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# Introduction

## EMBRACING COMPLEXITY

“It can’t go on much longer!”

I meant the Vietnam War. I remember uttering words along these lines in 1966. I was in my last year as an undergraduate at Cornell University. I was not a leader of any antiwar groups; I was a quiet, lonely follower. I was appalled by the fighting in Indochina and remember marching sullenly down the streets of Ithaca on a demonstration or two. I did not think the carnage could last much longer. I was wrong.

In that year, 1966, I was preoccupied with what I would do after graduation. I had no idea that I would become an historian of U.S. foreign relations. I had no notion of how my views would evolve from a focus on the domestic ideological and economic roots of policy to a preoccupation with threat perception. Even less could I have imagined that I would spend so much time wrestling with the possibilities of reconciling “revisionism” and “realism” and analyzing how perceptions of configurations of power abroad affected thinking about the preservation of core values and democratic capitalism at home. And since I would be trained in traditional approaches to diplomacy, I had not a clue about how the explosion of scholarship on culture, memory, and emotion would influence my growing fascination with the complicated interactions between human agents on the one hand and fundamental structures of political economy and international politics on the other hand.

When I finished college, my future was murky. I applied to law schools, graduate schools in history, and one or two programs dealing with international relations. I had choices, but when Ohio State University’s History

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Department offered me funding—the chance to experiment with graduate school without going into debt—the issue was resolved.

My intent was to study labor history. As an undergraduate in Cornell's School of Industrial and Labor Relations, I fashioned an eclectic program around history and economic development. Although I did not take any courses with Walter LaFeber, the gifted young assistant professor of American diplomatic history who had recently joined the Cornell faculty and who would subsequently have a major impact on my thinking, I did study American labor history with Gerd Korman. I wrote a substantial paper for him on the impact of the Bolshevik Revolution on the American labor movement. Working with Korman made me attentive to primary sources, reading carefully, and extrapolating meaningful generalizations from factual detail. He nurtured my interest in graduate study. He told me about a young labor historian who had joined the faculty at Ohio State: David Brody. He predicted, correctly, that Brody would become one of the leaders in the field. When I got to Ohio State, Brody was on leave. He never returned.

I was adrift. I gravitated to courses in U.S. diplomatic history and modern American history. I had little idea of what I would focus on, but my aversion to the Vietnam War clearly animated my interest in studying U.S. foreign relations. I enrolled in courses taught by a young professor, Marvin Zahniser. His expertise was in early American diplomacy, and he had written a book on C. C. Pinckney. He was then exploring the possibility of a big project regarding U.S. diplomatic missions that failed. Soon, he would turn his attention to writing a general history of Franco-American relations. Wearing a white shirt and a tie, often a bow tie, he presented learned but very traditional lectures. I found him distant, meticulous, rather inscrutable. His dispassionate aura perplexed me when my own emotions were pulsating. I had little idea of how he would influence my intellectual journey, but he did. He nurtured my love for research, encouraged me to interrogate my own predilections, and imparted a quest for “objectivity,” however elusive, that would shape so much of my scholarship.

During my first years at Ohio State I also enrolled in courses with John Burnham, Mary Young, and Andreas Dorpalen, an imposing, eminent historian of German history. In Burnham's course, we read Gar Alperovitz's recently published *Atomic Diplomacy*.<sup>1</sup> Though Burnham seemed to take no position on the book, his probing queries aroused passionate discussion. The atomic bomb, Alperovitz claimed, was dropped not to defeat the Japanese and save American lives, but to intimidate the Soviets and shape the course of post-World War II diplomacy. The broad implications were clear: the United States was responsible for the origins of the Cold War.

1. Gar Alperovitz, *Atomic Diplomacy: Hiroshima and Potsdam* (New York: Vintage, 1965).

At the same time, in which course I do not recall, I read William A. Williams's *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*, one of the era's most influential books critiquing the long trajectory of American foreign policy.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps David Green assigned it in his course. David Green had just come to Ohio State, as the second "diplomatic" historian, to be Zahniser's colleague, focused on modern U.S. foreign relations. Two young men could hardly have been more dissimilar. Green was a recently minted PhD student from Cornell, where he had studied with Walter LaFeber. Green was passionate, an ardent opponent of the Vietnam war, a fierce critic of U.S. foreign relations, a charismatic lecturer, and an enthusiastic revisionist who reinforced the themes of Williams's critique of American diplomacy. Not simply the Cold War, but also the wars in Indochina and the virulent anti-Americanism in Latin America were the result of America's open door imperialism, its lust for markets to solve the problems of overproduction, and its exceptionalist, self-deceiving ideology of innocence.

Green was a doer as well as a talker. He challenged us. One day in his lecture course—I think it was the day after Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination—he boldly asked the students to hand in their draft cards; as I recall, he was going to take them out to the "Oval"—the vortex of Ohio State's campus—and burn them during one of the ongoing demonstrations. I sat there nervously; no, I was not yet ready to burn my draft card. Yes, I was ready to take over the administration building, which a few of us briefly did around that time. Although I ruminated endlessly about the war and was appalled by the daily body counts, the scenes of guerilla warfare, the use of napalm, the conflagration of villages, and the suffering of ordinary women, children, and soldiers, I was unprepared for Green's bold assault on my conscience. He paid a heavy price, forced (I think) to resign.

I turned my attention to studying U.S. foreign relations history. I was now wrestling more deeply with the sources of American power and the harm it was inflicting. How could this war in Indochina be explained? How long could it last? Could it happen again?

The answers to my questions were emerging in the ballooning revisionist literature on the history of American foreign policy. Around this time, I read LaFeber's *New Empire*, a reinterpretation of late-nineteenth-century American expansion.<sup>3</sup> I was writing a paper for Zahniser on the mission by Stuart Woodford to Madrid in 1898 to head off the coming of war with Spain. LaFeber's book seemed powerful and nuanced. He emphasized the domestic roots of policy and stressed the importance of markets abroad for the preservation of

2. William A. Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (Cleveland, Ohio: World Publishing Company, 1959).

3. Walter LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1860–1898* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1963).

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democratic capitalism at home. Highlighting purposeful decision-making, he forced readers to think carefully about the connections between politicians and key business factions. Zahniser advised that I examine the role of Congress and take cognizance of the weaknesses of the presidency. By then, I thought the revisionists were right: U.S. foreign policy stemmed from domestic economic needs and anxieties about social stability. But Zahniser, Burnham, Dorpalen, and Young—all in their different ways—seemed to want to rein me in. They impelled me to read carefully, immerse myself in the evidence, consider divergent interpretations, and wrestle with historiographical debates.

I had to pick a dissertation topic. I had written a seminar paper on Franco-American relations in the mid-1930s. It seemed that many scholars already had written about U.S.-European relations during that decade. I was not likely to say anything new about the diplomacy of Franklin D. Roosevelt, the alleged isolationism of the era, and the gradual American embroilment in World War II. In contrast, the decade of the 1920s was enticing. New manuscript collections were becoming available, and historians had paid rather little attention to the course of American foreign policy between Woodrow Wilson and Roosevelt. Moreover, I had a terrific guide to the era—Williams's compelling chapter "The Legend of Isolationism in the 1920s" in *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*.<sup>4</sup> By using new materials like the Warren Harding Papers at the Ohio Historical Society and the Myron Herrick Papers at the Western Reserve Historical Society, I could turn attention away from the old-fashioned questions of America's rejection of the Treaty of Versailles, nonparticipation in the League of Nations, and foolish embrace of the Kellogg-Briand Pact. I could focus instead on what really mattered to the men making policy in the 1920s: war debts, reparations, private loans, and trade—the economic and business questions that I assumed were the core of U.S. foreign relations, the very questions that diplomatic historians had mostly ignored or treated simplistically. Moreover, the revisionist historians were teaching me what sources to use—business journals, trade convention proceedings (like those of the National Foreign Trade Council), banking periodicals, the manuscript collections of key financiers and industrialists, and the records of the Treasury and Commerce departments. The State Department was not alone in making U.S. foreign policy.

I moved to Washington. Because I had a grant from the Mershon Foundation, I had the rare opportunity to spend many months researching in the National Archives. First, I learned how to use the decimal file system, a master key to researching the exhaustive papers of the Department of State. I realized that the documents compiled in the *Foreign Relations of the United States* (FRUS) series, the official guide to the history of American diplomacy, could

4. Williams, *Tragedy*, chapter 4.

be deceptive.<sup>5</sup> Compilers in the late 1930s and 1940s had not been especially interested in economic and financial questions, and they certainly did not integrate materials from other government agencies into their volumes. Consequently, the amount of material on debts, reparations, and trade was rather meager compared to the voluminous corpus of diplomatic and political correspondence saved lovingly in those rectangular, gray archival boxes that were rolled out to me on one dolly after another for month after month, many of them from Record Group 39, Records of the Bureau of Accounts in the Treasury Department, and from RG 151, Records of the Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce. As for the records in RG 59 of the Department of State, I remember mastering the key decimal file numbers that, after forty years, I still vividly recall: 851.51, 811.51, 851.00, 851.62, 462.00R296, etc. At the same time I grew increasingly aware that the organization of the *FRUS* volumes by country, while understandable, could be misleading: you could not study Franco-American relations without also examining U.S.-German relations and U.S.-United Kingdom relations.

I found that isolationism was a myth. The United States was hugely embroiled in European affairs in the 1920s. After all, European diplomacy during that decade was all about these very matters: reparations, war debts, private loans, tariffs, trade, currency stability—and arms limitation and France's quest for security. The general thrust of my argument became clear: after Versailles, the United States jettisoned collective security and political commitments as a means to nurture European stability. But the quest persisted: the overall goal of U.S. foreign policy toward France and toward Europe was to promote stability along liberal and capitalist lines and to avert radical revolution. U.S. officials—like President Warren G. Harding, Secretary of Commerce Herbert C. Hoover, Secretary of the Treasury Andrew Mellon, and Secretary of State Charles Evans Hughes—recognized that the restoration of stability in Europe was important to the vitality of the American economy at home, the promotion of exports, the maintenance of full employment, and the health of the farm sector of the American economy, which was floundering from insufficient demand and low prices.

While the broad outlines of my dissertation formed in my head, the organization and presentation of my dissertation were not yet resolved when I decided to turn my attention to a more immediate goal. I realized I needed to publish an article to help position myself to compete in what seemed a terrible job market. I selected a narrow topic: the origins of Republican war debt policy, 1921–1923. This matter had received little attention in the scholarly literature, and the prevailing view was that insistence on war debt repayment

5. Department of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1920–1933* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1935–1949).

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revealed the ignorance and indifference of U.S. officials about the requirements of European stability. I already had uncovered a lot of material demonstrating beyond any doubt that businessmen and financiers as well as experts in the Treasury, Commerce, and State departments recognized clearly that war debts burdened the key debtors—Britain, France, and Italy. War debt repayments complicated the settlement of the reparations controversy, they retarded efforts to restore currency stability, and they constricted the promotion of world trade and American exports. Just as the open door revisionists were arguing, American businessmen and officials in Washington were not stupid. They knew these payments had to be scaled down if they were to stabilize the international economy along liberal and capitalist lines.

But as I labored on this article I expanded my research and examined the proceedings and periodicals of business groups and trade associations that were not quite so dependent on markets abroad. I looked at the legislative debates and analyzed the views of congressmen and senators. I saw countervailing evidence: a lot of Americans were less concerned about markets abroad and more concerned with the level of taxation at home. Relief to European governments meant higher taxes for Americans because revenue to the U.S. treasury would be reduced while the U.S. government still had to pay interest and principal to owners of U.S. war bonds. Consequently, proposals to lower the war debt payments of European governments—while Americans were suffering from the postwar economic slump in 1921 and 1922—sparked xenophobic sentiment, aroused racist predilections and ethnic prejudices, and reinforced the postwar disillusionment. Officials did want to reduce debts and promote U.S. exports, but they also wanted to lower taxes, encourage domestic investment, preserve the sanctity of contracts, and win elections. Priorities clashed; trade-offs were unavoidable. Policymakers had to balance conflicting imperatives.

I presented all of this in my article “The Origins of Republican War Debt Policy, 1921–1923: A Case Study in the Applicability of the Open Door Interpretation.” (See chapter 1.) I was thrilled when *The Journal of American History* accepted it for publication. The article underscored the salience of the open door interpretation yet questioned some of its conclusions. In the course of writing it, I began grappling with issues that would confound me for many years. I uncovered considerable evidence affirming the significance of exports to businessmen and officials; yet such concerns did not always translate into coherent policy. Policymakers and business elites did seek to fashion a stable, liberal, and capitalist international order, but other goals were also important: lowering taxes, controlling inflation, and protecting the home market. The foreign policy history of the United States government was more complex than I imagined. Even while the fighting in Indochina escalated and my op-

position to the war there became more passionate, my understanding of the sources of U.S. policy became more uncertain.

Resolving all these issues was less important in the short run than finishing my dissertation. I defended it in the spring of 1972 and landed a job at Vanderbilt University. I was one of five hires that year; Vanderbilt was rapidly changing, starting to highlight scholarly achievement, and scaling up the demands for tenure, a goal that was on my mind from my first day there. And the expectations were pretty clear: no book, no tenure. I decided to send out my dissertation for publication, thinking that my article in the *JAH* and the enthusiastic support of my mentors at Ohio State boded well for my future.

Then came some dramatic disappointments. One of the worst days of my professional career was at the American Historical Association convention, I think in December 1972 (or perhaps 1973). I was strolling through the book exhibits, and suddenly I saw a volume on one of the shelves, *American Business and Foreign Policy, 1921–1933*, by Joan Hoff Wilson.<sup>6</sup> At the time I never had heard of her and knew nothing about the prospective publication of this book. But I opened it up and my heart sank. It was organized precisely as I had organized my dissertation, with chapters on war debts, trade, etc. She examined business opinion almost precisely as I had. I knew this because I sat down on a chair adjoining the book booth and skimmed through page after page after page. Did I have anything new to say that Wilson had not said? With a pronounced tendency toward seeing the darker side of my future, with ingrained thinking that I never really was suited to be a successful academic, with my parents' reservations pulsating through my mind, I was distraught.

And perhaps for good reason. Not long thereafter, I received a referee report from the University of North Carolina Press. The reader praised my dissertation manuscript, but voiced strong reservations. He said my topical organization obscured the interaction of issues and obfuscated causal analysis. He also encouraged me to write a chapter on Woodrow Wilson to establish a context for studying Republican diplomacy and for analyzing continuities and discontinuities over time.

My dismay was extreme. But the advice was good. It reinforced my view that I had to differentiate my book from Joan Hoff Wilson's account. I would shift my attention from business attitudes to decision-making in the American government and give more nuanced attention to causal factors and to means and ends. Organizing my evidence chronologically, rather than topically, would help illuminate the policy process because officials grappled every day with the intersection of war debts, reparations, loans, currency stabilization,

6. Joan Hoff Wilson, *American Business and Foreign Policy, 1920–1933* (Lexington, Ky.: University Press of Kentucky, 1971).

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tariffs, and trade. Writing an opening chapter on Woodrow Wilson, moreover, would allow me to highlight continuities in goals (the quest for a stable capitalist international order) and disparities in tactics (the Republicans' repudiation of collective security and embrace of economic diplomacy). But to do these things, I had to reorganize my entire dissertation and start anew. I would rewrite from page one.

This required yet more research. The Herbert Hoover Presidential Library had now opened and friends were telling me it contained mountains of essential documents. At the same time, new books and articles were illuminating the workings of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York and the critical role of central bankers, including Benjamin Strong, the governor of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, in orchestrating the restoration of currency stability and the gold exchange standard in the mid-1920s. I needed to look at the papers of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York and gain an appreciation of its interactions with the investment banking community of New York, the Treasury Department, and European central bankers. Figuring out how the American government operated in the 1920s, how it interacted with functional elites in the business, banking, and agricultural communities, and how it balanced conflicting imperatives and clashing priorities were now my central tasks.

As I was despairing over my academic future and pondering my capacity to reconceptualize my dissertation manuscript, Ellis Hawley asked me to contribute a chapter on foreign policy to a book he was editing on Herbert Hoover as secretary of commerce. Hawley had come to Ohio State while I was writing my dissertation. Graduate student friends of mine sang his praises and told me I had to audit one of his courses. He had just written a brilliant book on the New Deal and the problem of monopoly.<sup>7</sup> Now, he was turning his attention to Herbert Hoover and the evolution of what he called the associational state. This framework would shape the writing of American domestic history for decades to come. It riveted attention on the formal and informal connections between government and functional elites in the American political economy. Hawley was developing and extrapolating from new interpretations of the Progressive Era that highlighted the importance of experts, the development of professional associations, the quest for efficiency, and the desire to find mechanisms that would mitigate political conflict, thwart radical movements, nurture productivity, and create a consumer paradise. For Hawley, Herbert Hoover was the central figure in the evolution of these developments.<sup>8</sup> But Hawley stayed at Ohio State only briefly. He moved to the University of Iowa,

7. Ellis Hawley, *The New Deal and the Problem of Monopoly, 1933–1939* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1965).

8. Ellis W. Hawley, "Herbert Hoover, the Commerce Secretariat, and the Vision of an 'Associative State,' 1921–1928," *Journal of American History*, 61 (June 1974): 16–40; Hawley, *The Great*

where he could easily exploit the materials at the Hoover Library and train generations of students, the most important of whom (for my purposes) was Michael Hogan, who became a lifetime friend, intellectual comrade, and occasional probing critic.

I put aside the revision of my dissertation to work on this essay for Hawley's book. (See chapter 2.) The exercise was critical to my intellectual development. By focusing on Hoover, I saw how domestic developments shaped approaches to foreign policy questions. As secretary of commerce during most of the 1920s, Hoover reorganized that department to position the United States to benefit from and exercise a constructive role in the world political economy. Hoover interjected himself into all matters of foreign relations, and he put his subordinates to work acquiring new data on natural resources and markets around the globe. Like other scholars at the time, including Mike Hogan, Frank Costigliola, Joan Hoff Wilson, Carl Parrini, Robert Van Meter, Emily Rosenberg, and Joseph Brandes, to name just a few, I recognized how carefully Hoover labored to take issues out of politics, gather statistical data, hire experts, and find solutions that would reconcile divergent priorities.<sup>9</sup> He championed innovative thinking about the role of invisible items (for example, overseas loans and tourist expenditures) in redressing trade imbalances and smoothing the functioning of the global political economy. By studying Hoover, one could see why Republican officials relied on private financiers, central bankers, tariff commissioners, and an agent general for reparations to grapple with the explosive financial and commercial questions of the 1920s. Allegedly, these "experts" would take such issues out of politics and resolve them objectively in ways that would palliate the sensibilities of clashing interest groups and competing nation-states. They would thereby help stabilize the international economy along liberal and capitalist lines.

While working on this essay on Hoover, I grappled with his worldview. He epitomized the economic approach to international diplomacy in the 1920s. Arms limitation was integral to this approach—a necessary means to cut government expenditures, balance budgets, stabilize currencies, and encourage

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*War and the Search for a Modern Order: A History of the American People and their Institutions, 1917–1933* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979).

9. Joan Hoff Wilson, *Herbert Hoover: Forgotten Progressive* (Boston: Little Brown, & Co., 1975); Carl P. Parrini, *Heir to Empire: United States Economic Diplomacy, 1916–1923* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1969); Michael J. Hogan, *Informal Entente: The Private Structure of Cooperation in Anglo-American Economic Diplomacy, 1918–1928* (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 1977); Robert H. Van Meter, "The United States and European Recovery, 1918–1923: A Study of Public Policy and Private Finance," PhD diss., University of Wisconsin, 1971; Joseph Brandes, *Herbert Hoover and Economic Diplomacy: Department of Commerce Policy, 1921–1928* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1962); Frank Costigliola, *Awkward Dominion: American Political, Economic, and Cultural Relations with Europe, 1919–1933* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1984).

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world trade. Hoover thought prosperity would heal the wounds of World War I, reconfigure the aspirations of governments, mitigate class conflict, stifle revolutionary impulses, and nurture individual opportunity. He was interested in world order and focused on fashioning a new era of perpetual prosperity, yet was unwilling to incur strategic obligations abroad. I appreciated the mechanisms and processes that were being designed to settle contentious international financial and economic issues, but did this make American foreign policy realistic in the era following Versailles? Was it sensible to brush aside France's requests for security guarantees, repudiate collective security, and disdain strategic obligations if Washington officials wanted to fashion a stable, liberal, and capitalist international order? Had Hoover, Hughes, Mellon, and their subordinates found an appropriate balance between domestic priorities and external demands? Were they employing and deploying American power in effective ways to achieve their goals? Few historians had thought so.<sup>10</sup>

These questions prompted me to look much more carefully at the political issues I previously had downplayed in my dissertation. (See chapter 3.) For a generation of "realist" scholars writing after World War II, it seemed incontrovertible that, after the Versailles Conference and the domestic fight over the League of Nations, Republican officials had irresponsibly rebuffed France's demands for security and ignored the responsibilities commensurate with the power that the United States had achieved. These "realist" analysts believed that American aloofness from the political affairs of Europe contributed significantly to the dynamics that led to the Second World War.<sup>11</sup> Yet my reading of the evidence suggested that these Republican officials were not quite so naive, ignorant, or irresponsible. They believed that France's definition of security would alienate the Germans, weaken the fragile Weimar Republic, and make another war inevitable. Republican officials did not want to incur commitments to a vision of security that they thought was inherently incompatible with the requirements of long-term European stability. Nor did they think that American promises could reshape French attitudes about France's security needs.

In other words, Republican officials, like Hughes and Hoover, possessed a sense of the limits of American power in the emotionally and politically vola-

10. For critical views, see, for example, Robert H. Ferrell, *Peace in Their Time: The Origins of the Kellogg-Briand Pact* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1952); William Leuchtenburg, *The Perils of Prosperity, 1914–1932* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958); Selig Adler, *The Uncertain Giant, 1921–1941: American Foreign Policy between the Wars* (New York: Macmillan, 1965); Alexander De Conde, ed., *Isolation and Security: Ideas and Interests in Twentieth Century American Foreign Policy* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1957).

11. For an illustrative work, see Robert E. Osgood, *Ideals and Self-Interest in America's Foreign Relations* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953).

tile years after Versailles. They wanted to act within the constraints imposed by an American electorate disillusioned by the results of the war and alienated by what Americans regarded as the self-serving actions of Paris, Berlin, and London. Policymakers in Washington wanted to find limited ways to promote European stability and reassure France without assuming responsibilities that exceeded their assessment of American interests. They did this through a variety of instruments that focused on modulating, if not solving, the contentious economic and financial problems afflicting Europe.

I started to think that Republican officials were neither especially isolationist nor singularly expansionist, but pragmatic and opportunistic. Neither the revisionists nor the realists seemed to have accurately synthesized the complexity of U.S. foreign policies in the era of the Republican ascendancy. In fact, my new research suggested that their approach to arms limitation and neutrality constituted a measured way to play a constructive role in European affairs without guaranteeing a status quo that could not last, given the inevitable German desire to be treated more equally and generously. I showed how the Kellogg-Briand Pact—a war-renouncing agreement that generations of historians had mocked as an international kiss—served as a starting point for Republican officials to rethink their neutrality position, should a European power embark on aggressive war. They never carried through on this modest way to meet France’s demands for security. But this seemed like a tempered and reasoned response to conditions that then existed: there was no threat to U.S. security; the French seemed predominant; the demands of Weimar leaders appeared reasonable; the need to nurture gradual change seemed prudent; the assumption that prosperity could slowly change attitudes and bring about more reasonable compromises did not appear unfounded. Of course, all of this turned out to be wrong. But could this have been foreseen in the 1920s and early 1930s?

The broad outlines of my book were now clear to me, but this article had an interesting history. Two or three journals rejected it, not because of its substance, but because of its length. I felt frustrated because I had a sense that the article was a real breakthrough, an ambitious attempt to transcend the binaries about “isolationism” and “open door expansionism” and at the same time interrogate the meaning of “realism” in historical context. A colleague told me about *Perspectives in American History*, the annual publication of Harvard University’s Charles Warren Center. It published long essays on a variety of topics. I submitted my essay, and it garnered an enthusiastic response from Ernest May, Harvard’s renowned diplomatic historian, who refereed the article. Although *Perspectives* was not widely read and my article never received a lot of attention, I still consider it one of the most important of my career. And the very fact that it did wind up in a prestigious outlet nurtured a conviction that I often repeat to my graduate students: if you have something good,

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you should stick with it and not get dissuaded by a sequence of rejections. Article publication is a crapshoot, but often it takes just one enthusiastic reader to make publication a reality.

After completing this article, I turned my attention for two or three years to fashioning a real book. I remember it as a time of great anxiety, not knowing if I would beat the tenure clock and not certain about the book's prospective reception. I knew it was not as profound as some of the great new volumes then appearing on European diplomacy by Charles Maier, Stephen Schuker, and Jon Jacobson.<sup>12</sup> Nonetheless, *The Elusive Quest: America's Pursuit of European Stability and French Security, 1919–1933*, along with other major volumes on U.S. foreign relations in the 1920s by Michael Hogan, Frank Costigliola, and Joan Hoff Wilson, helped reshape our understanding of the interwar years and influenced an evolving neo-revisionist trend in the interpretation of U.S. diplomatic history known as corporatism.<sup>13</sup> U.S. policy toward Europe in the 1920s was not isolationist.

Rejecting the Treaty of Versailles and the League of Nations did not mean that the United States was abandoning Wilson's pursuit of a stable liberal and capitalist world order.<sup>14</sup> It did not mean that the United States was eschewing its responsibilities. In fact, officials spent considerable effort seeking to balance interests and commitments, reconciling divergent pressures, and working with businessmen and bankers to design ingenious, apolitical mechanisms to conduct an effective foreign policy.

But the bottom line was that U.S. foreign policy did not create the stable, open door, liberal capitalist world order that supposedly was its goal: it failed; it was an elusive quest. I was still perplexed by the essential question: if U.S. officials regarded an open door international order as vital to the nation's health and security, why did they not do more to offset the imbalances in the international political economy and thwart the rise of totalitarian aggression? The last chapter of my book demonstrated that Roosevelt, as he assumed the presidency in 1933, cared even less than Hoover about stabilizing Europe. Al-

12. Charles S. Maier, *Recasting Bourgeois Europe: Stabilization in France, Germany, and Italy in the Decade After World War I* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1975); Stephen A. Schuker, *The End of French Predominance: The Financial Crisis of 1924 and the Adoption of the Dawes Plan* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1976); Jon Jacobson, *Locarno Diplomacy: Germany and the West, 1925–1929* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1972).

13. Melvyn P. Leffler, *The Elusive Quest: America's Pursuit of European Stability and French Security, 1919–1933* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1979); Hogan, *Informal Entente*; Wilson, *American Business and Foreign Policy*; Costigliola, *Awkward Dominion*. For "corporatism," see Hogan's essay in Michael J. Hogan and Thomas G. Paterson, eds., *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 226–37.

14. A key book that influenced the thinking of many "corporatist" scholars mentioned in note 13 above was N. Gordon Levin's *Woodrow Wilson and World Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968).

though Roosevelt eventually would transform American foreign policy, initially he did even less than his Republican predecessors to satisfy France's demands—even as Adolf Hitler consolidated power in Germany and the world depression persisted.<sup>15</sup>

In an essay for the volume *Economics and World Power* edited by Sam Wells and William Becker, I tried again to address these perplexing issues. I dug more deeply into the perceived salience of exports to American economic well-being in the late 1920s and early 1930s. I examined statistical data more closely than ever before to assess the importance of markets abroad to the health of different sectors of the American economy. I could not ignore the conclusion of U.S. Commerce Department officials: “The significant fact is not that our foreign markets are unimportant, but rather that the domestic market predominates.”<sup>16</sup> Hoover believed this; so did Roosevelt.

But did not U.S. military leaders realize that looming threats were emerging beyond the oceans? Were they not aware that bolder action was imperative before the international capitalist order collapsed and democratic nations were engulfed by totalitarian aggressors? I examined military records that I had not previously perused, an undertaking that would hugely shape the rest of my academic research. I started to examine threat perception. I found that army and naval officials were not alarmed by developments in the early 1930s. Even after the Manchurian Incident of 1931 and subsequent Japanese military action around Shanghai in 1932, the president of the General Board of the Navy insisted that the United States had to “put its own house in order without worrying about other nations.” France and America, concluded U.S. Army intelligence in 1932, represented “the essence of capitalism and have the great common interest of saving this system from anarchy.” But it was not deemed prudent to guarantee French security, lest such guarantees “perpetuate French hegemony over the Continent.” American commitments might embroil the United States without engendering a real change in French policy.<sup>17</sup>

As I grappled with these interpretive issues concerning the gap between U.S. diplomatic objectives and U.S. commitments, I started thinking about my next book. I knew I wanted to write about the origins of the Cold War. In the late 1970s, détente was collapsing and Soviet-American relations were dramatically deteriorating. Oil prices soared, the American economy staggered, our European allies floundered, and U.S. power seemed to wane. Unrest in the Third World seethed, Islamic radicals seized power in Iran, regional strife engulfed the Horn of Africa, and the Sandinistas took power in Nicaragua. As

15. Leffler, *Evasive Quest*, 316–61.

16. Melvyn P. Leffler, “1921–1932: Expansionist Impulses and Domestic Constraints,” in William H. Becker and Samuel F. Wells, Jr., *Economics and World Power: An Assessment of American Power since 1789* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 225–75, quotation on 259.

17. *Ibid.*, 261–64.

## 14 INTRODUCTION

American economists and journalists wondered whether capitalism could survive, Soviet leaders seemed intent on exploiting Western weaknesses and gaining influence at American expense.<sup>18</sup> A new group of neoconservatives arose. They exaggerated the Kremlin's strength and talked aloud about fighting and waging nuclear war.<sup>19</sup> They also launched a long campaign to emasculate "state" capacity and narrow the government's role in the domestic political economy.<sup>20</sup>

In this context, no topic seemed more important than the history of Soviet-American relations. Big new books were appearing reinterpreting the onset of the Cold War and demonstrating American responsibility for it. If the open door interpretation did not serve as a conclusive guide to explaining American foreign relations before World War II, revisionists like Gabriel Kolko and Lloyd Gardner were showing that the Great Depression and World War II had exercised a decisive influence on the perceptions of U.S. officials about the world they needed to remake after Germany and Japan were defeated. Policymakers in Washington had learned that the United States economy could not recover from depression without markets abroad, and they were now determined to fashion a world order along liberal and capitalist lines.<sup>21</sup>

From these powerful revisionist writings I sensed that the Great Depression and World War II solidified American thinking about America's role in the world. Policymakers now used the term "national security" to describe what they needed to do to safeguard America's vital interests. But what did that term mean and how did vital interests become associated with the preservation of markets abroad, if my own research had demonstrated that this had not been the case before the late 1930s? I decided that I could explore these questions by taking advantage of a unique research opportunity: the government had just opened a huge collection of the records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), the U.S. military leaders who had helped forge the strategy that defeated the Axis powers.<sup>22</sup> These documents transcended the war-time experience and shed light on the opening years of the Cold War. I could interrogate how the concept of national security had evolved and probe its

18. "Can Capitalism Survive?," *Time*, 106 (14 July 1975): 52–63. This was the front page story.

19. Anne Hessing Cahn, *Killing Détente: The Right Attacks the CIA* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998); Robert Scheer, *With Enough Shovels: Reagan, Bush, and Nuclear War* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983).

20. Justin Vaïsse, *Neoconservatism: The Biography of a Movement* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010).

21. See, for example, Gabriel Kolko and Joyce Kolko, *The Limits of Power: The World and United States Foreign Policy, 1945–1954* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972); Lloyd Gardner, *Architects of Illusion: Men and Ideas in American Foreign Policy, 1941–1949* (Chicago, Ill.: Quadrangle, 1970).

22. Record Group 218, Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, U.S. National Archives.

fundamental ingredients through the prism of military leaders and defense officials. In this manner, I thought I might make my own unique contribution to illuminating the origins of the Cold War.

The task was daunting. Although I had done a little research in military records of the 1920s and 1930s, I had no clue what awaited me. In those days military history and diplomatic history were distinct fields, and few historians of American foreign relations made extensive use of military records. I went back to the National Archives to talk to the archivists dealing with military documents. They provided me with the indexes to the JCS files. They were intimidating. I decided to start with JCS requirements for overseas bases.<sup>23</sup> The number of boxes must have been in the hundreds. I knew I would never exhaust them, but I learned after a few weeks that JCS papers went through many iterations, sometimes with only the slightest revisions. They would not consume as much time as I had initially feared, but they alerted me to the difficult enterprise I had embarked upon. It would take me years to examine the many topics that I deemed most important, among which were assessments of the intentions and capabilities of the Soviet Union, threat perception, the role of atomic weapons, and the occupations of Germany and Japan. My research gradually expanded into archival records of the Army and Navy, the office of the secretary of defense, and many officials, including James Forrestal, the first secretary of defense.

I presented my views in “The American Conception of National Security and the Origins of the Cold War, 1945–1948.” It was the most important article of my career, and it appeared in the profession’s flagship journal, *The American Historical Review*. (See chapter 4.) I argued that U.S. defense officials and military leaders conceptualized the basic requirements of postwar security before World War II concluded. They wanted an extensive system of overseas bases, air transit rights, a strategic realm of influence in the Western Hemisphere, and, most of all, a balance of power in Eurasia. More than anything else, defense officials and military leaders had learned that an adversary, or coalition of adversaries, that dominated Europe and Asia could integrate the resources, industrial infrastructure, and skilled labor of those continents into a war machine that could challenge the United States, wage protracted war, and endanger its security.

More boldly, I argued that when the war ended, Soviet actions did not threaten U.S. security requirements; instead, these requirements were endangered by the social turmoil, political chaos, and economic paralysis that engulfed Europe and Asia. Postwar conditions provided opportunities for leftist and communist parties to win elections or seize power and for the Kremlin to spread its influence. At the same time, ferment in the periphery of Southeast

23. CCS 360 (12-9-43), RG 218, USNA.

## 16 INTRODUCTION

Asia, the Middle East, and Africa bred revolutionary nationalist movements that challenged democratic allies in Western Europe, further weakened their economic and financial prospects, and opened opportunities for Soviet inroads. Soviet actions did not catalyze the sequence of events that led to the Cold War, and U.S. military leaders and intelligence analysts did not expect the Soviet Union to engage in premeditated military aggression. Their own very expansive definition of security requirements impelled U.S. officials to shore up weaknesses and vulnerabilities; these initiatives, a product of fear and power, aroused suspicions in Moscow. They triggered a sequence of actions and reactions, culminating in a protracted Cold War.

In a related article, I also showed how strategic thinking and military requirements shaped the diplomacy of the early postwar years. Looking closely at American relations with Turkey, I reconfigured understanding of the Truman Doctrine. (See chapter 5.) Soviet actions toward Turkey were not nearly as ominous as Washington portrayed them. U.S. interest in Turkey was sparked by American war planners. As early as 1946, they realized that if a major war with the Soviet Union erupted, British bases in the Cairo-Suez region would be critical to implementing American war plans and striking the Soviet Union. Turkey was essential to slow down any Soviet effort to overrun the entire Middle East. From bases in Turkey, the United States could attack vital oil fields and industrial infrastructure in Romania and Ukraine. U.S. officials wanted to provide military aid to Turkey to insure that Ankara would be amenable to U.S. strategic needs. Fear that Turkey might assume a neutral posture in wartime impelled U.S. officials to incorporate Greece and Turkey into NATO, after the North Atlantic Treaty was signed in 1949. Military leaders and civilian officials knew these decisions would arouse legitimate security concerns inside the Kremlin. Soviet leaders regarded these actions in their vulnerable southern underbelly as potentially threatening. But fear and power shaped U.S. diplomacy, and security requirements were the animating force.

At the same time, I wrote another article examining the diplomacy of the early Cold War. (See chapter 6.) Looking closely at the Yalta and Potsdam accords, I analyzed how the ambiguities embedded in their provisions engendered bitter recriminations. In his first meeting with V. M. Molotov, the Soviet foreign minister, President Harry S. Truman assailed the Kremlin for its failure to adhere to its Yalta promises. Molotov and Joseph Stalin rebutted these claims, insisting that British and American officials violated their own commitment to allow the Lublin communists to constitute the core of a reconstituted Polish provisional government. Soviet leaders also believed that the Americans were renegeing on their Yalta promises regarding the payments of German reparations from the western zones of occupation. Domestic politics and the imperatives of Western European reconstruction drove these decisions in Washington and London as much as, or even more than, portentous

Soviet behavior. Whatever the motivations, Western claims and Western actions did not seem defensive to the men making policy in the Kremlin.

My close scrutiny of strategic planning and diplomatic developments in the years immediately following World War II reinforced the revisionist critique of the Cold War. My *AHR* article in particular triggered angry reactions and biting critiques from more traditional historians. In a “Forum” in *The American Historical Review*, John Lewis Gaddis and Bruce Kuniholm ridiculed my interpretation and mocked my efforts. My argument that military planners were pragmatic and not idealistic, Gaddis concluded, was about as innovative as “discovering sex” at the age of 42. More trenchantly, my critics claimed that my focus on defense officials obfuscated who was really making policy—not military planners—and elided the difficult budgetary battles in Washington that precluded any significant increase in defense expenditures in the early postwar years despite the preferences of Pentagon officials. Basically, my critics said that I was guilty of “archive-itis—the tendency of historians to become so immersed in particular archives that they lose sight of the larger context into which all archival revelations must eventually be set.”<sup>24</sup> In their view, the larger context and explanatory factors for why the wartime alliance disintegrated and the Cold War arose were Stalin’s barbarity and Soviet aggression.

I reacted sharply to these criticisms, but they exerted a tremendous impact on my subsequent research.<sup>25</sup> I realized that to make my analysis about the origins of the Cold War more persuasive, I had to show that military planners alone did not possess these ideas about national security; I had to rebut claims that U.S. actions were primarily defensive, and I had to demonstrate that the absence of a major buildup in defense expenditures did not mean that policymakers were indifferent to U.S. strategic imperatives. I also had to explain why American officials subsequently pivoted quickly to seek a preponderance of U.S. military power. Most importantly, I had to think more carefully about whether U.S. policies were as provocative and countereffective as I had claimed in my *AHR* article, or whether they were justified by Stalin’s personality and Soviet aggressiveness, as my critics insisted.

Rather than succumb to archivitis, I opened myself to its possibilities. I spent four or five years doing additional research in the records of the Department of State and in scores of manuscript collections at the Truman Library and elsewhere. As I reexamined the dynamics of U.S. decision-making, my analysis started to disappoint my friends on the left. Initially, they had welcomed my thesis because my evidence from new sources vividly

24. “Comments,” by John Lewis Gaddis, in *AHR* Forum: “The American Conception of National Security and the Origins of the Cold War, 1945–1948,” *The American Historical Review* 89 (April 1984): 382–85.

25. For my reply, see *ibid.*, 391–400.

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