{essays in history}

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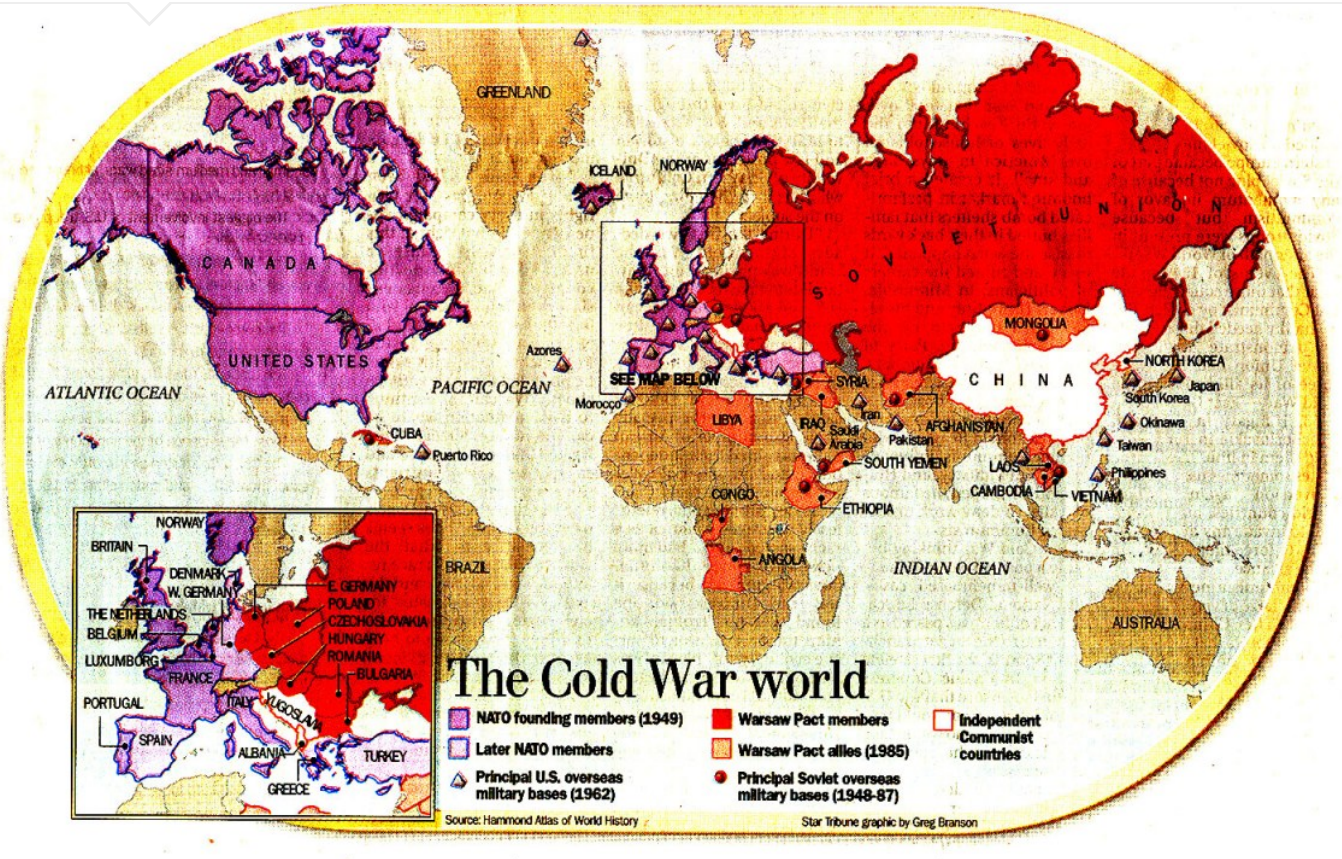
"A More Contentious Order of Things": The End of the Cold War and the Trans-Atlantic Search for Stability



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Reviewed Work(s)

Tear Down This Wall: A City, a President, and the Speech that Ended the Cold War. By Romesh Ratnesar (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2009). Pp. 229. Bibliography and index. Hardcover, $27.00.

Europe and the End of the Cold War: A Reappraisal. Edited by Frédéric Bozo, Marie-Pierre Rey, N. Piers Ludlow, and Leopoldo Nuti (London: Routledge, 2009). Pp. xiv + 288. Notes, bibliography, and index. Hardcover, $160.00. Paper, $39.95.

America Between the Wars: From 11/9 to 9/11: The Misunderstood Years Between the Fall of the Berlin Wall and the Start of the War on Terror. By Derek Chollet and James Goldgeier (New York: PublicAffairs, 2008). Pp. xvi + 412. Notes, bibliography, and index. Hardcover, $27.95. Paper, $16.95.

Only months after Napoleon's quest for *gloire* met defeat on the bloodstained meadows of Waterloo, British Foreign Secretary Lord Castlereagh dispatched a letter to George Henry Rose, minister to Prussia from the Court of St. James. As he considered the denouement of the violent Napoleonic era and the transformations laid down by the Vienna Congress, the melancholic young secretary instructed Rose that "[t]he existing state of European relations may possibly not endure beyond the danger which originally gave them birth, and which has recently confirmed them; but it is our duty, as well as our interest, to retard, if we cannot avert, the return of a more contentious order of things . . . ."[1]

For the foreign secretary, the Final Settlement of Vienna and its prosecution required even more political and diplomatic agility than the two-and-a-half decade "serious interruption of peace" that it followed. Still facing a Europe in disarray, Concert powers returned swords to their scabbards and disarmed a continent braced for war. Bonaparte had upset the ancient foundations of Europe's political and territorial organization, and Quadruple Alliance executors travailed to reapportion territory, reorient the loyalties of French imperial client states, integrate the former belligerent into the *juste équilibre* of world affairs, fill the power

vacuum left in Napoleon's wake, restore economic prosperity to lands ravaged by war, and calm the social turmoil left in the aftermath of invading armies and ideologies. In 1815, Castlereagh and his allied counterparts, despite their victories of force and statecraft, faced an international climate simultaneously teeming with unbounded promise yet rife with perilous uncertainty.

Like the post-Napoleonic era, the end of the Cold War presented policy-makers with more perplexing questions than gratifying answers. The bipolar system of international politics—and the precarious stability it provided—required complete overhaul as communism retreated from Europe. Wolf Gruner has explained that "[a]ny cooperative system of international politics naturally aims at some kind of (formalized) structure which produces stability, evinces durability, and allows for peaceful adjustments over time."[2] Castlereagh and his contemporaries successfully instituted the Concert of Europe system that endured for a century, but would the policy-makers of post-Cold War Europe enjoy comparable success? In a continent defended by strategic and tactical nuclear weapons, overwhelmed by conventional forces poised for battle, and confronted with waning Soviet command and control structures, would the post-Cold War era in fact present "a more contentious order of things"?

In recent years, a steady proliferation of literature has engaged the end of the Cold War and collapse of the bipolar system. A rich diversity of scholarship has emerged, providing both valuable historical insight into the *annus mirabilis* and theoretical insight into the nature of international politics in peace and war. John Lewis Gaddis, who heroically lauds Ronald Reagan as the chief architect of ending the Cold War, contends that "we avoided *destruction,* but at the price of *duration;* the Cold War went on much longer than it might have had nuclear weapons never been invented. Given the fact that they did exist, the Cold War could have ended with a bang at just about any point. It took decades to arrange a whimper."[3] Although Gaddis' study "resonates with the triumphalism that runs through our contemporary culture,"[4] the so-called dean of Cold War history correctly observed that, as the documentary record gradually becomes more accessible and our interpretations grow in sophistication, "Cold War historians should retain their capacity to be surprised."[5] The post-Soviet trend toward

disarmament, market capitalism, representative government, multilateralism, and international cooperation could not guarantee their practical or institutional longevity as the victors hailed the realized dream of "a Europe whole and free,"[6] as the vanquished nursed their egos, and as the forgotten seethed in frustrated anger.

Historians do not possess exclusive rights to the end-of-the-Cold War literature. Political scientists, economists, journalists, and a host of others have brought their myriad skills to bear on the collapse of bipolarity, composing a rich polyphony of interpretations. Among those contributors is Romesh Ratnesar, *Time* magazine's deputy managing editor and author of *Tear Down This Wall: A City, a President, and the Speech that Ended the Cold War*. Ratnesar's globetrotting reports from around the world have won him acclaim as a bright and talented journalist. But alas, the talents of a journalist do not entirely comport with the work he has set out to write.

Perhaps the title of the book should signal the exaggerated contents. One might assume that Ratnesar's title—"the speech that ended the Cold War"—would serve as a hyperbolic attempt to attract readers' attention to a more nuanced and cogent argument. Alas, the author quite earnestly believes what he writes, arguing that "the 'Tear Down This Wall' speech marked, if not the end of the Cold War, then the beginning of the end" (p. 9).

With a fantastic stroke of self-aggrandizing fancy, Ratnesar claims that he "draws on primary source material rarely examined before, including declassified State Department documents and . . . [documents] now kept in the archives of the former East Germany in Berlin" (pp. 6-7). Perhaps a closer examination of those enigmatic and elusive documents would have spared the reader such frequent in-text reference to secondary literature—"as historian Melvyn Leffler wrote . . ." and the like (p. 156). The absence of notes of course proves frustrating, although an omission recognizably common to journalistic studies.

Despite weaknesses with the documentary record, the strength of Ratnesar's source material lies in his integration of oral histories into the study. With thirty-five high-profile interviews—including contributions from James Baker, Richard Burt, Frank Carlucci, and Richard von

Weizsäcker—Ratnesar enlivens the oft-recounted and well-worn narrative of Reagan's Cold War heroism with fresh first-hand accounts of history as it unfolded. In particular, given Ratnesar's conversations with members of the president's speech-writing staff and stagecraft managers, the reader is able to labor through the creative process of articulating Reagan's foreign-policy message, calculate the logistics of its delivery, and enjoy the spectacle of the June 1987 speech against its austere Brandenburg Gate backdrop.

Reagan indeed was a master of oration. Ratnesar is seduced by Reagan's compelling rhetoric and confuses the president's grandiloquence with realized policy returns. The author's characterizations of Reagan evoke the occasional chuckle, as he produces hyperbole that surely sells magazines but leaves the phlegmatic reader at a loss. For instance, Ratnesar summarizes the president's anti-Soviet strategy: "By refusing to compromise his core principles, he conquered big government, stared down the Soviets, and won the Cold War" (p. 37). For Ratnesar, Reagan is a maverick who labored for an end to the U.S.-Soviet rivalry no matter the political circumstance or diplomatic cost: "In the meantime, the American president—bloodied but unbowed—set out to change the world on his own" (p. 54).

Ratnesar builds textual caricatures of our fortieth president, recounting with gusto Reagan's caprice, such as dozing off in a meeting with a Japanese official only to wake, shake the translator's hand, and add "Well, Mr. Foreign Minister, it sure has been a pleasure." The author perhaps forgets that the rest of the world did not find Reagan's eccentricities as endearing as did his electorate (p. 122).

Ratnesar's work exhibits that gleaning coherence from Reagan's often inchoate articulations of foreign policy proves difficult even twenty-five years later. As James Graham Wilson has shown, Reagan's long-term ambitions often remained unclear—that the president's "rendezvous with destiny" involved conflicting strategies and a rhetorical mélange of eradicating communism while simultaneously securing America's interests alongside the Soviet foe.[7] Ratnesar cites a prime example of the gap between Reagan's rhetoric and his action: "'I know I'm being criticized for not having made a great speech outlining what would be the Reagan foreign policy,' Reagan wrote to [John] Koehler. 'I just don't think it's wise to always stand up and put quotation marks in front of the

world what your foreign policy is'" (p. *55*). Ratnesar shows how the White House speechwriters struggled to translate incoherent policy into coherent presidential addresses. Peter Robinson, the principal architect of the June 1987 Berlin oration, shared with the author that "[t]here was always a certain amount of diplomatic stuff that would go in any foreign policy speech . . . but what the speechwriters were always trying to do was make it fresh, make it true to Ronald Reagan" (pp. 102-103). Alas, to remain true to Ronald Reagan called upon the communications staff to devise homiletic gems, such as "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!" without reconciling resources with aims or rhetoric with reality.

The important contribution that Ratnesar offers is that of a skilled journalist—one who grapples with the inconsistencies of Reagan's foreign policy ambitions and grand strategy two and a half decades later. His chronicling of the Berlin speech is enlivened and informed by dozens of interviews, although the interpretive framework surrounding the narrative remains untenable. Ratnesar's volume proves indicative of the enduring popularity of the "great communicator" and, despite his inconsistencies, the legacy he left for America's post-Cold War presidents —one of soaring rhetoric but frustrations in achievement.

Frédéric Bozo never fails to impress audiences with the scope and breadth of his research. His *Deux stratégies pour l'Europe: De Gaulle, les Etats-Unis et l'Alliance atlantique, 1958-1969* and *Mitterrand, la fin de la Guerre froide et l'unification allemande: de Yalta à Maastricht* already have distinguished Bozo as a foremost scholar on post-1945 French foreign policy.[8] In *Europe and the End of the Cold War: A Reappraisal,* his most recent addition to a rich body of scholarship, Bozo has gathered the leading historians and political scientists of Western European affairs, assembling a rich collection of essays and a valuable contribution to the scholarship on the end of the Cold War. Edited together with Marie-Pierre Rey, N. Piers Ludlow, and Leopoldo Nuti, the collection goes beyond the overworked U.S.-Soviet narrative in which Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev stand center-stage. Instead, this new volume provides a series of more nuanced and nationally-focused European studies on the end of the Cold War. The contributors successfully have explored the phenomenon as more than a conclusion to the decades-long U.S.-Soviet rivalry; rather, they show the myriad

reactions and outcomes to the revolutions of 1989—that apart from ending the Cold War, the collapse of the Soviet colossus provoked a flurry of questions about the future of peace in Europe. How would a reunified Germany upset the status quo? How would proponents of continued European Community integration move forward with plans for deepening and widening of Common Market currency and institutions? How would the North Atlantic Treaty Organization shape the future of post-Cold War Europe?

The authors correctly argue that we should adjust our historical lenses beyond simply the superpower conflict, the strategic arms race, and arms control, instead focusing on European integration. The strengthening of European institutions both provided a sensible check on German power relative its European neighbors and outlined an evolving international position for Europe after its precarious forty-five year relationship with the superpowers. The authors show the challenge that German unification posed to the European integration efforts underway. In particular, Jacques Lévesque's "In the Name of Europe's Future: Soviet, French and British Qualms about Kohl's Rush to German Unification" explores the paradox that three of the four 1945 victors, each with veto power, could not stop or slow down the process of German unification despite its larger "impact on the architecture of the European system of international relations" (p. 95). Similarly, in "France, German Unification and European Integration," Bozo points out that, since the Schuman declaration on 9 May 1950, "the relationship between European integration and the German question has been a dialectical one for France." He explains: "The Schuman Plan, for Paris, essentially aimed at assuaging the German problem through European integration, a goal which remained central to French European policies thereafter" (p. 148). Other contributions explore Thatcher's Britain, Poland, the Vatican, Hungary, Italy, and the Baltic States, providing a rich analytical overview of this transitional moment in European history.

The collection's greatest strength lies in the authors' abilities to take their state-based studies and to integrate them with the overarching questions of European politics and diplomacy of the 1990s. Although ostensibly focused on the period between 1989 and 1991, the editors carefully have positioned these studies to examine the lasting impact of the Cold War,

German unification, and the Soviet collapse on the birth of the European Union and NATO's post-1989 role on the continent.

For much of the literature on this topic, the post-Cold War shifts in international politics are relegated to epilogues and book club meetings. Derek Chollet and James Goldgeier have defied that trend in their brilliantly conceived study of the period between 11/9—the 1989 opening of the Berlin Wall—and 9/11—the 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States. Chollet and Goldgeier have set out to write an interpretive history of the transition period between the Cold War and the so-called Global War on Terror, accomplishing that end with great depth of research and analysis

By December of 2000, Bill Clinton's face showed the fatigue of his eight years in office, while the energetic George W. Bush soared in his run up to the presidency. As the two men settled comfortably into their armchairs in the Oval Office, the senior eight-year veteran leaned toward his newly-elected successor and confessed, "One of the great regrets of my presidency is that I didn't get him [Osama bin Laden] for you, because I tried" (p. 306). The authors draw many such continuities between the crumbling of the Soviet colossus in the early 1990s and George W. Bush's declaration of a war on terror. They show how, in the post-Cold War decade, domestic politics stymied U.S. foreign policies as the George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton administrations groped toward articulating a new strategy to characterize America's position in the post-Cold War world.

At the heart of the Chollet and Goldgeier's study rests the question: How did Americans so quickly find themselves in "a world where freedom itself is under attack,"[9] following the perception of unbounded promise in 1989?

Chollet and Goldgeier depict the senior George Bush as a befuddled strategist who lacked an appreciation for his ability to redefine American strategy during the great "unipolar moment."[10] Although a seasoned diplomat and former director of Central Intelligence, Bush contented himself by continuing the rhetorical fight against an already vanquished Soviet foe. While other wartime presidents—Woodrow Wilson and Franklin D. Roosevelt—strategized their ambitions and stood poised to

build their postbellum worlds according to an articulated grand strategy, the veteran Bush failed to do so. The authors lament that no Edward House or George Kennan emerged among Bush's strategists, instead characterizing America "adrift" with the disappointingly lightweight milquetoast Bush at the helm. As such, the authors show that the opportunity to articulate a post-Cold War American grand strategy languished away while Bush rested on his country's Cold War laurels and his successor lackadaisically acquired his foreign-policy credentials.

The authors are no more forgiving of Bill Clinton. They criticize Clinton's global agenda supporting "democratic values" without first taking stock of the international status quo, not least the U.S. embroilment in Somalia, which Clinton inherited from his predecessor. The authors particularly highlight the administration's inability to articulate a slogan to replace "containment" as America's strategy, demonstrating that confusion in pronouncing a strategy publicly corresponded with similar incertitude within the White House. The authors explore the Clinton administration's frustrations with that so-called "Kennan Sweepstakes" (p. 65-78)—an internal effort to devise a foreign policy "understandable enough you could put it on a bumper sticker" (p. 67). From Samuel P. Huntington's "clash of civilizations" to Anthony Lake and Jeremy Rosner's "democratic enlargement," no apothegm offered the guidance that previous generations of policy-makers enjoyed with the longstanding Kennan credo. In particular, the post-Cold War Clinton-era grand strategy would need to redefine prescriptions for the use of force, especially after the diminished reliability of force as an instrument of statecraft.[11] With military miscues in Somalia, Rwanda, Haiti, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, Clinton's aides had to articulate how ad hoc use of force could comport with the president's overwhelming gravitation toward "foreign policy as social work."[12]

In the strongest portion of the book, Chollet and Goldgeier show that both conservatives and liberals appropriated the end of the Cold War in redefining their positions on the political spectrum. For Republicans, the tough-on-communism cohesion they had long enjoyed met an abrupt and unceremonious conclusion, the Cold War and Gulf War victories proving "more disorienting than exhilarating" (p. 8).

Likewise, the Democrats faced no easier a task. "Clinton was an anti-realist," explained deputy national security advisor James Steinberg. "He didn't see that there had to be inherent competition among nations. The success of some was not threatening to others. It was their failure that was threatening" (p. 152). For Clinton, the end of the Cold War had created an international climate in which America's national interests hinged upon trade liberalization and "peace through trade, investment, and commerce" (pp. 154-155). As president, he struggled to build consensus among Congressional democrats to support his aims of restructuring the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) within the Uruguay Round and to create a new World Trade Organization. Even the administration's first foreign policy success rested in the conclusion of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), a politically volatile maneuver but one that confirmed Clinton's belief that a globalized economy should define his foreign-policy ambitions.

In their carefully researched and well conceived study, Chollet and Goldgeier elucidate the international scope of America's own domestic torrent in the twelve years between the opening of the Berlin Wall and George W. Bush's crusade against terror. Ironically, the dates of "11/9" and "9/11" remain conspicuously absent from their book, the authors providing them only as a framework to encapsulate "the misunderstood years" of the past two decades.

In September of 2001, Americans tuned in to listen to their president proclaim that, henceforth, freedom would be "at war with fear." He told them that "[a]ll of this was brought upon us in a single day—and night fell on a different world."[13] Chollet and Goldgeier quite expertly show that not to have been the case, as they reorient America's "War on Terror" with longstanding challenges of America's foreign policy.

Sir Basil Liddell Hart famously suggested that "the object in war is to obtain a better peace—even if only from your own point of view— . . . it is essential to conduct war with constant regard to the peace you desire."[14] He explained: "[I]f you concentrate exclusively on victory, with no thought for the after-effect, you may be too exhausted to profit by the peace, while it is almost certain that the peace will be a bad one, containing the germs of another war."

Liddell Hart believed that "victory in the true sense implies that the state of peace, and of one's people, is better after the war than before. Victory in this sense is only possible if a quick result can be gained or if a long effort can be economically proportioned to the national resources. The end must be adjusted to the means."[15] Although Liddell Hart concentrated his scholarly energies on the Second World War, his assessment of strategy in war and peace no doubt encapsulates the position of the trans-Atlantic community in the years after the Cold War as well. For in victory, the Western powers confronted a new world vastly more complex than the old.

While Castlereagh and his contemporaries sheathed their swords, post-Cold War statesmen quite literally beat their swords into ploughshares. From the Atlantic to the Urals, the 1990 Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE Treaty) brought cold warriors to a common goal in establishing troop ceilings and limiting the military hardware that for decades had threatened war on the continent. Meanwhile, the two German states became one, regaining status "as an equal and sovereign partner in a united Europe"[16] for the first time since Hitler's *Wehrmacht* made its genocidal advances. Those achievements, realized in the wake of the Cold War, established a lasting framework for peace and prosperity in a world so long poised for conflict. But as Lord Louis Mountbatten opined, policy-makers do not enjoy the privileges of a crystal ball.

The fog of war that bedimmed the twentieth century did not clear after 11/9 to reveal a pellucid international landscape. Many quarters of the world continue to struggle through crises. Military conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq drag on, much to the chagrin of America's European friends. The Somali civil war has worn into a second decade, having claimed hundreds of thousands of lives. Israel and Palestine remain no closer to resolving their hostilities. Pakistan and North Korea have entered the nuclear club with a defiant Iran close behind. The crumbling of Russia's conventional forces has galvanized a renewed confidence in nuclear weapons.[17] The wily, saber-rattling Putin government has suspended Russian participation in the CFE Treaty. America's foreign policy vacillates between audacity and hope.[18]

Like Castlereagh and his post-war peacemakers, the trans-Atlantic community faces "a more contentious order of things" only in terms of

sorting through the confusion that ensues when long-standing systems of international politics meet their upset. As the evolving literature on the end of the Cold War continues to exhibit, charting a course forward from conflict has proven arduous and an unremitting challenge on foreign-policy aims and international institutions. Although a test of our disciplinary proclivities, historians can find great instructive value by seeing the end of the Cold War as more than a conclusion, but also as a *genesis.*

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[1] Viscount Castlereagh to Ambassador Rose, 28 December 1815, in *Correspondence, Despatches, and Other Papers of Viscount Castlereagh,* series 3, vol. 3, edited by Charles William Vane (London: John Murray, 1853), 104-108.

[2] Wolf D. Gruner, "The Vienna System: Reconstruction of Europe Beyond Power Politics, 1812-1820: Reflections on New Approaches to the History of International Relations" in *The Transformation of European Politics, 1763-1848: Episode or Model in Modern History?,* edited by Peter Krüger and Paul W. Schröder, Forschungen zur Geschichte der Neuzeit (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2002), 165. Additionally, see *idem., Die deutsche Frage in Europa, 1800-1990* (München: Piper, 1993).

[3] John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 292.

[4] See Melvyn P. Leffler's response to Gaddis: "The Cold War: What Do 'We Now Know'?" *American Historical Review* 104, no. 2 (April 1999), 501-524. In his review essay, Leffler accuses Gaddis of "[confusing the Cold War's] ending with its origins and evolution" (p. 524).

[5] Gaddis, *We Now Know,* 294.

[6] George Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), 151.

[7] James Graham Wilson, "How Grand Was Reagan's Strategy, 1976-1984?" *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 18, no. 4 (December 2007): 773-803.

[8] Frédéric Bozo, *Deux stratégies pour l'Europe: De Gaulle, les Etats-Unis et l'Alliance atlantique, 1958-1969* (Paris: Plon, 1996); and *idem., Mitterrand, la fin de la Guerre froide et l'unification allemande: de Yalta à Maastricht* (Paris: Jacob, 2005).

[9] George W. Bush, "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the United States Response to the Terrorist Attacks of September 11," 20 September 2001, *Public Papers of the Presidents.*

[10] Charles Krauthammer, "The Unipolar Moment," *Foreign Affairs* 70, no. 1 (1990/1991): 23-33.

[11] Nearly three decades ago, Gordon A. Craig wrote on "the changed relationship between force and statecraft, which has diminished the reliability of the former as an instrument of the latter and led to the paradoxical situation that military force is now useful only as long as it is not used." See Gordon A. Craig, "The Historian and the Study of International Relations," *American Historical Review* 88, no. 1 (February 1983): 1-11. Quotation on page 7.

[12] See Michael Mandelbaum's criticism of Clinton foreign policy: "Foreign Policy as Social Work," *Foreign Affairs* 75, no. 1 (January/February 1996): 16-32.

[13] Bush, "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress," 20 September 2001.

[14] Sir Basil Liddell Hart, *Strategy,* quoted in Paul Kennedy, "Grand Strategy: Toward a Broader Definition," in *Grand Strategies in War and Peace,* ed. Paul Kennedy (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 2. See Sir Basil Liddell Hart, *Strategy,* 2nd rev. ed. (New York: New American Library, 1974), 353.

[15] Kennedy, "Grand Strategy: Toward a Broader Definition," 2.

[16] *Treaty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany,* 12 September 1990.

[17] Graham Allison, "Nuclear Disorder: Surveying Atomic Threats," *Foreign Affairs* 89, no. 1 (January/February 2010): 74-85.

[18] Zbigniew Brzezinski, "From Hope to Audacity: Appraising Obama's Foreign Policy," in *ibid.,* pp. 16-30.

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