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Introduction by James McAllister

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**Christopher J. Fettweis. *The Pathologies of Power: Fear, Honor, Glory, and Hubris in U.S. Foreign Policy*.** Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013. ISBN: 9781107682719 (paperback, \$29.99).

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## Contents

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Introduction by James McAllister, Williams College .....	2
Review by Jane Cramer, University of Oregon .....	4
Review by Jarrod Hayes, Georgia Institute of Technology .....	8
Review by John Schuessler, Air War College .....	13
Author's Response by Christopher J. Fettweis, Tulane University .....	18

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Introduction by James McAllister, Williams College

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Why did the United States, despite vigorous public debates over the wisdom of invading Iraq, pursue an ultimately disastrous war with Iraq in 2003? After all, as John Stuart Mill and others have suggested, such debates in the ‘marketplace of ideas’ should surely have led to a solid consensus against such a course. Explaining why American foreign policymakers repeatedly commit such mistakes is the broad task that Christopher Fettweis sets for himself in his new book. In his view, the primary source of blunders in American foreign policy is the nation’s deep and collective attachment to a series of pathological beliefs that he groups into the categories of fear, honor, glory, and hubris. These four pathologies do not lead to random errors in foreign policy making, but instead “almost always lend support to the most hawkish, belligerent position in any foreign policy debate. Fear, honor, glory, and hubris rarely convince leaders to cooperate with rivals or foes; these categories of belief expand the set of *casus belli* far more widely than any rational calculation would support” (14).

All of the reviewers believe that Fettweis has written an important book that deserves attention from both scholars and policymakers. According to Jane Cramer, Fettweis “does the excellent service of proving in convincing detail how extremely exaggerated U.S. fears have been, including describing how the threats from terrorism, rogue states, and unknown unknowns have been wildly inflated.” Jarrod Hayes believes that Fettweis has “produced an ambitious, expansive treatment of American foreign policy.” John Schuessler praises the book for being “eclectic and learned, drawing from a variety of disciplines including psychology, sociology, anthropology, economics, history, philosophy, and biology.”

Not surprisingly, all of the reviewers also raise questions and concerns about various elements of the arguments found in *The Pathologies of Power*. Cramer believes that Fettweis’s framework downplays the extent to which domestic political elites consciously manipulate threat perceptions to achieve their own ends. In her view, Fettweis’s assumption that elites always honestly believe their own alarmist views may not be correct. While appreciating his efforts to speak to both academics and policymakers, Hayes believes that both audiences are likely to be dissatisfied: “Academics will be frustrated by Fettweis’s refusal to engage in explicit theory building or empirical verification. Policymakers will no doubt be frustrated by Fettweis’s amorphous policy guidance to be rational and focus on the national interest.” Schuessler is very sympathetic to the essentially Realist conclusions and prescriptions reached by the author, but he suggests that two other factors may be of greater importance to understanding the pathologies of American foreign policy: a commitment to liberal ideology and the United States’ overwhelming power in the international system.

H-Diplo/ISSF thanks Professor Fettweis and all of the reviewers for their contributions to an important debate over the pathologies of American foreign policy.

**Participants:**

**Christopher J. Fettweis** is Associate Professor of political science at Tulane University, where he teaches classes on international relations, US foreign policy and security. He is the author of *Dangerous Times?: The International Politics of Great Power Peace* (Georgetown University Press, 2010) and *Losing Hurts Twice as Bad: The Four Stages to Moving Beyond Iraq* (W.W. Norton, 2008).

**Jane K. Cramer** is an Associate Professor at the University of Oregon. She researches the causes of international misperceptions and the sources of threat inflation and has co-edited and contributed to two volumes on fear and threat inflation, *American Foreign Policy and the Politics of Fear: Threat Inflation since 9/11* (Routledge, 2009) and *Why did the US Invade Iraq?* (Routledge, 2012).

**Jarrold Hayes** is an assistant professor of international relations at the Georgia Institute of Technology. His research appears or is forthcoming in the *European Journal of International Relations*, *Global Environmental Politics*, *International Organization*, *International Studies Quarterly*, and *Security Studies*. His first book, *Constructing National Security* (Cambridge University Press, 2013), examines U.S. security relations with India and China.

**John Schuessler** is an Associate Professor in the Department of Strategy at the Air War College. He received his Ph.D. in 2007 from the Department of Political Science at the University of Chicago, specializing in international relations. His principal research and teaching interests lie at the intersection of international relations theory, security studies, and diplomatic history. He is currently writing on why leaders have resorted to deception to sell wars to their publics. His article on the topic, "The Deception Dividend: FDR's Undeclared War," appeared in the Spring 2010 issue of *International Security* (Vol. 34, No. 4: 133-165). He has also co-authored with Sebastian Rosato an article on "A Realist Foreign Policy for the United States" which appeared in the December 2011 issue of *Perspectives on Politics* (Vol. 9, No. 4: 803-819).

Review by Jane Cramer, University of Oregon

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In his book *The Pathologies of Power: Fear, Honor, Glory, and Hubris in U.S. Foreign Policy*, Christopher Fettweis argues that foreign policies, like all other human actions, are motivated by beliefs. His 'political psychology' study identifies what he labels as four pathological beliefs (fear, honor, glory, and hubris) that are deeply held in the U.S. collective unconscious, and are important because they affect "real-world decisions in consistent, predictable and occasionally destructive ways." (14) For Fettweis, the importance of focusing on collectively shared *beliefs* follows directly from the observation that it appears true that beliefs, defined as ideas that have become internalized and accepted as true, are important because they guide and shape behavior, and are highly resistant to change since once internalized they are emotionally and viscerally held and psychologically defended. Fettweis importantly points out that "people are not born with beliefs; the origins of beliefs are in nurture rather than nature, and they become accepted, not because of rational analysis but trust in those who relay them." (6) Thus, in parallel with religious beliefs, secular beliefs are sustained as much by faith as they are by facts. Fettweis's focus on beliefs as the central problem for rational foreign policy builds directly on Robert Jervis's numerous arguments<sup>1</sup> that strongly held beliefs by elites, such as the George W. Bush administration's beliefs that Saddam Hussein posed a real threat to the United States (which Fettweis, echoing Jervis, asserts on page 2), or the strongly held beliefs of the neoconservatives (82-88), as well as widespread irrational beliefs by the public, are a central problem that needs to be cured to fix U.S. foreign policy.

Fettweis's study takes as its point of departure the need to better understand the foreign policy blunders of Iraq, Vietnam, the Bay of Pigs and more, and he argues that if U.S. leaders and the public come to realize that four pathological beliefs irrationally shape U.S. foreign policy across time and in specific cases, then these pathological beliefs could be eliminated, or at least greatly curbed, once they have been fully recognized and understood. According to Fettweis, understanding the pathogenesis of these beliefs—where these collective beliefs come from – is important to understanding these beliefs. For Fettweis, pathological beliefs have their roots in many places. One might even call this a kitchen sink approach to explaining the sources of these beliefs. For each pathological belief, Fettweis examines the roots of that belief at the individual level, the state level, and the system level. He argues that important explanations such as human nature and psychology are found at the individual level. He observes that these individual level explanations for these beliefs are general in that they would hold true for individuals in other countries and at other times, as with the observation that "Fear is hardwired into human nature" (52). Thus Fettweis recognizes that for each belief he is focused on, the state level explanations, such as the religiosity of the state or the domestic politics of the state, must do the main work to explain how the belief has become pathological within the United States. In other words, while fear is hardwired in humans, the pathological fear that is uniquely harming American

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Jervis, "Understanding Beliefs" *Political Psychology*, 27: 641-663 (2006); Robert Jervis, *Why Intelligence Fails: Lessons from the Iranian Revolution and the Iraq War*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010.

foreign policy is a product of U.S. culture and domestic politics. He adds that the system level is also somewhat useful for explaining these American pathologies specifically, at least to the extent that these are pathologies shared by other great powers, in a similar manner to how Jack Snyder has observed that beliefs in the “Myths of Empire” have been held by great powers across time and space.<sup>2</sup>

Most of Fettweis’s many observations and general analyses of U.S. foreign policy are interesting to read, offering numerous original insights along with much supporting evidence. For example, it is certainly correct that U.S. foreign policy is guided by, on some level, such things as widespread beliefs in inordinate fears, and Fettweis does the excellent service of proving in convincing detail how extremely exaggerated U.S. fears have been, including describing how the threats from terrorism, rogue states, and unknown unknowns have been wildly inflated. Fettweis is also to be commended for taking on the very difficult task of exploring the slippery, but clearly important, problem of emotional and powerful beliefs, which are very often based in trust in those who have relayed these beliefs, rather than in rational analysis and facts. Most significantly, in this study Fettweis has tried to bring together in some coherent fashion what have been the competing explanations for irrational collective beliefs: psychology and domestic politics. The problem with Fettweis’s combining of these explanations for collective irrationality within a general theory of pathological beliefs is his framing stresses the psychological arguments as the main sources of these fears, while admitting but down-playing the political sources of these beliefs. While it seems valuable to emphasize the widespread tendency for the public to adopt and irrationally adhere to internalized pathological beliefs, as Fettweis argues, his frame over-emphasizes the possible psychological roots of these beliefs, while often discounting without sufficient justification the domestic political sources of these pathological beliefs.

For example, in Fettweis’s formulation, Americans are uniquely fearful, and strikingly so since the end of the Cold War. He contends that this is proven by the fact that the United States has been an extreme outlier on defense spending. He points out that while almost the entire industrialized world has cut its defense spending, the U.S. is spending much more, 70 percent more in 2010 than in 2000. Fettweis asserts that “No military-industrial complex can take full credit for the strong, consistent support for an enormous military. It is the belief about the dangers inherent in the world ...” (31-32) Instead, he insists on stressing primarily broad psychological explanations for irrational U.S. fears, theories that should pertain to most people generally and people of other states. His many preferred psychological sources for U.S. pathological fears offer no U.S.-specific psychological explanations, and certainly no psychological source as uniquely American or as highly correlated with the time period as the domestic political military-industrial complex theory is as a source of public fears that are manufactured to justify extreme outlier defense spending.

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<sup>2</sup> Jack Snyder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991.

Also problematic is that Fettweis repeatedly argues that elites and the public are together guided by these pathological beliefs, and thus if they all were made aware of these irrational pathological beliefs, they would correct them. Yet at many places Fettweis acknowledges that elites are at the same time the main sources of these beliefs, and this leads to problems. For example, in his long discussion of the neoconservatives' beliefs, he discusses how their beliefs are pathological in many ways, such as their extreme and repeated misreading of intelligence, in such cases as the famous Team B episode of 1976 where an outside panel of known hardline neoconservatives was allowed to do a blatantly slanted competitive threat assessment to second guess CIA estimates and later with their extreme assessments of the threat posed by Saddam Hussein before the Iraq war of 2003 (74). Fettweis points out the neoconservatives have repeatedly raised the level of threat beyond what any rational standard would support, yet he asserts that this should be viewed as expressions of true belief by the neoconservatives, and not as exercises in political manipulation. But he offers no reason for this assertion, and discusses numerous similar findings that pathological thinking by elites was wholly inadvertent, as when he writes, for example, that "There is no reason to doubt the sincerity of [Vice President] Dick Cheney, who professed feeling constant, unrelenting pressure . . ." (52). For many observers, there is reason to suspect political manipulation by the neoconservatives and Cheney, and this possibility cannot simply be dismissed as completely unfounded. In the end, if there were political manipulation of the threat, instead of 'honest error' based in beliefs, then Fettweis's prescription that elites simply need to recognize the pathologies in order to begin to rationally make better policy appears to be naïve and irrelevant.

Overall, Fettweis's focus on collective pathological beliefs is a useful and interesting argument. Fettweis does not need to argue that all elites are true believers rather than political manipulators for his argument to be important, he need argue only that pathological beliefs shape public and elite opinion broadly across time. At the same time, Fettweis should even more specifically discuss, as he briefly mentions, that many political elites understand American pathological beliefs, and they know how to heighten them and use them to political advantage. To argue otherwise, as he does, is similar to arguing that Americans believe in gun rights because of their belief in individualism, and wholly independent of the NRA, or to argue Americans believe in sanctioning Cuba solely because of their fear of communism, and independent of the Cuban-American lobby. Fettweis is clearly aware of the role of special interests and political incentives behind pathological-type arguments. His framework actually points toward politics as a very important and continuing source of American pathologies, yet his commitment to the universal importance of psychological bias as the source of pathological beliefs has led him to construct an overly-elaborate explanation of leaders' sincerity and inadvertence as somehow obviously more important than political manipulation. Interestingly, Fettweis acknowledges in numerous ways the powerful, starkly contrasting arguments of Jack Snyder's *Myths of Empire*, as when he discusses "Paper Tigers" as part of the prevalent pathological beliefs of fear and hubris, yet he never explicitly addresses or contends with Snyder's domestic political explanation that leaders vying for power domestically and internationally intentionally hijack the state using "Myths of Empire" that are similar in many ways to Fettweis's list of pathologies. For this reader, Fettweis accurately characterizes how public beliefs are emotional, internalized, slow to change, and generally

guide elite beliefs, while Snyder better explains the specific domestic political sources of these beliefs, and why such similar, hawkish pathological beliefs are held by great powers across time and space.

Review by Jarrod Hayes, Georgia Institute of Technology

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In this sweeping critique of American foreign policy by Christopher Fettweis, scholars, policymakers, and the public will find much to provoke thought. Fettweis grounds his critique in the four emotions indicated in the title of the book: fear, honor, glory, and hubris. According to Fettweis, the central problem of American foreign policy is that these emotions have become a collective pathology for Americas and their policymakers, distorting foreign and security policies and priorities. The solution is to expose the presence and operation of these pathologies, thus setting the stage for a return to a 'rational' foreign policy grounded in the precepts of classical realist thinking.

Fettweis opens the book with a puzzle: why did the national debate in the run-up to the 2003 Iraq War produce such a disastrous outcome? More broadly, what has driven the United States to make a series of poor foreign policy decisions, including the Korean and Vietnam wars and involvement in the 1971 war between India and Pakistan? Fettweis traces the cause to the importance of beliefs in foreign policy making, specifically unexamined and pathologically incorrect beliefs held by policymakers and the public. In the United States, this means that foreign policy debates are marked less by a marketplace of ideas than a "battlefield of beliefs." In turn, a key predictor of foreign policy disaster is when "pathological beliefs defeat more rational ones" (5). These pathological beliefs--identified as fear, honor, glory, and hubris--produce systematic effects on American foreign policy. They empower hawkish, belligerent foreign positions and help policy makers justify otherwise unwarranted actions.

After setting the stage with an emphasis on the importance of beliefs for foreign policy, Fettweis provides a useful review of the literature on beliefs before moving on to the issue of rationality. One of the tensions of the book emerges in Fettweis's discussion of rationality. Fettweis argues that rational beliefs are based on "valid, demonstrably true foundations" (11). Yet, in discussing beliefs more generally, Fettweis argues that, "beliefs are visceral as much as intellectual, in other words, connected to emotion rather than reason." It is never clear, however, how to reconcile rationality, which is ostensibly predicated on reason and observation, with belief as an emotional phenomenon. Moreover, Fettweis engages only in a limited way with the burgeoning literature on the role of emotion in foreign policy making and hardly at all with the scholarship on the relationship between emotion and cognition (see for example Jonathan Haidt's work on moral psychology<sup>1</sup>). A final point in this regard is the difficulty in distinguishing between fear, honor, glory, and hubris as beliefs versus emotions or psychological states. Another underexplored aspect emerges in this discussion as well. Rationality is generally conceptualized at the individual level, but Fettweis also uses the concept of rationality at the collective level. How rationality and rational belief function across levels of social aggregation is something that Fettweis does not address.

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<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Haidt, "The emotional dog and its rational tail: A social intuitionist approach to moral judgment." *Psychological Review*. 108, (2001) 814-834.



After the brief introductory chapter, Fettweis moves into the heart of the book: four chapters exploring each of the pathological beliefs. Each chapter has a rich catalogue of secondary literature addressing the existence and operation of the pathologies. In each chapter Fettweis follows the same recipe. He first outlines the nature of the pathological belief and the ways that it shapes foreign policy. He then provides a response, drawing on secondary literature to demonstrate the disconnect between the pathological belief and reality. Finally, Fettweis again turns to the secondary literature to address the genesis of the pathological belief at the individual, state, and systemic levels of analysis.

In the chapter on fear (the longest of the four pathological belief chapters by far), Fettweis notes the prevailing belief among Americans and their policymakers that the United States confronts a "fundamentally dangerous" world (25). This belief has had a dramatic effect: "The United States has always detected threats in the system more serious than other countries realize" (25). This insecurity, however, is unwarranted. The international system is more peaceful than it has ever been. Conflict has declined, as have discrimination, repression, and genocide. Global military spending declined by a third after the end of the Cold War and, at least at the time Fettweis wrote, "International borders have all but hardened; conquest is dead" (35). Terrorism is on the decline from an incident peak in the early 1990s. Weak, failed, and rogue states are either irrelevant or deterrable. Nuclear proliferation has been contained; the number of nuclear states in 2012 was exactly the same as the number in 1989. Fettweis then explores the pathogenesis of fear and insecurity in the United States.

At the individual level, he cites literature from prospect theory that finds people are not good risk evaluators and that they are risk adverse. Moreover, negative events leave stronger emotional impressions than positive events (negativity bias), reinforcing perceptions of risk and threat. Fettweis also argues that the "most common" source of pathological belief at the individual level is the need to identify an enemy. These factors and others combine to produce an observable pattern of behavior and perception that Fettweis claims indicates the presence of a fear-based pathological belief. The list is too long to reproduce here, but generally points to the trustworthiness/value/morality of the self and the devious/evil/Machiavellian nature of the other (58).

At the state level, exceptionalism and extraordinary religiosity, combined with the prevalence of neoconservative ideology, also contribute to the fear pathology. One issue emerging out of the discussion of the individual and state levels is the relationship between the two. For example, if the individual level factors that Fettweis discusses are universal, why then is there decreasingly little violence in the international system today? It might be because state-level factors unique to the U.S. fail to act as a break on individual tendencies. But Fettweis is not clear on this point, nor does he demonstrate that other states have state-level factors that inhibit presumably unidirectional human nature.

At the system level, Fettweis highlights the tremendous power position of the United States vis-a-vis the other states in the system, and the impact that position has had on American strategic beliefs. "The greater its power," Fettweis claims, "the harder it is for a state to disconnect vital interests from the peripheral" (89)—a traditional imperial overstretch

argument. Moreover, the global position of the United States means that its vital interests are globe spanning. In addressing all three levels of analysis, Fettweis offers a welcome antidote to the tendency in IR to treat levels of analysis as naturally independent realms within the social sphere.

Fettweis addresses the other three pathological beliefs in like fashion, often with very interesting insights. I point readers, for example, to his treatment of the psychology of competition (146-168). I was unfamiliar with the extent to which the psychology literature has addressed the psychological sources and effects of competition. It is hard for any scholar of international relations to read that section and not feel that something important is missing from the disciplinary discussion. In the conclusion, Fettweis makes his commitment to classical realist thought and prescription clear, holding that only by turning to classical realism and keeping a clear focus on the vital national interest can the United States correct the course of the ship of state and avoid the terrible consequences of a foreign policy driven by pathological belief.

Fettweis mounts a strong case, but in reading the conclusion I found myself thinking of Henry Kissinger. With the possible exception of President Richard Nixon, perhaps no other foreign policy maker in the United States as self-consciously or recognizably embodied the precepts Fettweis espouses. And as National Security Advisor and Secretary of State Kissinger had some remarkable successes (the restoration of Sino-American relations; detente). But he also participated in disastrous foreign policies (the 1971 Bangladesh war<sup>2</sup>, bombing Cambodia). In both successes and failures, Kissinger brought the same realist pursuit of the national interest to bear, but with very different outcomes. To me, Kissinger's example belies the clarity of Fettweis's prescriptions. If the national interest were clear and the pursuit of it straightforward, then classical realism might indeed prove a potent remedy for pathological belief. But, as Kissinger's case demonstrates, the national interest is anything but clear and the policies to pursue it anything but straightforward. That does not make Fettweis wrong, but it does rob his remedy some of its strength.

Fettweis is clear that he is writing to change (or begin to change) the national conversation in the United States regarding foreign policy. Thus, Fettweis's target audience is policymakers and the general public. This fact can make the book frustrating reading for scholars. For example, Fettweis does not always back his claims with evidence or citations. More problematic, however, is Fettweis's call for a rational basis for policymaking based on the American national interest. What does that mean? Scott Burchill goes so far as to call the concept of the national interest devoid of substantive content.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the concept of the national interest, to say the least, is rarely clear—and that means that the rational pursuit of the national interest is at best a very difficult endeavor. Moreover, there are multiple

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<sup>2</sup> Jarrod Hayes, "Securitization, Social Identity, and Democratic Security: Nixon, India, and the Ties That Bind." *International Organization* 66.1 (2012): 63-93.

<sup>3</sup> Scott Burchill, *The National Interest in International Relations Theory*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.

modes of rationality. A policymaker who, like most modern presidents, obsessively monitors polling as a basis of policymaking is being rational -- even if it is a different rationality than that which Fettweis calls for.

Fettweis, however, largely leaves aside these issues. He never explicitly explores the sources or foundations of rationality other than to invoke classical realism. He does not address the substantial scholarly literature wrestling with the concept of a national interest. Going further, the growing literature on securitization theory problematizes the idea that threats are objective conditions that can be clearly identified by savvy or wise policymakers.<sup>4</sup> This in turn undermines the objectivist ontology that underlies Fettweis's thesis. If it is the case that threats are intersubjective constructions rather than objective conditions, Fettweis' argument is robbed of its prescriptive force. To be sure, Fettweis's critique of the flaws in U.S. foreign policy remains trenchant. But the call to rational assessment of objective foreign threats becomes a hollow one.

In part these issues arise because of the 'bridging the gap' agenda within which Fettweis situates the book. As the existence of programs like American University's International Policy Summer Institute and the resurgent debate over the policy-academia gulf attest,<sup>5</sup> efforts like Fettweis's are both badly needed and very welcome. But if bridging the gap were easy, there would be little need to encourage scholars and policymakers to do it. Fettweis's effort demonstrates just how difficult it can be to satisfy both sides. Academics will be frustrated by Fettweis's refusal to engage in explicit theory building or empirical verification. Policymakers will no doubt be frustrated by Fettweis's amorphous policy guidance to be rational and focus on the national interest.

These issues notwithstanding, the book is a rich text filled with ideas. For policymakers, Fettweis provides a brilliant review of a large number of literatures that speak directly to the challenges policymakers face and the potential psychological pitfalls that await them. While I suspect Fettweis's desire for rational foreign policymaking is impossible to achieve, policymakers are well served by Fettweis's effort to bring the flaws of human psychology to their attention. For academics, Fettweis's wide-ranging engagement with literature introduces important ideas from other disciplines into the international relations and foreign policy analysis conversation. Returning to the issue of competition, I was unfamiliar with the findings from psychology that demonstrates that competition is neither inherent to human nature nor terribly socially or psychologically beneficial. I wager that most, if not all, scholars of foreign policy or international relations will find a school of literature in the book that they were unfamiliar with.

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<sup>4</sup> Thierry Balzacq, ed., *Securitization Theory: How Security Problems Emerge and Dissolve*. Routledge, 2010; Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde. *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*. Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner Pub., 1998; Jarrod Hayes, *Constructing National Security: US Relations with India and China*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2013

<sup>5</sup> Bruce W. Jentleson and Ely Ratner. "Bridging the Beltway-Ivory Tower Gap." *International Studies Review* 13.1 (2011): 6-11.

Fettweis's arguments are also seeded with a number of interesting research projects. For example, one possible implication of his position that a particular set of pathologies has come to dominate American perspectives of the world is that American international relations theory has also been shaped by the same set of pathologies. That in turn suggests a research agenda focused on the specific social and historical foundations of theory. Such a research program would have profound implications for international relations and foreign policy, challenging ahistorical and universalist claims of much of American international relations theory and indicating a need for a truly internationalized discipline.

In sum, Fettweis has produced an ambitious, expansive treatment of American foreign policy. It has flaws, but so does every work of scholarship. Without a doubt, the richness of the text outweighs its problems.

Review by John Schuessler, Air War College<sup>1</sup>

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In late February 2011, then-Defense Secretary Robert Gates bluntly told an audience of West Point cadets, “In my opinion, any future defense secretary who advises the president to again send a big American land army into Asia or into the Middle East or Africa should ‘have his head examined’.”<sup>2</sup> In *The Pathologies of Power*, his third book, the political scientist Christopher J. Fettweis takes up this task for the United States as a whole, deconstructing the prevailing foreign policy mindset to shed some light on why the U.S. keeps making the same mistakes over and over again. Pathological beliefs, Fettweis argues, are to blame for serial blunders like the wars in Vietnam and Iraq. Specifically, fear, honor, glory, and hubris play outsized roles in the U.S. foreign policy debate, biasing decisions in a hawkish direction and decoupling policy from the national interest. Only when these pathological beliefs have been recognized and eliminated will strategic performance improve.

It is important to say up front that there is much to like in *The Pathologies of Power*. Fettweis’s writing is accessible and clear, and even entertaining by the standards of academic security studies. At the same time, his approach is eclectic and learned, drawing from a variety of disciplines including psychology, sociology, anthropology, economics, history, philosophy, and biology. Most strikingly, *The Pathologies of Power* packs a strong normative punch. It is both unyielding in its criticism of the prevailing foreign-policy mindset and hopeful that reason will prevail, with fear, honor, glory, and hubris being replaced by prudence and restraint. Descriptive and prescriptive in equal measure, *The Pathologies of Power* recalls the best of the classical realist canon.

While *The Pathologies of Power* deserves much praise, it would not be giving the book its due to fail to critically engage with its premises and core claims. The rest of this review does just that, focusing on three questions. First, how pathological is U.S. foreign policy by historical standards? Second, what accounts for the pathologies we do find in U.S. foreign policy? Third, how can the U.S. be cured of its pathologies?

In the introduction to the book, Fettweis is clear that the pathology that concerns him most when it comes to U.S. foreign policy is excessive hawkishness, or a tendency toward self-defeating aggression. (14). Fettweis is hardly the first to climb this particular academic hill. Defensive realists, who assume that the international system provides incentives for moderate, reasonable behavior, have long been puzzled by why great powers

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<sup>1</sup> The views expressed here are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the U.S. government or the Department of Defense.

<sup>2</sup> Thom Shanker, “Warning Against Wars like Iraq and Afghanistan,” *The New York Times*, February 25, 2011. <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/26/world/26gates.html? r=0>

“overexpand.”<sup>3</sup> Jack Snyder, whose *Myths of Empire* is the most important work to deal with this problem, argues that overexpansion can take one of two forms: “self-encirclement,” in which a great power provokes an overwhelming coalition of opposing states, or “imperial overextension,” in which a great power expands into the hinterland beyond the point where costs begin to outstrip benefits.<sup>4</sup> Snyder points to Wilhelmine Germany as a paradigmatic case of the former and Imperial Japan as a paradigmatic case of the latter.<sup>5</sup>

The relevant question for our purposes is whether the U.S. is in either power’s league when it comes to overexpansion. One would be hard pressed to make that claim. As for self-encirclement, it is not clear that the U.S. is even capable of self-encirclement, given the relative power advantage it enjoys over potential rivals and the collective action problems besetting any attempt at a counterbalancing coalition.<sup>6</sup> As for imperial overextension, the U.S. does have a nasty habit of getting into brushfire wars in the periphery, but none of them have been so injurious as to seriously threaten the U.S.’s dominant position in the international system. Overexpansion, as has been pointed out before, is a systemic outcome that depends as much on the relative power and position of the state doing the expanding as the wisdom of its policy choices.<sup>7</sup> In this respect, the U.S., as a regional hegemon-turned-unipolar power, can afford more overexpansion than most.

None of this is to suggest that U.S. foreign policy is *not* pathological in important respects. Richard Ned Lebow notes that the U.S. has been the world’s most aggressive state since 1945, at least when measured in terms of war initiation.<sup>8</sup> Also relevant is the widespread sentiment among security studies scholars that American grand strategy is overextended

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<sup>3</sup> A useful primer on defensive realism is Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, “Security Seeking Under Anarchy: Defensive Realism Revisited,” *International Security*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (Winter 2000/01), 128-161.

<sup>4</sup> Jack Snyder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 6-9.

<sup>5</sup> See *ibid*, chap.’s 3 and 4, respectively. Not all agree that Wilhelmine Germany and Imperial Japan are overexpanders. See John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, Updated Edition (New York, NY: Norton, 2014), pp. 213-216, 219-224.

<sup>6</sup> William C. Wohlforth, “The Stability of a Unipolar World,” *International Security*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (Summer 1999), pp. 5-41. For a variety of answers as to why there has not been more of a counterbalancing reaction against a unipolar U.S., see G. John Ikenberry, ed., *America Unrivaled: The Future of the Balance of Power* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002).

<sup>7</sup> Fareed Zakaria, “Realism and Domestic Politics: A Review Essay,” *International Security*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (Summer 1992), pp.183-190.

<sup>8</sup> Richard Ned Lebow, “Aggressive Democracies,” *St. Antony’s International Review*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (2011), pp. 120-133.

and that some retrenchment is in order.<sup>9</sup> Without doubt, it is worth exploring why U.S. foreign policy is biased in a hawkish direction, which Fettweis does in *The Pathologies of Power*. It is just that some perspective is in order. Perhaps the U.S. can engage in a moderate amount of overexpansion exactly because the consequences so far have proven less than disastrous.

This brings us to our second question: what accounts for the aggressive strain we do find in U.S. foreign policy? According to Fettweis, the problem can be traced back to pathological beliefs like fear, honor, glory, and hubris that play outsized roles in the U.S. foreign policy debate. Fettweis devotes a chapter to each belief, with part of each chapter taken up with “pathogenesis,” or exploring the sources of the belief in question.<sup>10</sup> These discussions are wide-ranging, drawing on explanatory factors from each of Kenneth Waltz’s three levels of analysis: the individual, the state, and the system.<sup>11</sup> Fettweis is agnostic about which level of analysis is most important, arguing, “Unfortunately for political scientists who prefer parsimonious models of complex phenomena, it will probably never be possible to disentangle the precise importance of the factors from each level of analysis. Few are mutually exclusive and all contribute to the development of pathological beliefs to some degree” (18). The cost of this open-endedness is that the book has difficulty identifying the root causes of the problem it is trying to solve.<sup>12</sup> One wants to know, in particular: What makes the U.S. aggressive? Its leaders? Its domestic politics? Its power? Different answers have different theoretical and policy implications.<sup>13</sup>

For what it is worth, my own sense is that two factors are most important, one at the state level and one at the system level.<sup>14</sup> First, the U.S. is a liberal great power, and, as others

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<sup>9</sup> Academic proponents of the prevailing grand strategy, “deep engagement,” decry this defeatist attitude among their colleagues. See Stephen G. Brooks, G. John Ikenberry, and William C. Wohlforth, “Don’t Come Home, America: The Case against Retrenchment,” *International Security*, Vol. 37, No. 3 (Winter 2012/13), pp. 7-51.

<sup>10</sup> An overview of pathogenesis can be found on 16-18.

<sup>11</sup> Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, the State, and War: A Theoretical Analysis* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1959).

<sup>12</sup> Fettweis senses trouble ahead. The passage quoted above goes on: “While historians are by training and temperament comfortable with multi-causality, political scientists are rarely satisfied with explanations that list important variables and imply that ‘everything matters’.”

<sup>13</sup> On leaders, see Elizabeth N. Saunders, *Leaders at War: How Presidents Shape Military Interventions* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011). On domestic politics, see Peter Trubowitz, *Politics and Strategy: Partisan Ambition and American Statecraft* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011). On power, see Nuno P. Monteiro, *Theory of Unipolar Politics* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

<sup>14</sup> I have made these points before in an exchange on the Lebow article cited above. See Seth Johnston, Dan Reiter, John Schuessler, and Richard Ned Lebow, “Are Democracies Aggressive? Is the United States Aggressive? An Exchange,” *St. Antony’s International Review* Vol. 7, No. 1 (May 2011), pp. 179-181.

have argued, liberalism can engender a crusading spirit that leads to aggression abroad. Michael Doyle, in his seminal treatment of the democratic peace, notes that liberal foreign policy suffers from characteristic shortcomings, the most important being a tendency toward “imprudent vehemence” in relations with the non-liberal world, periodically leading to “costly crusades” and “spasmodic imperialism.”<sup>15</sup> Michael Desch has applied Doyle’s insights to the problem of overreaction in U.S. foreign policy. He argues that liberal ideology, when married to a preponderance of power, can lead directly to illiberal policies like the pursuit of hegemony and preventive war.<sup>16</sup> If one is looking for a culprit to explain U.S. aggression, perhaps liberalism has more to do with it than *The Pathologies of Power* lets on.<sup>17</sup>

Ideology is not solely to blame, however, as liberal states in Europe, Asia, and Latin America have hardly been as war-prone as the U.S.<sup>18</sup> I would argue that a second factor – regional hegemony – has interacted with liberalism to explain the pattern of U.S. aggression. The U.S. is the only regional hegemon in modern history. That is, it is the only great power that has not had to share its region of the world, the Western Hemisphere, with another great power. “This impressive achievement,” as John Mearsheimer argues, “is the real basis of American exceptionalism in the foreign policy realm.”<sup>19</sup> The fact that it is a regional hegemon explains why the U.S. has traditionally played the role of offshore balancer, preventing great powers in other regions from dominating their areas of the world.<sup>20</sup> It also explains why the U.S. has been able to pursue ideological crusades abroad. The U.S. is probably the most secure great power in history, surrounded by weak neighbors and protected by two giant moats – the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.<sup>21</sup> This margin of security has allowed the U.S. to pick fights with ‘rogue states’ like Iraq rather than focus its

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<sup>15</sup> Michael Doyle, “Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs,” in *Debating the Democratic Peace*, eds. Michael E. Brown, Sean M. Lynn-Jones and Steven E. Miller (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1996), pp. 30-31.

<sup>16</sup> Michael C. Desch, “America’s Liberal Illiberalism: The Ideological Origins of Overreaction in U.S. Foreign Policy,” *International Security* 32, no. 3 (2007/08): 7-43. Brendan Green introduces an important qualification to Desch’s argument. Not all liberals are crusaders, according to Green. “Negative liberals,” at least, favor exemplarism and restraint. “Positive liberals” have been ascendant since the 1960’s, however, which explains why we usually tend to associate liberalism with crusading in the U.S. context. See Brendan Rittenhouse Green, “Two Concepts of Liberty: U.S. Cold War Grand Strategies and the Liberal Tradition,” *International Security*, Vol. 37, No. 2 (Fall 2012), pp. 9-43.

<sup>17</sup> Fettweis addresses the liberal tradition most directly in a discussion of the sources of hubris. I would argue that liberalism’s effects on American foreign policy are broader and more pernicious than that. See Fettweis, *The Pathologies of Power*, 221-224.

<sup>18</sup> Lebow, “Aggressive Democracies,” 122.

<sup>19</sup> Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 236.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, chap. 7.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 127.



energies on local threats. Because the stakes are less than existential, the U.S. has been able to cut its losses when decisive victories have proven elusive. The implication is that, as long as the U.S. is secure in the Western Hemisphere and not preoccupied with a potential peer competitor, it will be “free to roam” and crusade abroad.<sup>22</sup>

To be fair, Fettweis would by no means disagree with the thrust of the analysis above, even if he might be reluctant to sacrifice richness for parsimony. The book is titled *The Pathologies of Power*, after all, and related themes like neoconservatism and unipolarity certainly get their due. Most telling is where the book ends: with a call for more realism in U.S. foreign policy.<sup>23</sup> “It is realism,” according to Fettweis, “that contains the antidotes to pathology,” with prudence and restraint serving as a better foundation for decision-making than fear, honor, glory, and hubris (242). While this will be music to the ears of many, it has to be said that Fettweis’s book departs from the realist canon in important respects, in ways that suggest the author is not fully prepared for what a realist foreign policy might entail. Descriptively, Fettweis is more confident than many realists would be that international politics will remain peaceful, with great power war more or less obsolete.<sup>24</sup> The rise of China, for example, is not discussed extensively as a potential source of future conflict.<sup>25</sup> Prescriptively, this allows Fettweis to advocate for restraint while eliding the balancing role that the U.S. will have to fulfill if China emerges as a potential hegemon in East Asia. There may be good reason to believe, as Fettweis argues, “that a United States run by realists would be a wiser, less belligerent, and ultimately happier country,” but that does mean its foreign policy would not retain a hard edge (242).

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<sup>22</sup> As Mearsheimer argues, “regional hegemons – because they are so dominant in their neighborhoods – are free to roam around the globe and interfere in other regions of the world.” See *ibid.*, 365.

<sup>23</sup> I am quite sympathetic to this call. See Sebastian Rosato and John Schuessler, “A Realist Foreign Policy for the United States,” *Perspectives on Politics*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (December 2011), pp. 803-819.

<sup>24</sup> See, especially, 33-39.

<sup>25</sup> Fettweis does not discuss the rise of China in his survey of the security environment in chapter 1. The issue does get some attention in the conclusion, with Fettweis warning that care should be taken not to be overly confrontational toward China. A useful contrast can be drawn here with the updated edition of John Mearsheimer’s *Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. Its final chapter, which is new, is quite pessimistic about the future prospects for U.S.-China relations, with China making a grab for regional hegemony in East Asia when it is powerful enough and the U.S. spearheading a balancing coalition to stop it.

**Author's Response by Christopher J. Fettweis, Tulane University**

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It is customary to begin an H-Diplo author's response by thanking the reviewers, and this is a custom well worth preserving. To have three scholars devote so much of their time to critiques of one's work is a humbling experience, and I certainly appreciate their effort and comments. It is also customary for the author to move on quickly from gratitude to defensiveness, and push back a little on their comments. I am afraid I am not going to spend much time doing this, because I do not disagree with any of the points these reviewers raise. Instead I will offer a few thoughts by way of explanation, in the hope of continuing the conversation about pathological beliefs that drive U.S. foreign policy.

Professor Cramer begins her review by taking me to task a bit for assuming that leaders are sincere in their professed beliefs, and appearing somewhat naïve to the potential political motivations behind their comments. This is a fair point; in fact I had initially included a section explaining why I did so, which I regret to say did not make it into the final draft. I appreciate the opportunity to make a rare rescue of a section that had found its way to the cutting-room floor:

Political explanations for fear mongering have limited utility. While only the most naïve would claim that statements and actions always reflect true belief, there is a limit to what can be gained by doubting the sincerity of leaders. Deeper understanding and better conclusions tend to reward those who make a habit of taking people at their word, disagreeing where necessary with ideas but not impugning motives, for a couple of important reasons.

First, speculation about hidden motivations inevitably introduces bias into analysis. Exercises in discerning the true interests that generate positions are automatically tendentious, speculative and unprovable. The instrumental view of threat inflation (i.e., that it is politically motivated) is almost always held by those outside of, rather than within, administrations; it is often a judgment or accusation made by those with only indirect access to decision makers and their thought processes. That political explanations are convenient does not make them causal. Except for those rare cases when leaders admit after the fact that they were not being wholly honest, there is no way to know what truly motivates any statement or action. In the absence of evidence, too many analysts often base conclusions on their intuition rather than on facts. The best way to avoid the temptation to engage in what can quickly become jaundiced exercises in narcissistic speculation is to err on the side of sincerity, to take people at their word.

The tendency to doubt the motivation of others is not only a central feature of the enemy image but also is a reflection on the strength of our own beliefs. At times people appear incapable of understanding that others can hold beliefs that are the opposite of what theirs. They seek ulterior motives, often political, to explain the difference. As Jervis observes, "we

often have difficulty taking seriously beliefs with which we disagree.”<sup>1</sup> It is hard for anyone to accept the idea that someone else has examined the same evidence and reached starkly different conclusions.

Second, most political decisions are multicausal. Too often analysts try to identify the lone or “true” cause of state behavior, as if political elites are unable to hold multiple, reinforcing ideas simultaneously. Furthermore, people regularly align political interests with beliefs about security and danger. “Humans are compulsive rationalizers,” writes [journalist Eric] Gardner. “Self-interest and sincere belief seldom part company.”<sup>2</sup> Donald Rumsfeld believed that people needed to be reminded of threats; Michael Chertoff’s gut actually told him to expect attacks; Dick Cheney “believed in his bones that the risks were mortal and real,” according to the most authoritative review of his term.<sup>3</sup> For these purposes, it is important to note that even those motivations initially disingenuous quickly become the truth, as a result of every human being’s desire to be internally consistent. No matter what President Bush’s initial calculations were regarding Iraq, for example, there is little doubt that today he truly believes that Saddam represented a clear and present danger and that removing him was the right thing to do. To believe otherwise would be cognitively unacceptable for almost anyone in his position. When necessary, the mind creates beliefs where none had existed before.

Third, even if leaders are substituting political expediency for true belief, there is much to be learned from the issues or stances that resonate with American society. Politicians understand their constituents, and (like the media) are reflections of the society from which they emerge. If the public was not susceptible to certain pathologies *a priori*, then leaders would not make reference to them as part of their campaign or governing strategies. Why some pathological arguments resonate in certain polities but not in others deserves investigation. Generating fear only wins elections in societies predisposed to paranoia; the fact that U.S. politicians win elections by scaring the public says far more about America than it does about its leaders.

In the final analysis, the sincerity of scare-mongering political leaders does not much matter. After all, as Kennan wrote a half-century ago, “history does not forgive us our national mistakes because they are explicable in terms of domestic politics.”<sup>4</sup> Even if there is little political downside to frightening people – and then keeping them good and scared – the consequences for foreign-policy decisions can be substantial.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Jervis, “Understanding Beliefs and Threat Inflation,” in A. Trevor Thrall and Jane K. Cramer, *American Foreign Policy and the Politics of Fear: Threat Inflation Since 9/11* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 18.

<sup>2</sup> Daniel Gardner, *The Science of Fear: How the Culture of Fear Manipulates Your Brain* (New York: Plume, 2008), 139.

<sup>3</sup> Barton Gellman, *Angler: The Cheney Vice Presidency* (New York: Penguin, 2008), 227.

<sup>4</sup> George Kennan, *American Diplomacy, 1900-1950* (New York: Mentor, 1951), 65.

Professor Hayes takes issue with my thin treatment of rationality, and again I am guilty as charged, for the reasons he suggests. It is always difficult to write for two audiences, and *Pathologies of Power* was composed with both the scholarly and policymaking communities in mind. As a result, I tried to keep what seemed to be purely academic discussions, such as the nature of rationality or national interests, to a minimum. As is usually the case, books with two masters please neither.

Perhaps by way of explanation I could emphasize that my chapters – on fear, honor, glory and hubris – were not beliefs in themselves, but *categories* of related beliefs. They represent beliefs, and hope to offer a useful shorthand, but are not beliefs in themselves. Fear is an emotion, after all, and honor a value. The beliefs inside these categories are what I suggest are demonstrably irrational or pathological, not the categories themselves. They are also somewhat more falsifiable with rational argument.

For example, though fear is not irrational, the belief that the world is a dangerous place certainly is. To state the obvious – or what should be obvious to foreign affairs professionals, but too often is not – security is *relative*. Just as no person can ever be completely safe, no country can ever be completely secure. Dangers always exist; absolute security is impossible to achieve. Surely there are different levels of safety, however, and compared to any other country at virtually any time, the United States faces no major (and precious few minor) threats.<sup>5</sup> The belief that the twenty-first century is exceptionally dangerous for the United States is demonstrably false, and because it leads to bad decisions, pathological.

Events since the book's publication would have helped me make my case, if they only had the common courtesy to have happened sooner. The national freakout in 2014 over the simultaneous emergence of ISIS and Ebola were depressing but unsurprising. No amount of information from the Centers for Disease Control about the virus was able to calm the public, many of whom have grown skeptical of science. Their guts told them that they were in danger, and that feeling was reinforced nightly by know-nothing, irresponsible media figures. And despite the fact that no U.S. intelligence service was able to identify a credible threat to the homeland from ISIS, or even explain how one might rise, U.S. leaders appeared to compete to be the most breathlessly hyperbolic. Sen. Lindsay Graham (R-SC) warned that "This president needs to rise to the occasion before we all get killed here at home"; Sen. Jim Inhofe (R-OK) sensed that "they're rapidly developing a method of blowing up a major U.S. city," and as a result "we're in the most dangerous position we've ever been in as a nation." Over at the Pentagon, the Secretary of Defense called ISIS "imminent threat to every interest we have" that was "beyond anything we've seen," while the JCS Chairman that the group has an "apocalyptic, end-of-days strategic vision," whatever that might

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<sup>5</sup> For a recent discussion of the relative safety of the United States, see the essays in Christopher A. Preble and John Mueller, eds., *A Dangerous World? Threat Perception and U.S. National Security* (Washington, DC: Cato Institute, 2014).

mean. A full list of panicky, irrational, pathological comments from people in leadership positions would require a new volume.<sup>6</sup>

Professor Hayes also makes a good point about my prescription for improvement. Although I suggest that classical realism contains a number of remedies for pathological thinking, it is not the case that all realists think alike or would agree with my interpretation. There is a great deal of variation in the tradition, as Henry Kissinger's long career demonstrates. The particular realism of the former Secretary of State has not always led to wisdom, as his support of the Iraq war in 2003 demonstrates. On this issue, he was nearly alone among realists.<sup>7</sup> More importantly for the purposes of this conversation, no scholar or practitioner in American history was more obsessed with credibility, or more convinced that international events are interdependent. There was no event that Kissinger did not see through the lens of the Cold War, no matter how far removed from the competition it appeared to be. This pathological belief led Kissinger to support a variety of counterproductive policies, from Vietnam to West Pakistan to Cambodia. Overall, foreign policies based on classical realist foundations can take many forms; mine was just one. The book would have been stronger if I had been more explicit on that point.

Professor Schuessler points out that the pathologies of the United States might not reach high historic levels, a point with which I agree. When it comes to counterproductive decisions, the United States is not Wilhelmine Germany or Imperial Japan's league. Judged against the standards of the twenty-first century, however, U.S. pathologies do not compare favorably to those of other countries. And its enormous relative power simply makes U.S. pathologies more relevant, and more dangerous. Albania or Vanuatu may suffer from equally strong pathological beliefs, for all we know, but they do not have the same capability to act on them.

Overall, it is easy to overestimate the importance of foreign policy decisions. In international politics, structural factors matter. The United States is strong and healthy, and is able to absorb almost any decisions its presidents make. Consistent and repeated blunders during the Cold War did not prevent ultimate victory, after all. Although it certainly did not appear so at the time, we can see now that the defeat of international

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<sup>6</sup> Philip Bump, "Lindsey Graham: We need troops to fight Islamic State 'before we all get killed here at home'," *Washington Post*, September 14, 2014, available at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/post-politics/wp/2014/09/14/lindsey-graham-we-need-troops-to-fight-islamic-state-before-we-all-get-killed-here-at-home/>; Inhofe made his remarks on local Oklahoma TV, "Senator Inhofe warns of potential terrorist attacks on U.S. soil," KOKH-TV, August 20, 2014, available at <http://www.okcfox.com/story/26331734/senator-inhofe-warns-of-potential-terrorist-attacks-on-us-soil>; and Jeremy Herb, "Chuck Hagel: ISIL 'beyond anything that we've seen'," *Politico*, August 21, 2014, available at <http://www.politico.com/story/2014/08/chuck-hagel-isil-defense-james-foley-110241.html#ixzz3OAUeIZ6l>.

<sup>7</sup> The vast majority of realist opinion is perhaps best represented by the well-known letter to the *New York Times* that appeared on September 26, 2002, which was co-signed by a virtual who's-who of realist scholars.

communism was basically pre-ordained: Only massive governmental malpractice could have squandered the tremendous advantages that its economic and political systems afforded the United States. Communism produced massive, insurmountable inefficiency, and totalitarianism led to perpetual disquiet and unrest. The Soviets ensured their own destruction by overspending on their military and by pumping billions they could not afford into irrelevant conflicts in the global periphery. Their system produced both bad economic outcomes and bad leaders, making their defeat inevitable. There was virtually nothing American presidents could have done to lose the Cold War. Victory occurred *despite* presidential decisions as much as *because* of them.

The structural strengths of the United States allow a margin for error that other countries simply do not enjoy. That does not mean, however, that we should stop trying to improve, or minimize the chances for disaster. Overall the book hopes that Deborah Larson was correct some years ago when she wrote that “cognitive biases are like visual illusions; once the error is pointed out to you, you can see the image differently.”<sup>8</sup> Once actors are made aware of the thin foundation that supports even the most deeply held beliefs, their view of the world cannot help but change.

Once again, my sincere thanks to the reviewers and to the editors at H-Diplo for putting this forum together.

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<sup>8</sup> Deborah Welch Larson, *Anatomy of Mistrust: U.S.-Soviet Relations During the Cold War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 5.