Theory, and the Logic of International Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012).

[12] See Odd Arne Westad, *The Cold War: A World History* (New York: Penguin, 2018), and Paul Thomas Chamberlin, *The Cold War's Killing Fields: Rethinking the Long Peace* (New York: HarperCollins, 2018).

successively as the Russian Empire and then the Soviet Union."[13] The USSR "went 'poof' like the Wicked Witch in *The Wizard of Oz*," observed Walter McDougall,"or Sauron in *The Lord of the Rings*."[14] The historian John Lukacs, a native Hungarian, contrasts the demise of fascism with that of communism:

> In 1945 many thousands of Germans committed suicide. Many of those who killed themselves were not National Socialist party leaders, some of them not even party members, but all of them [were] believers. But I know of not a single instance, in or around 1989, when a believing Communist committed suicide because of the collapse of Communism, in Russia or elsewhere. Dogmatic believers in Communism had ceased to exist long before, even as dogmatic anti-Communists continued to flourish.[15]

Charles Krauthammer described the end of the Cold War as "one of the great anticlimaxes in history. Without a shot being fired, without a revolution, without so much as a press release, the Soviet Union simply gave up and disappeared."[16]

This going gently into the night on the part of the USSR surprised nearly everyone who studied that state. Its permanence, as both an ideological project and locus of power, was assumed but rarely tested. Instead, throughout the Cold War, it was the United States whose decline was anticipated. During the 1970s and 1980s, "declinism" was in academic fashion, not just among Soviet apparatchiks, who were obliged to find scientific evidence for American degeneration, but also within Western intellectual circles. Few thought the United States could beat the USSR, even fewer that Soviet communism could just vanish. Paul Kennedy's *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, a bestseller in 1988 (and for years after), predicted the decline of US power – for which we are still waiting.[17]

This intellectual climate permeated the machinery of American foreign policy too. The most important cog in that machine, the president, was a product of the Cold War. The staff he deployed to run his diplomacy,

[13] In Leon Aron, Everything You Think You Know about the Collapse of the Soviet Union Is Wrong, *Foreign Policy* [online], June 20, 2011.

[14] Walter A. McDougall, *The Tragedy of U.S. Foreign Policy: How America's Civil Religion Betrayed the National Interest* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016), p. 4.

[15] John Lukacs, The Poverty of Anti-Communism, *National Interest* 55 (Spring 1999): 75–85.

[16] Charles Krauthammer, *Democratic Realism* (Washington, DC: AEI Press, 2004), p. 1.

[17] Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (New York: Random House, 1988).

from Brent Scowcroft (under George Bush Sr.) to Madeleine Albright (under Bill Clinton) and from Condoleezza Rice (under George Bush Jr.) to John Kerry (under Barack Obama) and John Bolton (under Donald Trump), were students in and of the conflict. The international architecture of the Cold War did not crumble along with the Soviet Union. Instead, the enlargement of NATO became the foreign policy priority of the Clinton administration, as its formation had been that of Harry Truman in the late 1940s. The newly liberated people of Eastern Europe did not rush into a lonely, communist-free autonomy but into an American embrace, seeing US power as a guarantor of their non-communist future. People rarely set aside tools that work. They might buy new ones, but only because these more efficiently replicate what the old ones did. This dictum was true of how both US foreign policy and its objects adapted to the end of the Cold War.

Despite efforts to get over the Cold War, no president has truly succeeded in doing so – because the need has always proved insufficient. The Cold War frameworks of US foreign policy – intellectual and institutional – have endured because many of them continued to work after that conflict ended. The demand to think more imaginatively did not obtain after 1989 as it did after 1945. This is not to argue that the Cold War legacy is permanent. It is to argue that it has been more present in the decades after 1989 than is often acknowledged. We live in its shadow.

WHAT IS THE POST–COLD WAR ERA?

While the Cold War generated distinct historiographical schools, post–Cold War history has not. There is a dearth of books that endow the years since 1989 with a singular character; we have come to know the era as simply "post–Cold War." Even 9/11 has failed to change this rather vague label. George W. Bush's response to those attacks is part of a longer post–Cold War narrative. Indeed, as has been argued, the response to 9/11 synchronized rather well with traditional forms of statecraft.[18] Al-Qaeda's attack did not begin a foreign policy revolution, an argument developed later in this book.

This is not to deny that admirable attempts have been made to define what was specific, new, and different about the post–1989 years. Derek Chollet and James Goldgeier present a compelling history in *America*

[18] See Timothy J. Lynch and Robert S. Singh, *After Bush: The Case for Continuity in American Foreign Policy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

Between the Wars: from 11/9 to 9/11.[19] Their object is the peculiar intervening period, "the interregnum," "the age of anxiety/uncertainty/fragmentation," of "great and failed expectations/disillusion (and dissolution)," from the collapse of the Berlin Wall on November 9, 1989 up to September 11, 2001. In their preface they acknowledge this as the "Age That Even Historians from Harvard Can't Name."[20] How much harder, then, to find a single label that covers the momentous decades on either side of 9/11?

Sean Wilentz, to find historical coherence, extends the period backward to 1974, in a book he calls *The Age of Reagan*, which, though significantly foreign policy–related, offers a general accounting of US history from Richard Nixon to George W. Bush.[21] William O'Neill does something similar but, again, narrows his history to what he calls the "interwar bubble" between 1989 and 2001.[22] In 2016, Michael Mandelbaum offered a synthesis of post–Cold War failure. In coming to the aid of the Kurds in 1991, he argued, the United States established a pattern that was to endure across the post–Cold War decades. It was choosing to fight wars not for realist objectives but for a humanitarian one – the protection of Muslims from bad government – that was to recur in the Balkans, the Middle East, and East and North Africa under the next four presidents. Interests had been supplanted by values, the defining feature and failure of the post–Cold War foreign policy, and constituted a revolution in US posture:

> Without announcing it, without debating it, without even fully realizing it, the goals of American foreign policy changed fundamentally ... Historically, where their foreign policies are concerned sovereign states inhabit the realm of necessity: they do what they must do to survive. The United States after the Cold War, in contrast, dwelt in the difficult-to-reach kingdom of choice.[23]

In the Cold War, the United States sought to liberate oppressed people to weaken the Soviet Union. After the Cold War, it did so because it

[19] Derek Chollet and James Goldgeier, *America between the Wars, 11/9 to 9/11: The Misunderstood Years between the Fall of the Berlin Wall and the Start of the War on Terror* (New York: PublicAffairs: 2008).

[20] Chollet and Goldgeier, *America between the Wars,* p. x.

[21] Sean Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan: A History 1974–2008* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008).

[22] William L. O'Neill, *A Bubble in Time: America during the Interwar Years, 1989–2001* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2009).

[23] Michael Mandelbaum, *Mission Failure: America and the World in the Post–Cold War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 4, 368.

was the right thing to do. For Mandelbaum, this shift was the root cause of recurrent "mission failure" abroad. Instead of negating geostrategic opponents, presidents choose to propagate the bounties of American freedom.

Stephen Walt offers a more strident indictment of post–Cold War failure. Foreign policy during this period is "impossible to defend," he argues.[24] By grandiosely and condescendingly claiming to be the indispensable nation, the United States lost all sense of the actual limits of its power. Filled with a misplaced conviction that liberal democracy was the inevitable and universal system, policymakers exaggerated the ease with which democracy could be spread. By assuming wars like Afghanistan and Iraq would be cakewalks or slam dunks, the Bush administration ended up entangled in the intractable politics of the Middle East, with America's wealth squandered and thousands of its soldiers, and millions of foreigners, dead. Walt sees continuity across the Cold War era. For him, however, it was the continuity of delusion, of successive presidents believing the rest of the world shared their assumptions about human progress, about how "peace, prosperity, and justice" might be attained.[25] When these men and women encountered resistance, they invariably overreacted. The attempt to construct a liberal world order gave us the opposite, argues Walt.

Thomas Henriksen finds more nuance than Walt. In his analysis of the first four post–Cold War presidents, he observes not a delusional quest for hegemony, but a continual wrestling with the forces of engagement and disengagement. Foreign policy since 1989 has seen recurrent "cycles of international extroversion and introversion."[26] These were not forced on presidents by public opinion, or by some political ideology, but were the product of choices and changes each man made in response to events. Herein lay the continuity of the post–Cold War years: the quest to balance a tension inherent in US foreign policy for over two hundred years between doing more versus doing less in the world. Both Bushes, claims Henriksen, were "engagement-orientated" presidents – waging large wars in the Middle East – who subsequently retreated. Clinton and Obama, on the other hand, wanted a domestic focus and largely achieved this,

[24] Stephen M. Walt, *The Hell of Good Intentions: America's Foreign Policy Elite and the Decline of U.S. Primacy* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018), p. 7.
[25] Walt, *The Hell of Good Intentions*, p. 22.
[26] Thomas H. Henriksen, *Cycles in U.S. Foreign Policy since the Cold War* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. 1.

avoiding significant war abroad. All four were trapped in a cycle of in and out, of making war and making peace, that has a long historical lineage.

What Henriksen understates, and that this book argues, is that the continuity was fuller and deeper than a response to cyclical pressures. The contrasts across the five administrations were much less than the similarities. All the post–Cold War presidents came to office seeking some form of retrenchment or foreign policy humility, of doing less, not more. All ended up fighting wars on behalf of large humanitarian causes – especially the protection of Muslim populations. All posited that they were to lead in a world transformed and yet found themselves using decidedly traditional institutions of statecraft, facing the same opponents, in most of the same ways as presidents had done for decades before. Even 9/11 failed to fundamentally break this continuity. After 9/11, each president defined the number-one national security threat as the nexus of rogue states, terrorism, and weapons of mass destruction. And each made wars to preclude that threat that relied on alliances forged in the Cold War.

Much scholarship of US foreign policy from 1989 to the present tends to concentrate on specific sub-eras or administrations within this period. Hal Brands' *From Berlin to Baghdad* (2008), as the title suggests, tells the story of US diplomacy from 1989 to 2003, or the "long 1990s," as he terms it. Brands identifies an incoherence in both American foreign policy and in the study of it.[27] Despite this, as he argues in his later *American Grand Strategy in the Age of Trump* (2018), the United States has been a "Pretty Successful Superpower."[28] Unlike the Cold War period, the post–Cold War period generated no historical orthodoxy, and consequently no revisionism of it. American foreign policy became fractured and so, as a result, did the historiography of it. Large schools of interpretation, a la the Cold War, have not developed and are unlikely to. The closest we get is a vast literature observing American failure and the much smaller one making the counter-case.

In fact, the dominant texts of the post–Cold War decades (measured in sales and citations) have not been histories but prophecies – by political scientists. In 1989, Francis Fukuyama suggested history may well be ending, an argument we will explore more fully in the next chapter.

[27] Hal Brands, *From Berlin to Baghdad: America's Search for Purpose in the Post–Cold War World* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2008).

[28] Hal Brands, *American Grand Strategy in the Age of Trump* (Washington, DC: Brooking Institution Press, 2018), pp. 1–23.

Samuel P. Huntington disagreed.[29] While he agreed that ideological conflict would recede, "The Clash of Civilizations?" (the title of his 1993 *Foreign Affairs* article and 1996 book, with the question mark being lost along the way) would take its place. "The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural," argued Huntington.[30] The world would become more dangerous as these differences, long suppressed by the Cold War, were let loose. His book sold well in the middle 1990s but enjoyed a further boost after the al-Qaeda attacks of September 11, 2001; his predicted clash of Christianity and Islam seemed to have come true. He observed, "For 45 years, the Iron Curtain was the central dividing line in Europe. That line has moved several hundred miles east. It is now the line separating the peoples of Western Christianity, on the one hand, from Muslim and Orthodox peoples on the other."[31]

Huntington's pessimism was shared, if for different reasons, by the Chicago professor John Mearsheimer. In 1990, he argued against the general euphoria brought about by communist collapse. Rather, we would "soon miss the Cold War ... The conditions that have made for decades of peace in the West are fast disappearing, as Europe prepares to return to the multi-polar system that, between 1648 and 1945, bred one destructive conflict after another."[32] Robert Kaplan joined this chorus of realist pessimism. In a widely debated article in the *Atlantic Monthly* he detailed "the coming anarchy."[33] These authors offered analyses betraying a fundamental nostalgia for the Cold War, a nostalgia that was soon apparent in the foreign policymaking of the Bush Sr. and Clinton administrations.

[29] See Francis Fukuyama, The End of History?, *National Interest* 16 (Summer 1989): 3–18; Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992); Samuel Huntington, The Clash of Civilizations? *Foreign Affairs* 72, 3 (Summer 1993): 22–49; and Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Touchstone, 1996).

[30] Huntington, Clash of Civilizations? (1993), p. 22.

[31] Huntington, *Clash of Civilizations* (1996), p. 28.

[32] Mearsheimer, Why We Will Soon Miss the Cold War, *Atlantic Monthly* 266, 2 (August 1990): 35–50. He later indicted the "great delusion" of Western foreign policymakers in *The Great Delusion: Liberal Dreams and International Realities* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018).

[33] Robert D. Kaplan, The Coming Anarchy: How Scarcity, Crime, Overpopulation, Tribalism, and Disease Are Rapidly Destroying the Social Fabric of Our Planet, *Atlantic Monthly* 273, 2 (February 1994): 44–77.

Despite much initial rhetoric about "a new world order" (Bush Sr.) and an era of "democratic enlargement" (Clinton), neither man was able to define the precise contours of these visions. Instead, when reality set in, both men pursued a foreign policy strikingly like those of their Cold War predecessors. If the years from 1989 to 2001 were played out in the shadow of the Cold War, the years since 2001 took place within its penumbra. They did so despite predictions by several scholars of a foreign policy revolution under Bush Jr. and of sweeping change under Barack Obama. Though the actors, issues, and crises are new (and, with the presidency of Donald Trump, unexpected), the Cold War continues to shape the international landscape in which they unfold. How this came to be is the subject and argument of this book.

1

George H. W. Bush

New World Order, Old World President, 1989–1992

The Cold War didn't end; it was won.
—*George H. W. Bush, 1992*[1]

George Herbert Walker Bush was the last American president born before World War II and the last president to have fought in it (he enlisted at age eighteen). His political career reached its pinnacle just as the Cold War, which gave it form, vanished. Shaped by two great global wars, World War II (1939–1945) and the Cold War (1945–1989), Bush became president just as America's longest-standing opponent, the Soviet Union, was dissolving. How did the new president adapt to this turn of events? *Cautiously* and *nostalgically* would be potential answers. As if in disbelief that America could win so easily, he remained wary of the speed at which Moscow abandoned its ideological mission and wary of the prospects for disorder of its so doing. He set about using World War II and the Cold War as basic reference points in his construction of what he called "a new world order." Rather than jettison the past, Bush made it his essential prism. His reward for this was a series of significant foreign policy successes, from regime change in Panama to the liberation of Kuwait. The price he paid was electoral defeat, in 1992, at the hands of a younger opponent who dismissed foreign policy in favor of domestic economic renewal, and who wanted to look forward, not backward. The story of Bush's international success and national failure is told in this chapter.

[1] State of the Union Address, January 28, 1992.

THE END OF HISTORY?

What was the nature of the world George Bush confronted in 1989? That summer, a young political scientist at the RAND Corporation, a California-based research organization, offered an attractive answer. Francis Fukuyama argued that the waning of the Cold War was indicative of "the end of history." In an influential article in the journal *National Interest*, extended over the next two and a half years into a bestselling book, Fukuyama claimed the world had moved into a possibly permanent, post–ideological era.[2] The collapse of ideological competition, leaving liberal democracy "as the final form of human government," meant that history had ceased. History, as Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels had predicted in the nineteenth century, was indeed directional, but toward the system of government enjoyed by the United States rather than by its opponents.

As with George Kennan's Long Telegram (1946) and X Article (1947), which were the intellectual anchors for US strategy in the Cold War, it is as difficult to prove the impact of Fukuyama's ideas on the making of American foreign policy as it is difficult to divorce them from it.[3] Neither President Bush nor his successors declared the end of history. But in his diplomacy each man seemed to have imbibed the logic and to have exaggerated the optimism of Fukuyama's work. There was actually much pessimism and little of the triumphant in his writing – without ideas to contend over, men would become timid and "without chests." However, to find oneself on the right side of history was no doubt enormously reassuring. The task for the post–Cold War presidents, unlike for their predecessors, who had the job of containing something bad, was to help spread something good – and inevitable, according to Fukuyama. The big question of which ideological system would inherit the earth had been answered in America's favor; its foreign policy could thus become a tidying-up operation. Washington would content itself with nudging along an inexorable process – "encouraging, guiding, and managing change without provoking backlash and crackdown," was how Bush

[2] Francis Fukuyama, The End of History?, *National Interest* 16 (Summer 1989): 3–18; Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992).

[3] George F. Kennan, *American Diplomacy: Sixtieth-Anniversary Expanded Edition* (Walgreen Foundation Lectures) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).