A Superpower Transformed: The Remaking of American Foreign Relations in the 1970s. By Daniel J. Sargent. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015). Pp. 456. Hardcover, $33.00.

Daniel Sargent, Associate Professor of History at UC Berkeley, has produced a compelling account of the clash between globalization and the American domestic experience. Weaving formerly classified material into his scholarship, *A Superpower Transformed: The Remaking of American Foreign Relations in the 1970s* stresses the critical role individuals play in guiding foreign policy decisions that increasingly affect greater numbers of people and nations. The 1970s were a decade of "disruption and disjuncture," forcing American leaders to grapple with new challenges that looked beyond Cold War politics (9). Pushing back against scholarship that focuses more on the cultural facets of the 1970s, Sargent brings compelling economic analysis and diplomatic history back into the historiographical debate. At the heart of Sargent's work lies the assertion that during the 1970s America's role as a superpower radically changed not because of a grand, overarching design, but due to disparate and chaotic forces reflected in institutional instability and cultural change both in the United States and globally.

Cold War politics have traditionally defined political and diplomatic histories of the 1970s. However, Sargent moves beyond the singular preoccupation with US-Soviet relations and turns to the challenges of globalized and integrated markets, human rights, and navigating a world in which transnational politics and economies "empowered markets at the expense of government" (10). As economic order changed in the 1970s and the world economy became increasingly globalized, the US underwent a systemic shift when it lost its role as the dominant global creditor and producer and came up against new economic realities that challenged American hegemony in the global marketplace. Such shifts included a new American dependence on foreign oil in which the US went from being the dominant oil producer in the late 1960s to importing over half its oil by 1977. In such instances, economic realities butted up against American foreign policy priorities that centered on the "big" powers—the Soviet Union and China—forcing American foreign policymakers to contend with these new limitations.

Going beyond an economic analysis, *A Superpower Transformed* explores US foreign policy in the 1970s through the lens of principal political actors–namely Nixon, Ford, Carter and their foreign policy counterparts Kissinger and Brzezinski. Sargent argues that Nixon failed to "engage much less master" the new challenges of international politics and focused his foreign policy upon a Cold War bipolarity that ignored the nuanced demands of Third World nationalism, integrated markets, and burgeoning calls to intervene in humanitarian crises (10). Nixon and Kissinger ultimately used détente as a tool to preserve American power based on a continuation of Cold War politics in which they aimed "to transform containment into a strategy for indefinite coexistence" (63). While Kissinger expanded the strategies of American foreign policy to solve problems like the energy crisis, his "disinclination to accept human rights in foreign policy dismayed critics, confirming for many Ford's inability to transcend the expedience of the Nixon years" (11).

Carter emerges in *A Superpower Transformed* ready to implement America's first post-Cold War strategy—prioritizing the management of economic globalization over Soviet containment.

However, Carter's agenda was neither enduring nor particularly effective as he was constantly confronted with international crises on the magnitude of the Iranian Revolution and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. "Carter's own preoccupation with human rights" hampered his ability to forge an effective foreign policy sensitive to new international demands (11). As Sargent eloquently asserts, "contrary to pervasive assumptions, what undid the Carter administration's bid for a new foreign policy was neither internal discord nor the failure to formulate a coherent strategic concept so much as the inherent difficulties of imposing singular strategic concepts on complex and confounding realities" (11).

Sargent's unpacking of the political dynamics at play in American foreign policy is bolstered by a carefully considered structure that moves from establishing the premise of the postwar order to analyzing how this international order became destabilized in the 1960s. As Sargent rightly theorizes, "lacking the capacity to define their circumstances, American decision makers adapted, and their adaptations marked the limits of their power" (12). Those limitations included a surging emphasis on human rights.

The embrace of human rights as a central tenant of US foreign policy tied the US to a foreign policy based more upon ideology than pragmatism—replacing an era of reliance on and promotion of "ideological diversity as a reality of international life and a prerequisite for stability, even survival" (3). The Cold War tensions that materialized in the 1980s exhibited just how impactful the 1970s had been. Sargent does not shy away from a critical analysis of the ad hoc solutions American policymakers employed throughout the seventies to combat price inflation, floating currencies, and the energy crisis. The postwar order was not replaced by a new international order. Instead, "market-oriented globalization" acted as a stand in for a global political structure (302). Nixon, Kissinger, Ford, Carter and Brzezinski all tried their hand at reordering American foreign policy. Yet, like many things in life, the outcomes were not a product of their design but rather a result of forces both outside of their control and their imaginations. Coming out of the 1970s, the US realized its lack of a cohesive approach to foreign policy had hampered it ability to construct a stable international order that could simultaneously protect its interests and project its influence.

The events of the 1970s created the opportunity for American leaders to structure a new international order—to rise to the challenges of rapid globalization and transnational shifts. However, American foreign policy fell short of its capacity to respond to these global forces. Throughout Sargent's work, one is constantly left feeling that the dilemmas these leaders faced in the 1970s still haunt the current White House administration and State Department. Nixon's quandary over Vietnamization compels a comparison to the current attempt at empowering the Iraqi Army to take on the brunt of the fighting against the Islamic State. Nixon's entreaty to reopen China to American interests underwrites a similarity with current American initiatives to increase our diplomatic relations with "adversarial" regimes. And perhaps the fixation on Cold War politics within the realm of foreign policy in the 1970s reflects the current preoccupation with defining international affairs through the singular lens of a war on terror.

A Superpower Transformed reads as a compelling narrative offering astute insights into a critical decade for American foreign policy. Sargent's economic and policy minded approach deviates from much recent work that focuses on the social and cultural history of the period. Conversely, missing, in *A Superpower Transformed,* is any deep consideration of the social and cultural changes occurring outside of the upper echelons of the policy world. Nonetheless, Sargent has created a useful guide for appreciating the sheer complexity of the 1970s and its political and economic legacy. As the chaotic uncertainty that underwrote many decisions in the seventies continues to influence the legacy of American foreign policy in the twenty-first century, the architects of American foreign policy will do well to remember the words of Henry Kissinger: "History is a tale of efforts that failed, of aspirations that weren't realized, of wishes that were fulfilled and then turned out to be different from what one expected" (1).

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