

# H-Diplo | Robert Jervis International Security Studies Forum

## Roundtable Review 14-18

Mark Atwood Lawrence. *The End of Ambition: The United States and the Third World in the Vietnam War Era*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021. ISBN: 978-0-691-12640-1 (hardcover, \$35).

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 Introduction by Daniel Sargent, University of California, Berkeley
 

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Mark Lawrence is a prominent, prize-winning historian of US foreign relations. *The End of Ambition* shows why. The book offers a brilliant interpretation of US policy towards the Third World in the 1960s. It shows how the decade's early ambition gave way to cynicism and accommodations with reactionary regimes. Lawrence organizes his argument around five cases. They explore US policy towards Brazil, India, Iran, Indonesia, and southern Africa. (The first four cases deal with nation-states; the last, a region.)

Through these cases, Lawrence threads a strong argument. The lofty ambition of President John F. Kennedy's 1961 inaugural committed Americans to elevate the Third World "not because we seek their votes, but because it is right."<sup>1</sup> But what followed was a declension narrative. Over the 1960s, Lawrence explains, the makers of US foreign policy became more cynical, not less; more inclined to favor loyal strongmen over nationalists; more preoccupied with geopolitics than democracy. Central to Lawrence's book is the question: why?

This roundtable assembles five reviewers, who parse Lawrence's explanation with care: Kevin Kim, who specializes in the history of the US and the World, with a regional focus on Korea and Northeast Asia; Alan McPherson, who specializes in the history of US-Latin America; David Prentice, a historian of the Vietnam War and expert in the war's late phase; Sandra Scanlon, who specializes in the dynamic interactions between US domestic politics and foreign policy; she teaches at University of College, Dublin, and Thomas Schwartz is a historian of US foreign relations who has published extensively on US foreign policy during the Cold War. Schwartz, I will note, is the author of the book that most closely parallels Lawrence's. His *Lyndon Johnson and Europe: In the Shadow of Vietnam* (Harvard, 2003) does for US policy towards Western Europe in the 1960s what Lawrence does for Third World policy—and excavates understanding from the weight of the Vietnam War, which dominates the historiography on the US foreign relations in the 1960s.<sup>2</sup>

The five reviewers shower praise. Kim salutes *The End of American Ambition* for its "a hyper-realistic portrait of US policymaking" and "kaleidoscopic portrayal of US power." McPherson calls the book "an impressive feat of scholarship that should be read and debated by all scholars of US foreign policy." David Prentice, it is a "masterful account"; for Scanlon, it is "ambitious and far-reaching." Thomas Schwartz calls *The End of American Ambition* "an extraordinarily impressive book" and salutes Lawrence's authorial craft, calling the book "a genuine joy to read." This is the kind of response that authors crave. If this forum is any indication, Princeton University Press will have to deploy a smaller font on the rear of the paperback edition.<sup>3</sup>

The five reviewers also probe searching questions, which Mark Lawrence engages in a thoughtful response. All of the reviewers describe Lawrence as a master of intricate diplomatic history, who reconstructs the decisionmaking process with such care and insight as to make outcomes legible and comprehensible. To do this, he "relies overwhelmingly on US government sources," as McPherson notes. The reviewers vary in how satisfying they view this kind of historiography. Kim questions the limits of the book's "US-centered approach," although he salutes Lawrence for having elsewhere written "sensitively about the need for non-Western voices in the historiography." Prentice wishes that "Lawrence had used more foreign archives." Lawrence, in his response, defends the case for writing history that utilizes the American sources to comprehend American actions in the world. These are important questions—but also dilemmas with which

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<sup>1</sup> John F. Kennedy, "Inaugural Address," January 20, 1961. JFK Presidential Library, Available at <https://www.jfklibrary.org/archives/other-resources/john-f-kennedy-speeches/inaugural-address-19610120>.

<sup>2</sup> Schwartz, Thomas A. *Lyndon Johnson and Europe: In the Shadow of Vietnam*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003.

<sup>3</sup> This is an opportunity for me to disclose that I reviewed Lawrence's manuscript for Princeton, very favorably, and, as readers of the hardcover may have noticed, gave it a positive blurb.

historians of US foreign relations must grapple. Suffice, perhaps, to say that whatever any author strikes, in regard to any given topic, will not satisfy all readers.

Setting aside the question of where the world is situated in the history of US foreign relations, reviewers salute Lawrence's mastery of his sources and materials. Several credit his judicious selection of case studies, which McPherson and Prentice both call well-chosen. Summarizing, Scanlon credits Lawrence for drawing deep "on the rich histories" of his five cases to explain "how Johnson was forced to adopt unpalatable policies in response to challenges in U.S. hegemony." Such praise for the Lawrence's empirical mastery is fitting; he not only teaches history at the University of Texas, Austin but also directs the Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library—a vital archival resource for all historians of US policy and politics in the 1960s and a facility that many readers of this forum will have visited.

Crucially, Lawrence's empirical command advances an analytical purpose, as Schwartz notes. "Each of the case studies" he writes, "allows Lawrence to illuminate parts of his overall argument." That overall argument identifies three causal motors: personnel change within the US government, especially during the transition between presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson; changes in US domestic politics; and changes in the priorities and outlooks of Third World leaders. None of the five reviewers quibbles with this ground-level explanation for policy change. But Lawrence leaves his reviewers grappling with the largest implications of his argument.

Two questions linger. One is the question of where to situate Johnson in the sequence of the presidents? (The glib answer—"between Kennedy and Nixon"—is precisely the point.) Scanlon notes, shrewdly, that changes in foreign policy do not always—and often do not—correspond with inaugurations; presidents formulate policy in response to external circumstances, which means that "continuity between administrations" is pervasive. So is the implication of Lawrence's argument that Johnson was the true author of the Nixon Doctrine, which sought to enlist strong postcolonial states as instruments of US geopolitical influence? Several reviewers ask as much. McPherson, in fact, concludes his review with a direct challenge: should we see Lyndon Johnson as a "transitional or transformational" president?

A second big question involves Vietnam. Kim puts the point well. "While *The End of Ambition* makes its case about the Vietnam War's impact on U.S.-Third World relations," he writes, "the war's exact causal role is sometimes murky." Schwartz concludes his laudatory review with a similar question—and an invitation that resembles McPherson's. Had Johnson "decided not to escalate the Vietnam War in 1965," Schwartz asks, "how might this have affected the five case studies in the book?" Should we, in other words, see the Vietnam War as a causal driver effecting broad global consequences for US foreign policy, or might the Vietnam War, for all its horrors, have been more of a "sideshow" (to misappropriate journalist William Shawcross's characterization of the Cambodian War) than our historiographical preoccupation suggests. Did the war really cause the general drift of US foreign policy in the Third World towards cynical accommodations with often repressive regimes?

These are big, complex, and perhaps unanswerable dilemmas. So persuasive, so expert, so refined is Lawrence's handling more tangible riddles that attention drifts, inevitably, towards the largest questions that *The End of American Ambition* raises—and that Lawrence engages in his response. Readers will take heart in the implications of the drift. Diplomatic history is demanding; it requires both a capacious global vision and careful attention to process, politics, and personality. Done right, as Mark Lawrence does it, diplomatic history opens big, interesting, and consequential problems. There is no end, we might say, to its intellectual ambition.

## Participants:

**Mark Atwood Lawrence** is Professor of History at the University of Texas at Austin and, since January 2020, Director of the LBJ Presidential Library and Museum. Lawrence is author of *Assuming the Burden: Europe and the American Commitment to War in Vietnam* (2005), *The Vietnam War: A Concise International History* (2008), and *The End of Ambition: The United States and the Third World in the Vietnam Era* (2021), which won the Robert H. Ferrell Book Prize from the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations. Lawrence has also published several edited books and numerous articles, chapters, and reviews on various aspects of the history of US foreign relations. Lawrence has held the Cassius Marcellus Clay Fellowship at Yale University (2006-2008) and the Stanley Kaplan Visiting Professorship in American Foreign Policy at Williams College (2011-2012). He earned his BA from Stanford University and his PhD from Yale University.

**Daniel J. Sargent** is Associate Professor at the University of California, Berkeley, where he holds appointments in the Department of History and the Goldman School of Public Policy and co-directs Berkeley's Institute of International Studies. He is the author of *A Superpower Transformed: The Remaking of American Foreign Relations in the 1970s* (Oxford University Press, 2015). He is writing an interpretive history of the American world order.

**Kevin Y. Kim** is an Assistant Professor of History at the University of California, Los Angeles. He is currently completing a book, tentatively titled *Worlds Unseen: Henry Wallace, Herbert Hoover, and the Making of Cold War America*. His scholarly writings have appeared or will appear in *Pacific Historical Review*, *Diplomatic History*, *Modern American History*, and the *Journal of Asian Studies*. In the 2022–2023 academic year, he will be in residence at the Hoover Institution at Stanford University as a Glenn Campbell and Rita Ricardo-Campbell National Fellow.

**Alan McPherson** is Thomas Freaney, Jr., Professor of History and Wachman Director of the Center for the Study of Force and Diplomacy at Temple University. He has produced dozens of articles and chapters on US-Latin American relations, including on the LBJ administration, in addition to eleven books. His latest is *Ghosts of Sheridan Circle: How a Washington Assassination Brought Pinochet's Terror State to Justice* (University of North Carolina Press, 2019).

**David Prentice** is an award-winning instructor at the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at Oklahoma State University. His work has appeared in *Diplomatic History*, the *Journal of Military History*, and several edited volumes. His forthcoming book (University Press of Kentucky) examines America's exit strategy from Vietnam.

**Sandra Scanlon** is Lecturer in American History at University College Dublin and is the author of *The Pro-War Movement: Domestic Support for the Vietnam War and the Making of Modern American Conservatism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2013). She received her doctorate from the University of Cambridge, and has been a Fulbright Scholar and Visiting Associate Professor at the Department of History at Emory University. She is currently working on a study of white identity and American conservatives' transatlantic networks during the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.

**Thomas A. Schwartz** is the Distinguished Professor of History and Professor of Political Science and European Studies at Vanderbilt University. He is the author of *Lyndon Johnson and Europe: In the Shadow of Vietnam*, (Harvard University press, 2003) and *America's Germany: John J. McCloy and the Federal Republic of Germany* (Harvard University Press, 1991); and *Henry Kissinger and American Power: A Political Biography* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2020).

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 Review by Kevin Y. Kim, University of California, Los Angeles
 

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*The End of Ambition* tells a familiar story—the decline of US power after the Vietnam War—in an unfamiliar way. Instead of the usual tales about the anti-war movement and other forces bringing about what historian Allen Matusow called the “unraveling of America,” this book examines something we know surprisingly little about: Vietnam’s impact on US policy in the Third World.<sup>1</sup> Historiographically, this is a surprising gap; the Vietnam War is one of the field’s most heavily examined topics. From nearly every methodological angle and local and transnational scales, the war has inspired an enormous literature. Historically, the neglect is somewhat surprising, too. In 1961, after the journalist Stanley Karnow told Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy that Vietnam would probably be the United States’ greatest challenge, Kennedy reportedly replied, “Vietnam . . . We have thirty Vietnams a day here.”<sup>2</sup> Delving into the dilemmas facing US policymakers to which Kennedy referred, *End of Ambition* triangulates the United States, Vietnam, and the Third World as three places whose connections changed each place in unpredictable, at times explosive, ways.

The result is a valuable contribution to many fields, notably US decisionmaking, domestic politics, development, and decolonization. Written by one of US and international history’s most accomplished scholars, *End of Ambition* turns Kennedy’s quip into a shifting mosaic of local and global actors in the United States and the Third World. In the end, however, its author Mark Atwood Lawrence gives a new verdict on one entity: the US state. Complicating the usual narrative of decline, Lawrence presents the 1960s as a time of transformation and transition, setting a new pattern in US foreign policy on which President Richard Nixon and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, who are normally given credit for such changes, merely elaborated in the 1970s. Starting in the 1960s, spurred by Vietnam-era Third World developments, Lawrence argues convincingly, US foreign policy turned from a liberal quest for democracy and development to cautious accommodation with autocratic regimes in the name of stability, state power, and the postcolonial status quo.

Scholars of the Vietnam War, the Third World, and US foreign policy will recognize much of the story. *End of Ambition* is not, however, a predictable globalizing of the old yarn about the limits of US power. The author resists ‘quagmire’ arguments for explaining US and Third World behavior. There is no inevitable clash between US power and Third World nationalism. There are no spiraling US presidencies or Third World regimes, no relentless waves of revolutionary violence or *coups d’états* (though such motifs arise again and again).<sup>3</sup> As Lawrence says with respect to US-Iranian opposition to the aborted “Bandung II” Conference (1965) in Algiers, “a genuine overlap of interests” existed, his book maintains, between the United States and the Third World (193). Ultimately, while acknowledging mutual interests and responsibilities between the United States and its Third World partners, *The End of Ambition* concludes that their relations fell prey to growing conflict and contradiction—not the intimate collaboration which moments like Bandung II’s collapse promised. “Soaring expectations of American resources and activism,” Lawrence writes, “made disappointment and disgruntlement virtually inevitable.” While Third World actors bore great responsibility for this history, the author reserves his greatest criticism for US policymakers. “[T]he US failure to cope more constructively with the rise of the Third World,” Lawrence concludes, “engendered anti-Americanism, sowed the seeds of future turmoil, and limited the prospects of success” (310).

For this reader, the book’s familiar conclusion seems less important than its process—that is, the methodological routes *The End of Ambition* takes getting us there. At the center of the book is a fairly

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<sup>1</sup> Allen J. Matusow, *The Unraveling of America: A History of Liberalism in the 1960s* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1984).

<sup>2</sup> David Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest* (New York: Random House, 1992, orig. 1972), 77.

<sup>3</sup> For some classic works, see, among many examples, George C. Herring, *America’s Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950–1975* (New York: Wiley, 1979); George McT. Kahin, *Intervention: How America Became Involved in Vietnam* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986); Marilyn B. Young, *The Vietnam Wars, 1945–1990* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1991); Jeffrey P. Kimball, *Nixon’s Vietnam War* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998).

traditional construct: the White House, particularly the US president and his foreign policy advisors; national security agencies; and lower-level officials who held “significant authority” over “day-to-day” policy (7). Exploring the Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon administrations and five case studies on Brazil, India, Iran, Indonesia, and Rhodesia, Lawrence analyzes how this White House-led group built US relations with Third World governments. However, the US state in this book is far from all-powerful, or clear and unified in its intentions and actions. As in his earlier work on US, British, and French officialdom in post-World War II French Indochina, Lawrence portrays the US state as a highly fraught, contested place.<sup>4</sup> Already divided on their own, personally, ideologically, and politically, US policymakers, seen through a fast-whirring blender of policy debates, international events, and public controversies, managed a US state that often seems more like a scattered collage than a unitary political actor. Indeed, Lawrence emphasizes as one of his “most significant points” that Vietnam-era US policy mirrored US society (291). As a parallel project of domestic liberalism, US foreign policy was also driven by high idealism in a troublesome pluralistic landscape. No less than President Lyndon B. Johnson’s Great Society, it competed with “skeptical” voices, and was “riddled with uncertainties about methods and objectives” (291).

What makes *The End of Ambition* unique is this kaleidoscopic portrayal of US power. American and global realities collide in a whirlwind of personalities, agendas, and events. Siding with recent scholarship emphasizing President John F. Kennedy’s greater openness to the Third World in contrast with Johnson’s and Nixon’s blunter approaches, Lawrence softens their differences, placing all three on the same arc of growing accommodation with Third World autocracy (except India, whose growing alienation from US policy, under Prime Minister Indira Gandhi’s Congress Party, is the exception that proves the rule). Beneath them and a few high-level advisors like Robert Kennedy and McGeorge Bundy, Lawrence finds four schools of thought swirling in the US bureaucracy, ranging from Third World liberal internationalism to muscular US unilateralism. The chief strength of the book is not so much these analytical categories, but the way it deploys them. In one chapter after another, it depicts how US officials and Third World elites painstakingly navigated one another’s personalities, ideologies, domestic politics, and shifting international circumstances. Local and regional concerns like Brazilian left-wing populism, Rhodesian oil supply, and the Indonesia-Malaysia *Konfrontasi* (1963–1966) moved world events as much as global concerns like NATO and the IMF. Though centered on the US state, the book portrays the truly transnational landscape which US power sought to shape. At its Olympian heights, the book weaves anti-US protesters in Latin America, pro-white Rhodesia US conservatives, and embattled Western and Third World political elites as equally prominent elements in a global tapestry of power and protest. At its banal lows, it tracks US-Third World dynamics in petty matters like bureaucratic staff turnover, royal family corruption, or US business investments. The result is a hyper-realistic portrait of US policymaking—one which Kennedy and other historical actors who wrestled with “thirty Vietnams,” might have readily recognized.

Several issues arise from this approach. First, *The End of Ambition* so thoroughly operationalizes US-Third World politics that it tends to blur the global factions and outlooks at the center of its analysis. Events often seem less driven by intellectual differences than (as Lawrence says of Kennedy’s approach to Africa) “acute policy dilemmas” (71). “Strongpoint” Atlanticists like Under Secretary of State George Ball appear in various Third World contexts without clear Atlanticist biases. Elsewhere, it is hard to discern the ideas or influence of “globalists” like Africa specialist G. Mennen Williams or US Senator William Fulbright; strangely, their Third World liberalism appears, at times, voiceless or contradictory. Much of this reflects the book’s focus on White House-level diplomacy, where pragmatism and flexibility, instead of “central guiding principles,” reigned (22). This often leaves unresolved, however, the exact role that ideology played in US policy, whether as broad

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<sup>4</sup> Mark Atwood Lawrence, *Assuming the Burden: Europe and the American Commitment to War in Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

philosophical background or specific foreign policy beliefs (a problem that political scientists and historians have puzzled over for many decades).<sup>5</sup>

Second, while *The End of Ambition* makes its case about the Vietnam War's impact on US-Third World relations, the war's exact causal role is sometimes murky. At times, Vietnam-related issues clearly impacted US-Third World relations (e.g., the largely unmet US need for allied Third World troops). But often, US-Third World issues seem to have been entirely unrelated to Vietnam. Rather than a portrait of how Vietnam affected the Third World, what often emerges is something else equally striking: how the Third World presented many local iterations of the same story (US power versus Third World independence, Western neocolonialism versus Communism, authoritarian stability versus democratic reform). Encountering “hopeless muddles,” “least bad alternatives,” Western-educated “scholar-advisers,” and “regional proxies” (66, 219, 240, 308) from the Congo to West Irian, one senses that the Vietnam War was as much a symbolic conflict to the Third World as it was to the United States. Indeed, some of this study's most profound moments occur when US and Third World actors diverge over Vietnam's symbolic meanings, most profoundly in the case of the Johnson administration's stubborn application of Suharto's counterrevolutionary “success” in Indonesia to a much less hospitable Vietnam. As Lawrence suggests, Third World actors instinctively placed Vietnam in a larger pattern of US-Third World dynamics. Castroism, Nasserism, Dutch neocolonialism, and other local and global issues posed more immediate threats than the remote conflict in Vietnam.<sup>6</sup>

All of this, perhaps, is exactly the point. As Lawrence writes in the introduction, the war wrought the “end of ambition” in liberal US foreign policy not as a single engine but a “powerful accelerant” (6) of broader US and Third World trends. One might rue the book's other elisions: its relative inattention to key domestic and international institutions (especially the US Congress, United Nations, and IMF), its primarily bilateral approach between the United States and individual nations (slighting multilateral and regional dynamics in different parts of the Third World), or its often revealing but minor treatment of economic issues, a fast-growing subfield in decolonization and development studies.<sup>7</sup> The book's chief shortcoming may be its US-centered approach. The author, who has written sensitively about the need for non-Western voices in the historiography, presents Third World actors as important, if not always equal, players.<sup>8</sup> While strongest in its portrayal of Third World state elites—including tantalizing passages on Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi's delicate dance between US patronage and Iranian nationalism—*The End of Ambition* also includes nonstate dissidents, second-tier state actors, and student protesters. Still, the book's Washington-focused perspective leaves the non-US side of the story less fully explored.

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<sup>5</sup> See Alexander L. George, “The ‘Operational Code’: A Neglected Approach to the Study of Political Leaders and Decision-Making” (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 1967); Mark Schafer and Stephen G. Walker, eds., *Operational Code Analysis and Foreign Policy Roles* (New York: Routledge, 2021).

<sup>6</sup> On Nasserism and Castroism's long shadow before and after the 1960s, see Salim Yaqub, *Containing Arab Nationalism: The Eisenhower Doctrine and the Middle East* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), esp. Ch. 6; Tanya Harmer, *Allende's Chile and the Inter-American Cold War* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

<sup>7</sup> See, for instance, Christopher R. W. Dietrich, *Oil Revolution: Anticolonial Elites, Sovereign Rights, and the Economic Culture of Decolonization* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2017); David C. Engerman, *The Price of Aid: The Economic Cold War in India* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018); Christy Thornton, *Revolution in Development: Mexico and the Governance of the Global Economy* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2021); Muriam Haleh Davis, *Markets of Civilization: Islam and Racial Capitalism in Algeria* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2022). See also the special issue on the 1970s-era “New International Economic Order” in *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development*, vol. 6, no. 1 (2015): 1–233.

<sup>8</sup> Most recently, see Mark Atwood Lawrence, “Afterword: Patterns and Puzzles,” in *The Tricontinental Revolution: Third World Radicalism and the Cold War*, eds. R. Joseph Parrott and Mark Atwood Lawrence (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 332–346.

*The End of Ambition* shows, however, that no history of the Third World is complete without the United States. Sidestepping definitional questions of empire, hegemony, and neoliberalism, it offers a panoptic view of Washington's Third World—one in which US power ebbed and flowed from a potent but highly improvisational, flawed, insecure US state sprawled across the world stage. Rather than offering a clear verdict on US success or failure, the book leaves the reader with diverse possibilities: rejection (India), passivity (Rhodesia), right-wing stability (Brazil and Indonesia), close partnership (Mohammad Reza Shah's Iran), and catastrophe (Ayatollah Khomeini's Islamic Republic). It lays out, in agonizing detail, how Americans shifted their definitions of success by accommodating increasingly truculent Third World leaders and monstrous realities like the Suharto regime's mass killing and incarceration of over a million Indonesians. Vietnam's famous 'quagmire,' Lawrence makes clear, was worldwide. Throughout the Third World, US policymakers got stuck, sank deeper, or somehow extricated themselves and trudged elsewhere. Centered on the United States in a morally balanced way which neither reviles nor privileges US power, *End of Ambition* demonstrates the need for more scholarship that takes such a measured approach to US foreign policy. That one can take away multiple meanings and only deeper questions seems to be the underlying message of *The End of Ambition*.



Review by Alan McPherson, Temple University

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The scope of Mark Lawrence's long-awaited study of President Lyndon Johnson's Third World policies certainly does not speak to a loss of ambition. It tackles a still-fascinating administration's relationship with some of the largest, most influential governments in the 1960s and delves deeply into several bilateral and multilateral stories. The great mystery of this book is that its central question, "How did the Vietnam War alter the broad contours of American foreign policy in the 1960s," does not seem to be answered by most of its content (vii). Or else the answer seems to be *not much*.

To be sure, the book is original, important, and convincing. Lawrence argues that the Johnson foreign policy team responded to events in the developing world with an approach that was radically different from that of President John Kennedy. His first three chapters present an overview of the major gaps between the Kennedy and Johnson foreign policies. Kennedy talked a good liberal game and, in some cases, encouraged innovation and listened to the voices of Third World leaders. But, by the time of his assassination, he left an ambiguous, rudderless "mixed record" that often drifted into conservatism (22). Most useful is the author's taxonomy for Kennedy's advisers—a 'globalist' grouping including Under Secretary of State Chester Bowles and Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs 'Soapy' Williams, who championed decolonization; a 'nationbuilding' strand of thought headed by Deputy National Security Advisor Walt W. Rostow, who was more likely to prescribe solutions rather than listen to Third World leaders; the 'strongpoint' outlook of Secretary of State Dean Rusk and Under Secretary of State for Economic Affairs George Ball, who favored key allies; and the 'unilateralism' of most military advisers and Director Allen Dulles at the CIA. In later chapters, the book would have benefited from following more systematically how these lines of thinking gained or lost prominence.

The last five chapters take a case-study approach, examining one major country from each region of the world—Brazil, India, Iran, and Indonesia—and one region, Southern Africa. These are well chosen since in the 1960s it seemed that their destinies were "up for grabs" and that the paths their leaders chose influenced their region (12). In Brazil and Indonesia, Johnson backed right-wing coups and gave up on softening their edges over time. In Iran, Washington already faced an authoritarian Shah yet increased its friendliness to his repressive regime. Finally, the United States kept its distance from a non-aligned but democratic India and chose to follow the British lead rather than pressure Southern African white segregationists to cede power to black majorities.

Lawrence's sources and methodology are traditional but effective. He relies overwhelmingly on US government sources to analyze the positions of US foreign policy leaders. There is only a smattering of sources in foreign languages, and practically none gauging the views of other Americans. Given his intention to understand Johnston's advisers, this limitation is appropriate. Lawrence demonstrates his mastery of important issues in four countries and one region and of each relationship's historiography. He also makes good use of ideology, bureaucratic politics, and biography as tools to analyze US foreign policy. Particularly interesting is the prominent role of lesser-known advisers such as Romer Komer of the National Security Council, who usually do not appear in research on Vietnam (or Latin America).

Throughout the book, however, the real question that Lawrence answers is not about Vietnam but rather "Why did American leaders reverse their approach to the Third World in such a short span of time?" (3). I am not convinced that, as the author writes, "Vietnam played a crucial role in leading U.S. leaders to abandon their liberal preoccupations in favor of a more cautious approach." He argues that "mounting frustration sapped much of the confidence about development and democratization" of earlier in the decade and that the war brought "sharp criticism of the United States in many parts of the Third World" (5).

Happily, he does not reiterate the tired argument that Johnson was simply too 'distracted' by Vietnam to devote time to any other foreign or domestic pursuits, although he argues that, "as the war in Vietnam

consumed the administration's attention and commanded the nation's resources, Johnson increasingly prioritized stability over political and socioeconomic progress in the Third World" (291). The book plainly shows—and common sense dictates—that the US government had plenty of personnel who were devoted to non-Vietnam foreign policy. They could have carried over or enhanced Kennedy's attitudes and policies had they wished to do so.

Lawrence also acknowledges that Vietnam did not “by itself” transform Johnson's policy. He posits three other developments: “changes in American leadership, the rapidly shifting political landscape within the United States, and accelerating polarization in the Third World.” Vietnam “acted as a powerful accelerant” for these trends (6). The debate thus appears to be over this level of ‘power,’ and I was surprised to see that Vietnam in fact did not appear often as uppermost in the minds of either Third World leaders or their Washington counterparts.

Vietnam played a role, of course. In Brazil, Johnson appreciated the Castelo Branco regime for backing his Gulf of Tonkin fabrications, granting diplomatic recognition to South Vietnam, and sending diplomats, medical supplies, and coffee. The story in Tehran was similar—some rhetoric, some trade. Vietnam most affected US-Indian and US-Indonesia relations. Indian leaders spoke out against bombings in Vietnam and Prime Minister Indira Gandhi sent birthday greetings to Vietnamese President Ho Chi Minh, which irked Washington, and Johnson used food aid to try to silence New Delhi on Vietnam. The coup by Suharto in Indonesia, according to US ambassador in Saigon Henry Cabot Lodge, was “a direct result of our having taken a firm stand in Vietnam” (238).

Yet Brasília never contributed militarily to Vietnam as Washington wanted it to and soon retreated from even its meager support. While India (like Indonesia under Sukarno) proved critical of the war in Vietnam, it also stuck to its non-aligned policy of playing the Soviets against the Americans. The Shah tolerated Iranian press outlets that were critical of the war. And while Washington hated Sukarno's anti-Vietnam rhetoric, his overthrow occurred for overwhelmingly internal reasons. Lodge's boast was likely just that—a ploy to increase his value in White House eyes. Lawrence himself admits that there was “little evidence” to support the claim that the anti-Communist countercoup of 1965 was due to the US role in Vietnam (249). In Southern Africa, meanwhile, there seems to be no evidence that Vietnam played any role in Washington's lack of interest. On Rhodesia, for instance, Lawrence notes that he found “no explicit mention” of Vietnam in the documentary record (281).

More important than Vietnam in accounting for the change in outlook were the attitudes of Johnson and his advisers. Johnson certainly did “[lack] both Kennedy's interest in the Third World and his patience for debate about American policy” (7). The Texan was not ignorant of world affairs, but he valued stability above all and cared only for the opinions of other political leaders, not their people.

Also more salient than Vietnam were the other two developments Lawrence notes, especially the rising polarization among poor nations. As his chapter on “a world of dilemmas” and his case studies largely demonstrate, most Third World leaders were not particularly concerned with the Vietnam War. They argued over paths to development, the value of democracy versus ‘order,’ and Cold War ideology. Their statements of opposition to Washington's Southeast Asia adventure often seemed geared more to scoring points with internal audiences than to determining policy orientations.

Counterfactuals are always tricky, but had the Vietnam War never occurred or never involved the United States, it seems likely that Brazil and Indonesia would still have had coups, that Washington would have embraced them, and that Iran would have continued down its self-destructive path with US military assistance. Indian leaders may have been somewhat less strident in their criticism but probably no less wedded to non-alignment. US policy in Southern Africa, driven by US racism and loyalty to allies, would have seen no alteration.

Finally, a major historiographical question that I hope Lawrence takes up in his response to this roundtable is whether we should see Johnson as a *transitional* or a *transformational* foreign policy president. After reading this book, the answer remains blurry but the fault lines appear sharper than ever. Certainly, there should no longer be any question that Johnson failed to carry forward the Kennedy legacy in almost every foreign policy area. Still, was he closer to President Richard Nixon or to his predecessor? Lawrence writes that “Johnson anticipated . . . the approach embraced by Nixon and Kissinger” (7) and that his presidency was “a crucial period of transition” (10). It would seem, therefore, that the answer is transition rather than transformation.

Yet Lawrence suggests transformation in his background chapter on Johnson, stating that his administration “largely resolved the ambiguities of the Kennedy presidency and set down policies that would persist after Johnson had left office” (80). Lawrence could have delved more deeply into his significant racism and paranoia, traits that not only served him poorly as a foreign policy president but also paralleled those of his successor. In his conclusion, Lawrence argues that Nixon and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger’s major addition to the Johnson policy of seeking stability in the Third World was rhetorical: they dubbed it the “Nixon Doctrine” (288). The two men articulated the policy more clearly than Johnson had, but “the ideas at the core of the Nixon Doctrine had circulated for years within the Johnson presidency” (290). So which is it—was Johnson transitional or transformational? In US-Latin American relations, the debate has long raged, and *The End of Ambition* should add fuel to it.<sup>1</sup>

Despite some flaws, Mark Lawrence has achieved with this book an impressive feat of scholarship that should be read and debated by all scholars of US foreign policy. The voluminous historiography on Vietnam has taken much of the attention away from other parts of US-Third World relations in the 1960s, and *The End of Ambition* does much to redress that disparity.

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<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, Joseph Tulchin, “The Promise of Progress: U.S. Relations with Latin America during the Administration of Lyndon B. Johnson,” in Warren Cohen and Nancy Tucker, eds., *Lyndon Johnson Confronts the World* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994): 211-243; William O. Walker III, “Mixing the Sweet with the Sour: Kennedy, Johnson, and Latin America,” in Diane Kunz, ed., *The Diplomacy of the Crucial Decade: American Foreign Relations during the 1960s* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994): 42-79; Peter Sanchez, “Continuity and Change in U.S. Foreign Policy toward Latin America: The Alliance for Progress under Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson,” *Journal of the Third World Spectrum* (1995): 1-19; Jeff Shesol, *Mutual Contempt: Lyndon Johnson, Robert Kennedy, and the Feud that Defined a Decade* (New York: Norton, 1997); Stephen Rabe, *The Most Dangerous Area in the World: John F. Kennedy Confronts Communist Revolution in Latin America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Alan McPherson, *Yankee No! Anti-Americanism in U.S.-Latin American Relations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003); Jeffrey Taffet, *Foreign Aid as Foreign Policy: The Alliance for Progress in Latin America* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2007); Michael Grow, *U.S. Presidents and Latin American Interventions: Pursuing Regime Change in the Cold War* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press), 2008; Thomas Tunstall Allcock, *Thomas C. Mann: President Johnson, the Cold War, and the Restructuring of Latin American Foreign Policy* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2018); Stephen Rabe, *Kissinger and Latin America: Intervention, Human Rights, and Diplomacy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2020); and Andrew Kirkendall, *Hemispheric Alliances: Liberal Democrats and Cold War Latin America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2022).

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 Review by David Prentice, Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at Oklahoma State University
 

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Studies on American declinism and strategic shifts are as old as the Republic. “The jeremiad—the tale of woe—has been a second national anthem for us,” George Herring aptly observed.<sup>1</sup> And with each stanza has come reevaluations of America’s role in the world. Classics like John Lewis Gaddis’s *Strategies of Containment* and Paul Kennedy’s *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, or more recently Ray Dalio’s *Principles for Dealing with the Changing World Order* sketch the ebb and flow of nations and their global aspirations.<sup>2</sup> Rare is the book that captures with analytical precision the moment at which dreams turned to disillusionment and ambition was cast off in favor of stability.

Mark Atwood Lawrence’s *The End of Ambition* is a masterful account of how and when the United States discarded the “ambitious liberalism” of the early 1960s (vii). Confronted by rising discord at home and an escalating war in Vietnam, President Lyndon Johnson accepted the need for stability and reliable partners in the developing world. Through five succinct international case studies (Brazil, India, Iran, Indonesia, southern Africa), Lawrence convincingly demonstrates how Johnson’s policies “anticipated” Richard Nixon’s realism and the Nixon Doctrine of regional responsibility and self-help (7).

But this book is so much more than that. Lawrence brings forth treasures new and old. His first book, *Assuming the Burden*, excelled at crafting presidential profiles, capturing the divisions within American officialdom on Europe and Vietnam, and recognizing the dilemmas of US power as the United States grappled with the First Indochina War.<sup>3</sup> Here, Lawrence perfects this methodology, giving readers an excellent synopsis of the engagement of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations with the Third World.

Beginning with Kennedy, Lawrence explains the confidence and soaring rhetoric of what G. Calvin Mackenzie and Robert Weisbrot called “the liberal hour.”<sup>4</sup> Eschewing a bipolar worldview, Kennedy spoke of helping the Third World “break the bonds of mass misery” and looked to align America with the forces of democracy and reform whether or not they embraced his nation’s ideals or its Cold War outlook (1, 18-20). Yet, as Lawrence notes, this “propensity for bold rhetoric” lacked a unifying grand strategy so that it amounted to “a conglomeration of tendencies” (16, 22). The president’s pragmatism—a key tenet of the postwar liberal faith—was complicated by factions within the foreign policy establishment (23).<sup>5</sup> Advocates of globalism, nationbuilding, strongpoint or traditional allies, and unilateralism all wrangled over America’s approach to the Third World, and Lawrence fairly and concisely explains each group and its motivations (26-37). Facing a challenging international and domestic political context, Kennedy’s policies also varied with the winds of change. “When [Johnson] gained the presidency,” Lawrence writes, he “inherited a world of dilemmas” and “a muddled set of policies that offered no blueprint for the future” (17, 41).

Johnson was not rudderless, though, and Lawrence wonderfully explains his core principles. From his experience with the New Deal and World War II, he developed an “elitist vision of geopolitics” that assumed that decisive leaders drove statecraft and that a strong, activist central government was well-suited to

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<sup>1</sup> Commencement address, George Herring, Roanoke College, 2011. I am grateful to Professor Herring for sharing portions of this speech.

<sup>2</sup> John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security during the Cold War*, rev. and expanded ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989); and Ray Dalio, *Principles for Dealing with The Changing World Order* (New York: Avid Reader Press, 2021).

<sup>3</sup> Mark Atwood Lawrence, *Assuming the Burden: Europe and the American Commitment to War in Vietnam* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005).

<sup>4</sup> G. Calvin Mackenzie and Robert Weisbrot, *The Liberal Hour: Washington and the Politics of Change in the 1960s* (New York: Penguin, 2008).

<sup>5</sup> On pragmatism and liberalism, see Kevin Mattson, *When America Was Great: The Fighting Faith of Postwar Liberalism* (New York, Routledge, 2004), 7, 96.

implement economic and social reforms (82). His formative years in the Texas Hill Country made him sympathetic to the world's poor, sick, and hungry. But he also believed that Communists were bent on "world domination" and that the Third World was inseparable from and secondary to the larger Cold War (86). He disdained the soft headedness of those who could justify aid to those who criticized US foreign policy. Ever the dealmaker, he expected quid pro quo. "When I put my wheat down here, and it costs me a few hundred million," Johnson barked at his agricultural secretary, "I want to see what [India is] putting on the other side" and not "bullshit and a lot of criticism of the President" over Vietnam. "What are they going to do for the United States?" he asked (164-165). He expected similar loyalty and like mindedness from his subordinates. Secretary of State Dean Rusk and soon-to-be national security advisor Walt Rostow rose in influence whereas the old Kennedy globalists fell out of favor. In short, Johnson quietly exchanged Kennedy's nuance and transformative Third World aspirations for stability and friendly partnerships.

Johnson's domestic agenda and the subsequent traumas of Vietnam reinforced this shift. The president believed that political momentum was fleeting.<sup>6</sup> Lawrence adds that any foreign policy crisis "would distract Congress and the American public from his priorities, call attention to his lack of experience in international affairs, and embolden conservative critics whose hawkishness in international affairs might put pressure on the administration to act more boldly abroad than it cared to do" (91). Global calm was paramount if he was to win the 1964 election and enact the Great Society. "I knew the Congress as well as I know Lady Bird and I knew that the day it exploded into a major debate on the war" in Vietnam, he recalled to Doris Kearns Goodwin, "that day would be the beginning of the end of the Great Society."<sup>7</sup> After the legislative triumphs of 1964-1965, Johnson faced ever greater limits as Americans turned on liberalism in the wake of Vietnam's escalation, the 1965 Watts riots, and the antiwar protests of the late 1960s. "The rhetoric of social uplift, a political winner as recently as 1965, gave way to a new emphasis on law and order in 1966," Lawrence writes (94-95). Focused on social and economic problems at home, Americans had little appetite for an activist foreign policy in the Third World. Consequently, Congress scrutinized US commitments and foreign aid. Moreover, Johnson and his advisors acutely felt the pains of military overstretch. President Richard Nixon may have popularized the phrase "no more Vietnams," but as Lawrence maintains, it was a sentiment his predecessor shared.<sup>8</sup>

Having superbly sketched the philosophies and contours of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, Lawrence proceeds to delve into his five chosen countries to bear out his argument that Johnson prefigured Nixon's foreign policy. Brazil, which underwent a 1964 military coup, demonstrated the president's readiness to accept creeping authoritarianism in the name of curbing radicalism in Latin America and as a means of promoting reform. Iran and its shah similarly won White House respect for its top-down reforms, embodied in the White Revolution, as well as its growing economic and military strength. Before Nixon hailed Iran as an exemplar of the Nixon Doctrine, the Johnson administration saw it as the "keystone of American plans" in the Middle East and "a new sub-regional super-power" (207-208).<sup>9</sup> Johnson believed that the United States had achieved similar success in Indonesia as that country underwent a military coup that supplanted the nationalist leader Sukarno. As in Brazil, the administration turned a blind eye to the murder of Communists and suspected dissidents. Instead, it emphasized that country's elite-driven, technocratic reforms and "Western-leaning non-alignment" (240, 242). Pleased that America had turned a diffident Southeast Asian neutral into a partner, Johnson ramped up aid to Indonesia. Conversely, his displeasure at South Asian

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<sup>6</sup> On momentum, haste, and Vietnam see Mackenzie and Weisbrot, *The Liberal Hour*, 93, 176; Eric Alterman and Kevin Mattson, *The Cause: The Fight for American Liberalism from Franklin Roosevelt to Barack Obama* (New York: Viking, 2012), 202.

<sup>7</sup> Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), 282-283.

<sup>8</sup> Richard Nixon Library Birthplace and Foundation, Yorba Linda, CA (hereafter RNLBF), Pre-Presidential Series 208:101:14, Nixon, "To Keep the Peace," 19 October 1968, radio broadcast.

<sup>9</sup> For Iran and the Nixon Doctrine, see for instance, Osamah F. Khalil, "The Crossroads of the World: U.S. and British Foreign Policy Doctrines and the Construct of the Middle East, 1902-2007," *Diplomatic History* Vol. 38, 2 (April 2014): 299-344.

nations led to curtailed assistance to the subcontinent. India, the perennial hope of so many in the Kennedy administration, revealed Johnson's frustrations with critical Third World nations. As Lawrence notes, he misunderstood that country's strategic nonalignment as well as the domestic politics that both reinforced that preference and framed the rhetoric and decisions of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. Chafing at her criticism and trying to balance India and its rival Pakistan, the White House increasingly withdrew from its relationship with India. Last, the fact that the president who was most responsible for twentieth-century desegregation and civil rights settled for the status quo in southern Africa brings home Lawrence's thesis on the winding down of US aspirations. Judging Africa to be on the periphery of American interests, the White House deferred to British leadership on the region's apartheid regimes. "This is first a UK problem, then a UN problem, and only then is it a US problem," Rusk argued in 1967 (278). The American public's tilt toward law and order and business's willingness to work with racist regimes crimped the administration's efforts to justify British-American and later UN sanctions. Overall, Lawrence's chosen countries show that in an age of political, economic, and military limits, Johnson increasingly favored stability over idealism, democratization, and reform.

Lawrence chose his countries well. Each was significant in its day and remains so today. Excepting Rhodesia—now Zimbabwe—they are among the top twenty economies in the world, and as America seems poised to confront China, Indonesia's and India's importance only grows. Moreover, these chapters provide excellent national and regional overviews that will be useful to graduate students. International histories are notoriously difficult to research and write, but Lawrence well structures his narrative so that it avoids becoming a disorienting, merry-go-round of topics and nations.

I wish that Lawrence had utilized more foreign archives, though. When he does—as in the case of Brazil and South Africa—he provides valuable insights on how those nations interpreted US policies and politics. Granted, research in Iran is likely not a possibility, but additional multi-archival research would have developed the interplay between US foreign policy and local actors. For instance, did authoritarian allies (like Brazil and Indonesia) anticipate the Nixon Doctrine, and if so, did they realize that they had greater leverage or freedom to maneuver toward autocracy? And how did these pivotal Third World nations interpret the end of American ambition? My multi-archival research on Vietnam, Australia, and Great Britain in 1967-1969 shows that these three anticipated the Nixon Doctrine and began shifting their foreign policies well in advance of President Nixon's July 1969 press conference on Guam Island.<sup>10</sup> These nations read the writing on the wall, and I am sure that Lawrence's countries did as well.

The book would also have benefited from a full chapter on the transition from Johnson to Nixon. Lawrence's conclusion convincingly covers the historiography and its portrayal of Nixon's foreign policy as a paradigm shift. Indeed, throughout the 1968 campaign and his first term in office, Nixon worked at establishing the belief that his foreign policy was a necessary adjustment to the limits of US power and a decisive break from his predecessor's activism.<sup>11</sup> Lawrence counters that "eloquence and analytical incisiveness should not, however, be confused with originality" since the Johnson administration had already moved toward this path (290). Here, Lawrence adds a perfect metaphor: both the July 1969 moon landing and the Nixon Doctrine

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<sup>10</sup> See Prentice, "Everything Depends on Us Alone? President Nguyen Van Thieu's Vietnamization Strategy" in Trinh Luu and Truong Vu, eds., *Republican Vietnam, 1963-1975: War, Society, Diaspora* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, forthcoming); "Waltzing Matilda' Out of Vietnam: Grand Strategy, Politics, and the Decision to Remove Australian Military Forces from Vietnam," *Journal of Military History*, Vol. 86, 3 (July 2022): 642-669; "J. William Fulbright and the Retreat of American Power: Anglo-Australian Views of Congress and U.S. Neo-Isolationism," in Alessandro Brogi, Giles Scott-Smith, David Snyder, eds., *The Legacy of J. William Fulbright* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2019), 93-113.

<sup>11</sup> See for instance, RNLBF, Pre-Presidential Series 214:35:18, Nixon, "The Debate of 1968: A Test for America," 28 March 1968, NBC Radio Network Address; "Address to the Nation on the War in Vietnam," Nixon, 3 November 1969, available at <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/november-3-1969-address-nation-war-vietnam>.

speech were products of years of work (290-291). His argument on the antecedents of Nixon's foreign policy is the book's most novel contribution to the literature, and the one most likely to be challenged by scholars. All the more reason to expand the discussion and develop a Johnson-Nixon transition chapter.

Having mined the Johnson library for material related to the Nixon Doctrine and Vietnamization, I would suggest that there is much material that would have strengthened Lawrence's case. He is right in suggesting that US policymakers were moving toward something like the Nixon Doctrine from 1965 on. The social, military, and economic traumas of 1968 hastened this process. Noting these problems, Rostow argued that it was time for US allies to "take a larger hand in cooperative enterprises with us and diminish the abnormal burden borne by the United States."<sup>12</sup> The Pentagon and State Department were moving in a similar direction.<sup>13</sup> Nixon and Johnson realized that the American people and their congressional representatives were demanding strategic retrenchment and limited activism abroad. Both presidents hoped that by preempting these domestic pressures they could mitigate the effects on American internationalism and credibility. In short, the book needs a full chapter, perhaps one that is centered on 1968, to carry the reader from one administration to the next.

A separate conclusion would also have given Lawrence space to explore alternatives to Johnson's and Nixon's circumscribed foreign policies. "The transformation of U.S. foreign policy," he fairly notes, "was in many ways a rational adjustment by American leaders at a time of national crisis. Liberal ambitions in the early sixties had outstripped American resources, expertise, and ideological appeal and lacked precision with respect to either goals or the tools needed to bring democracy and development to the Third World" (307). Hence, Lawrence continues, "American leaders understandably shifted away from grand aspiration and instead prioritized order and stability" (307). But stability came with real and lasting costs. The Shah's rule collapsed in the 1970s. In Brazil, Indonesia, and southern Africa, undemocratic regimes persisted into the 1980s-1990s. And the United States had decades of strained relations with the world's largest democracy, India. Lawrence's criticisms of Johnson and Nixon are just, and second-guessing leaders is difficult, especially in a nuanced book such as this one. He is not wrong to chide them for "lost opportunities to establish a world order more amenable to U.S. leadership over the long term" or for instead creating "a world of uncertainty and a host of new dilemmas that would beset the United States in the 1970s and beyond" (4, 14). Still, the reader would have benefited from a contemplative conclusion that sets out clear alternatives.

Finally, I wondered if the November 1963 assassination of South Vietnam's President Ngo Dinh Diem, which receives a passing mention (190), should be described as having played a larger role in Johnson's thinking. Johnson's opposition to the coup and subsequent inferences about the South Vietnamese instability that followed Diem's death hardened his hands-off attitude toward meddling in foreign politics and his preference for military strongmen over democratic nationbuilding.<sup>14</sup> The parallels to Brazil and Indonesia seem obvious.

But these are minor criticisms. Lawrence's approach to presidential history is among the best there is. His insight into the Kennedy administration being "a conglomeration of tendencies" (22) could be said of many a White House. His understanding of policymaking factions highlights the complex and contentious nature of executing foreign policy. Nevertheless, presidents are decisive on these debates, Lawrence adds, since they "set the parameters within which conflict occurred" (7). He also nails the presidential profiles. Having extensively studied Johnson and his actions in 1967-1968, I have found no truer portrait than the man

<sup>12</sup> Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library, Austin, Texas (hereafter LBJPL), National Security Files-Rostow, Box 6, folder "Vietnam: March-June 1968 (1 of 2)," #14, Rostow to LBJ, 2 April 1968, memo.

<sup>13</sup> See for instance, Enclosure A to report by J-5 to JCS, "Military Strategy for FY 1970 Through FY 1977 (U)," c. August 1967, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 10:569-588; LBJPL, National Security Files-Agency File, Box 55, folder "U.S. Foreign Policy: Current Issues in a Longer-Term Perspective," #1, Policy Planning Council, December 1968, memo.

<sup>14</sup> Andrew Gawthorpe, *To Build as Well as Destroy: American Nation Building in South Vietnam* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018), 50-52.

Lawrence describes here. He also gets the context right, masterfully surveying Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon's international and domestic political environment. The waning of the liberal hour is the essential backdrop.

In the current era of neo-liberal disillusionment and renewed talk of American declinism, *The End of Ambition* is a timely and engaging read. As Lawrence notes, the 1960s was another chapter in America's "cyclical" engagement with the world (13). Hope springs eternal that US presidents will better manage the gap between ambition and means, idealism and realism than their predecessors. But, as Lawrence indicates, historians who wish for dramatic breaks between presidents may be expecting too much.<sup>15</sup> Rather than cycles, perhaps we should see a tidal flow with administrations moving as the public shifts from despairing of ambition and relinquishing global burdens to renewed national optimism and international engagement. *The End of Ambition* is an outstanding model for thinking and writing about the ebbs and flows of US foreign relations.

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<sup>15</sup> Regarding recent foreign policy continuity between the Trump and Biden administrations, see Richard Haass, "The Age of America First: Washington's Flawed New Foreign Policy Consensus," *Foreign Affairs* 100, no.6 (November/December 2021): 85-90, 92-98.



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 Review by Sandra Scanlon, University College Dublin
 

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The story begins with the presidency of John F. Kennedy and concludes with that of Richard Nixon, but it is President Lyndon Johnson whose presence pervades Mark Atwood Lawrence's impressive analysis of the shift in United States policies toward the Global South during the 1960s era. While demonstrating the dramatic changes in attitude, tone, and purpose regarding the Third World from the Kennedy to the Johnson administrations, Lawrence clearly articulates the weak foundations on which Kennedy's "unprecedentedly grandiose language" rested (20). This is not to deny the significance of Kennedy's attempts to set relations between the US and emergent democracies on a new footing. Rather, Lawrence concludes that Kennedy "neither articulated nor possessed any detailed blueprint for coping with the problems he so often described in colorful and urgent ways" (21).

As such, this study both confirms the idea of continuity between administrations, and emphasizes the importance of personality, political objectives, and contingency in how international policies were developed and implemented. Just as Kennedy's vision for a new geopolitical order infused his perceptions of US interests in the Third World, so too did Johnson's personal ambitions define much of his administration's approach to relations with states in Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America.<sup>1</sup> His keen focus on domestic policy goals and related concerns about political support at home, a fixation on global leaders' positions on Vietnam, and a personal focus on reciprocity in relation to US aid served to undermine the bold objectives that Kennedy had set out to achieve. Writing specifically of the US relationship with India, Lawrence concluded that by the end of the Johnson years "[l]ittle remained of hopes that had once run high" (176). Indeed, by the time of the supposedly dramatic shift to the Nixon Doctrine, this reduction of direct US engagement seemed merely a newly grandiose way of describing the realities of existing policy relating to the Global South.<sup>2</sup>

Lawrence offers five case studies, each of which is distinctive geographically in terms of its evolving relationship with the US during the Johnson years. Dealing with Brazil, India, Iran, Indonesia, and southern Africa in separate chapters, Lawrence relies heavily on US sources but expertly avoids discounting the myriad ways in which national leaders and their interests shaped US policy and limited the administration's room for maneuver.<sup>3</sup> His focus is often on the influence of the president—and the significance of personnel change at various levels of the administration—but Lawrence also demonstrates the intricacies of policymaking at the coalface of relations with other states. Furthermore, this work highlights how states proved able to withstand America influence and Washington's calls for change. In the case of Indonesia, for instance, Lawrence describes its regimes as mostly "impervious" to US control (214). As such, this is certainly not a study of straightforward US power projection, nor an inward-looking account of the internal determinants of US policymaking. Lawrence draws on the rich histories of the states he discusses to demonstrate how Johnson was forced to adopt unpalatable policies in response to challenges to US hegemony.

Still, Lawrence argues that unlike Kennedy, Johnson cared little about the internal workings of those states "discounting the ways in which social change, economic desperation, and weak institutions drove unrest and

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<sup>1</sup> For studies of personality and policy relating to Johnson's foreign policies, see Fredrik Logevall, *Choosing War: The Lost Chance for Peace and the Escalation of War in Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), Thomas Tunstall Alcock, "The Virtues of Moderation: Foreign Policy and the 1964 Presidential Election," in Andrew Johnstone and Andrew Priest, eds, *US Presidential Elections and Foreign Policy: Candidates, Campaigns, and Global Politics from FDR to Bill Clinton* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2017) and "'A Uniquely American Display of Excellence': Lyndon Johnson and Presidential Cultural Diplomacy," *Diplomatic History*, 45:4, September 2021.

<sup>2</sup> For discussion of the limitations of the Nixon administration's reorientation of foreign policy, see Robert K. Brigham, *Reckless: Henry Kissinger and the Tragedy of Vietnam* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2018).

<sup>3</sup> Lawrence's approach nonetheless prioritizes US policymaking and is limited in its scope in terms of discussing how global processes of decolonization altered the international environment. See Leslie James and Elizabeth Leake, eds., *Decolonization and the Cold War: Negotiating Independence* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

increased the likelihood of radical outcomes” (82). If Johnson’s personal predilection toward stability across the Third World was influential, so too, Lawrence makes clear, were wider institutional and ideological attitudes towards individual regions. This is perhaps best demonstrated in the case of Brazil, where US policymakers were much less inclined than elsewhere to tolerate nationalism or non-aligned tendencies. Here, assumptions of US predominance in Latin America as a whole resulted in broad support for authoritarianism as a bulwark against non-alignment.<sup>4</sup> While distinctive in this regard, Johnson’s ultimate embrace of increasingly antidemocratic and repressive regimes in Brazil, “reflected his tolerance for authoritarianism, his belief that economic progress depended far more on cooperation with like-minded elites than the legitimacy of U.S. aims at the grassroots, and his desperation for international support of his policy in Vietnam” (108). This pattern is again reflected in relations with Iran’s authoritarian regime during this period, although in this case it is clear that “geographical distance and shallower historical connections to Iran... meant that American leaders felt less squeamishness about democracy than they did in Brazil” (178).

Relations with India stand in contrast, in that Johnson had low expectations from the outset, in part because India’s “non-alignment and dedication to a socialist model of economic development affronted [Johnson] far more than his predecessor” (142). While the administration remained willing to support the Brazilian regime even as it openly challenged US policy and interests, the same was not true in India. Revealing Johnson’s determination that aid would require clear reciprocity, Indian challenges to broader US policies were met with vocal and punitive attacks from Washington. This resulted in a relationship that faced discord and recrimination, and which ultimately defied early promise of engagement to one that simply “muddled along” (174). The same could not be said of Indonesia, where Johnson broadly followed Kennedy’s policies despite growing concerns about President Sukarno’s open challenges to the United States. Indonesia’s transformation under President Suharto was again met with US support for authoritarianism, and prompted optimistic claims from the administration that US policy in Vietnam was indeed shoring up anti-Communism across the region, despite CIA challenges to such assertions. While Lawrence’s analysis of US responses to crisis in Rhodesia confirms the broader points relating to the loss of ‘ambition’ in US policy toward the Global South, it is also the chapter that demands further analysis of more wholesale American disregard for Africa at institutional levels.

Vietnam looms large but does not dominate this study, and the significance of the war is at once impossible to ignore and difficult to fully calculate. Vietnam was not, Lawrence insists, the only reason that many Third World states turned against the US in the latter half of the 1960s, but it clearly played a major role. Similarly, the war “contributed to LBJ’s preference for stability in the broader Third World largely because of its effects on domestic politics,” as the war’s controversy made him keen to reduce any other sources of political “unpredictability and turmoil” (98).<sup>5</sup> Public anxieties over Vietnam contributed to a broader public and congressional rejection of foreign aid. The war’s enormous economic costs and its disproportionate burden on military resources limited any possibilities for direct US intervention in potential sites of crisis and conflict. When the rare possibility of intervention arose, such as when Johnson suggested a US military escort for Israeli ships that were attempting to pass the Strait of Tiran then closed by Egypt, the potential of congressional fears of another Gulf of Tonkin-style military authorization quickly forced the administration to abandon its proposal. Additional burdens wrought by the war, not least the extent to which US military operations in Vietnam relied on the flow of Arab oil, weakened American leverage with potentially antagonistic states in the region. The war ultimately limited American options and enhanced White House support for those leaders (the Shah of Iran and President Suharto most notably) who supported US

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<sup>4</sup> See “Beyond and Between Cold War Blocs,” Special Issue of *The International History Review*, Volume 37, (2015), Thomas C. Field Jr., Stella Krepp, Vanni Pettinà, eds., *Latin America and the Global Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020), and Tanya Harmer and Alberto Martin Alvarez, eds., *Toward a Global History of Latin America’s Revolutionary Left* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2021).

<sup>5</sup> For further discussion of Johnson’s attempts to withstand domestic challenges to his foreign policies, see Sandra Scanlon, *The Pro-War Movement: Domestic Support for the Vietnam War and the Making of Modern American Conservatism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2013).

intervention in Southeast Asia. But these state-focused chapters reveal that the ambitions exhibited by the Kennedy administration would nonetheless have faced considerable challenges. Even without Vietnam, Cold War mentalities suffused thinking about how to deal with countries even hinting at non-alignment. Prominent ideas about US influence in Latin America and elsewhere, and the relative economic potential of certain regions, also challenged the extent to which American policymakers embraced policies that posed any real challenge to US interests.

Certain questions remain unanswered, less because Lawrence does not address them than because their scope requires much deeper analysis. How and in what ways did ideas about race influence policymakers' responses to crises within the Third World? Lawrence argues throughout that domestic turmoil challenged the administration's relationship with Congress and its propensity for caution abroad. Lawrence notes that political and social divisions over civil rights during the late 1960s diminished Johnson's willingness to take a bolder stand against Rhodesia's white minority government, leading it to rely heavily on Britain in the region, but the wider implications of American racial attitudes are not considered.<sup>6</sup> Lawrence posits at the outset that "with the benefit of hindsight, American decisions stand out for engendering doubts, both abroad and at home, about the morality of U.S. foreign policy and Washington's claims to global leadership" (4). Lawrence's case studies contribute significantly to addressing how concepts of morality in foreign policy are dependent on institutional and individual perceptions of human value, rather than an overarching ideological framework. As the study of southern Africa shows, there is considerable scope for further work in this area.

Lawrence concludes his own ambitious and far-reaching study by noting that the end of ambition and American retrenchment in the face of domestic turmoil and increasingly complicated geopolitical environments did not serve US interests in the long-term, but rather provided the basis for additional crises. While heralding the "[e]loquence and analytical incisiveness" of Nixon and Kissinger's approach to world affairs, he insists that this not be "confused with originality" (290). In contributing to new ways of approaching our engagement with the global implications of the Vietnam War, and indeed our understanding of the Johnson administration, he cannot be accused of lacking any such originality.

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<sup>6</sup> Scholars of US foreign relations have long recognized the significance of policymakers' racialized ideas; for recent summary see Paul Kramer, "Shades of Sovereignty: Racialized Power, the United States and the World," in Frank Costigliola and Michael J. Hogan, eds, *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016) and Adrienne Lentz-Smith, "The Unbearable Whiteness of Grand Strategy," in Elizabeth Borgwardt, Christopher McKnight Nichols, and Andrew Preston, eds, *Rethinking American Grand Strategy* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2021). While Kramer, and others such as Oliver Charbonneau in "Colonizing Workers: Labor, Race, and U.S. Military Governance in the Southern Philippines," *Modern American History*, Vol. 4, Issue 1, (2021), have constructed analyses of US colonial governance, the work to fully integrate narratives from the Global South remain limited.

Review by Thomas A. Schwartz, Vanderbilt University

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Mark Lawrence's *The End of Ambition* is an extraordinarily impressive book, which has already been honored by the Society of Historians of American Foreign Relations with its Robert H. Ferrell prize. Superbly written and researched, Lawrence's manuscript is a genuine joy to read. It avoids jargon, is structured logically and consistently, and explains complicated political, military, and economic situations in a readable and understandable fashion. The footnotes reflect how much information Lawrence has managed to summarize and analyze in clear and compelling prose. I really stand in awe at how well he has handled this material.

Having recently finished a book on Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, which covers the foreign policy period immediately after the Lawrence volume, I had a strong interest in how Lawrence handled the foreign policy that the Nixon Administration inherited.<sup>1</sup> One of the many contributions of the book is its demonstration of how much continuity there was between the end of the Johnson Presidency and Nixon-era foreign policies, a continuity shaped by the impact of the Vietnam War. For those historians who admire the innovations of the Nixon era, or those who deplore what they see as President Richard Nixon and Kissinger's *realpolitik* approach compared to the idealism of the Kennedy-Johnson era, this book is a welcome response, making it clear how closely the Nixon Administration ultimately followed in the path set by the end of Lyndon Johnson's presidency.

Lawrence's central achievement in this book is its providing, through five case studies, a perceptive and insightful answer to the question of how the Vietnam War affected American foreign policy outside of Vietnam. This question is also strongly connected to one that has excited the American popular imagination a great deal, namely the impact of the assassination of President John Kennedy on American foreign policy and overall American history. Having grappled myself with these questions on the issue of American policy toward Western Europe, I know this is an enormously complex question.<sup>2</sup> Lawrence's approach offers a particularly insightful way to address the question. Choosing five significant case studies—Brazil, India, Iran, Indonesia, and Rhodesia/South Africa, Lawrence posits three central factors in understanding the changes from Kennedy to Johnson: the shift in personnel within the administrations between Kennedy and Johnson, the transformation of domestic politics within the United States, and the shift in the viewpoints of Third World nations themselves. He then does a masterful job of exploring each case study, recognizing that the Kennedy administration left unanswered questions in each case that Johnson was forced to confront. (Given the Kennedy nostalgia within popular culture that afflicts even the most seasoned historians, this is a welcome change.) Lawrence's comprehensive research enables him to develop each case study and connect the different countries to larger patterns in the administration's foreign policy. The result is an extremely persuasive account of how America's liberal hopes of promoting democracy and development shifted toward security and a tolerance for autocratic regimes. It is one of the most compelling accounts I have read of the direction of American foreign policy in the 1960s.

Each of the case studies allows Lawrence to illuminate parts of his overall argument. In the Brazil case, he does an excellent job of teasing out the degree of American involvement in the 1964 coup, making it clear that while the United States welcomed the overthrow of the government, it played no direct role in undertaking the action.<sup>3</sup> In a similar vein, Lawrence makes it clear that the American officials were surprised by the attempted coup in Indonesia, but that officials on the ground were complicit in helping the military in

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas A. Schwartz, *Henry Kissinger and American Power: A Political Biography* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2020).

<sup>2</sup> Schwartz, *Lyndon Johnson and Europe: In the Shadow of Vietnam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003)

<sup>3</sup> Although the literature on US-Latin American relations tends to believe the worse about US actions and motives, some of the literature is more nuanced. See Thomas Tunstall Allcock, *Thomas C. Mann: President Johnson, the Cold War, and the Restructuring of Latin American Foreign Policy* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2018), and Hal Brands, *Latin America's Cold War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010)

its bloody purge of the PKI, Indonesia's Communist Party.<sup>4</sup> He also makes it clear that US officials did not have any evidence that the actions of the Indonesian military were affected by the American intervention in Vietnam, an argument that was a particular favorite of Johnson's National Security Adviser, Walt Rostow.<sup>5</sup> It is a position which remains fundamental to many revisionist studies of the Vietnam War.<sup>6</sup>

Lawrence's treatment of American policy toward South Africa and particularly the issue of Rhodesia or the future Zimbabwe highlights the degree that American domestic politics pushed the Johnson administration toward a more active policy, from which it subsequently retreated, especially as Vietnam escalated in importance. Although the Nixon administration carried its indifference to the white-ruled country much further, Lawrence shows the degree to which the Johnson administration retreated from its strong initial stand with the British.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, the close American military relationship with the Shah of Iran, which is often seen as starting in the Nixon administration, appears to have been shaped during the Johnson years, especially as the British signaled their retreat from their East of Suez positions.<sup>8</sup> Finally, Lawrence makes it clear that domestic politics in India, particularly Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's political position in the Congress Party, played a significant role in preventing a closer relationship with the United States. The Nixon Administration's subsequent 'tilt' toward Pakistan was hardly inevitable, but the deterioration of US relations with India began well before the 1971 war.<sup>9</sup>

Lawrence's writing is so persuasive, and his judgments so well-supported, that criticism does not come easily. Rather, what I would like to suggest is that he consider the following counterfactual. If Johnson had followed his vice president's suggestion and decided not to escalate the Vietnam War in 1965, and to accept what was likely to be the rapid Communization of the country, how might this have affected the five case studies in the book? Is it possible that a decision to accept defeat in Vietnam might have led to the same disillusionment with Kennedyesque foreign policy, and the same move toward focusing more on stability and accepting authoritarian regimes? It is disturbing to think that the enormous blood and treasure expended by the United States in Vietnam might have had such a limited effect on international politics, but many of the factors brought out by this book suggest exactly that.

Mark Lawrence has authored a remarkable book that will clearly influence the historiography of twentieth-century American foreign relations for years to come.

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<sup>4</sup> One of the best and highly critical studies of US policy toward Indonesia is Bradley R. Simpson, *Economists with Guns: Authoritarian Development and U.S.-Indonesian Relations, 1960-1968* (Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA 2008).

<sup>5</sup> Walter W. Rostow, "The Case for the Vietnam War," *Parameters* 26, no. 4, (Winter 1996-1997): 39-50, 47. Rostow explains this more fully in Rostow, *Concept and Controversy: Sixty Years of Taking Ideas to Market* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), 293-316.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Lind, *Vietnam: The Necessary War: A Reinterpretation of America's Most Disastrous Military Conflict* (New York: The Free Press, 1999), 36-37.

<sup>7</sup> On South Africa, the best recent treatment is Ryan Irwin, *Gordian Knot: Apartheid and the Unmaking of the Liberal World Order* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012). The classic works are Thomas J. Noer, *Cold War and Black Liberation: the United States and White Rule in Africa, 1948-1968* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1985) and Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race relations in the Global Arena* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001)

<sup>8</sup> Ben Offiler, *U.S. Foreign Policy and the Modernization of Iran: Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon and the Shah* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015). The classic work is James A. Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion: The Tragedy of American-Iranian Relations*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988)

<sup>9</sup> Robert J. McMahon, *The Cold War on the Periphery: The United States, India, and Pakistan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994)

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Response by Mark Atwood Lawrence, University of Texas at Austin

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Scholars can receive few compliments so high as when valued colleagues engage deeply with their work. I am sincerely grateful to Kevin Y. Kim, Alan McPherson, David Prentice, Sandra Scanlon, and Thomas A. Schwartz for their elegant and incisive reviews on *The End of Ambition* and to Daniel Sargent for his thoughtful introduction to the roundtable. These commentaries represent serious investments of time, energy, and collegiality.

Naturally, I am delighted by the favorable assessments of such distinguished scholars, all of whom have authored influential studies of international affairs in the 1960s and 1970s and know a thing or two about my subject.<sup>1</sup> Particularly gratifying is their praise of my ability to use US sources to tease out the complexities of international affairs. From the outset of my research, I had hoped that intensive work with US archival material, combined with reading such foreign sources as I could muster, would enable me to capture not just US decisionmaking but also the ways in which the world defied US control. If I have accomplished this goal, I have perhaps said something worthwhile about a pivotal era in American diplomacy while also demonstrating that studying the exercise of US power does not necessarily mean ignoring or shortchanging the global dynamics within which Americans operated. The methodological boundaries between American and international history may, to put it differently, be less rigid than we may sometimes think.

I am pleased as well by the reviewers' positive response to my efforts to blend complicated stories of high-level decision-making with careful attention to the biographies of key policymakers and the vicissitudes of domestic politics. As I moved forward with the project, I grew more convinced that my central question—why did the United States back away from the ambitions of the early 1960s?—was the right one to pose. But I worried that my answer, embracing multiple lines of analysis, was too complex to fit within one reasonably sized book with a clear central argument.

As a longstanding champion of international history, I knew I needed to highlight the ways in which Third World governments limited American options and the tendency of the Vietnam War to fuel global skepticism of US leadership. Indeed, I delved deeply into these themes in the anthology I had the pleasure of co-editing with R. Joseph Parrott, *The Tricontinental Revolution*, even as I completed work on *The End of Ambition*.<sup>2</sup> But I also believed increasingly that the keys to understanding American behavior lay with the cast of characters who made decisions in Washington amid rapidly changing domestic circumstances. No matter what the international landscape, US foreign policy grows first and foremost from the interplay of personality, intellectual predisposition, and political calculation among American leaders. The key challenge was to blend multiple lines of causation in a coherent analysis.

I concede that I might have done more to thread my analysis of personality and intellectual outlook through the dense case studies that comprise the book's second half. McPherson and Kim reasonably question how the taxonomy of policymaking outlooks that I lay out in chapter 1 informs my understanding of actual decisionmaking when I get into the weeds of American deliberations about specific countries. I intended the taxonomy as a way to understand general tendencies rather than highly specific policy agendas, but I can see that chapter 1 leads readers to expect that I would carry that analysis explicitly through the remainder of the

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<sup>1</sup> I have learned a great deal, for example, from Alan McPherson, *Yankee No! Anti-Americanism in U.S.-Latin American Relations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003); Daniel J. Sargent, *A Superpower Transformed: The Remaking of American Foreign Relations in the 1970s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); Sandra Scanlon, *The Pro-War Movement: Domestic Support for the Vietnam War and the Making of Modern American Conservatism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2013); and Thomas A. Schwartz, *Henry Kissinger and American Power: A Political Biography* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2020), along with numerous essays and articles by Kevin Y. Kim and David Prentice.

<sup>2</sup> R. Joseph Parrott and Mark Atwood Lawrence, *The Tricontinental Revolution: Third World Radicalism and the Cold War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

book. Indeed, the book would have been stronger if I had done exactly that. As Kim observes, my lack of specificity about how each current of thinking evolved during the 1960s contributes to an impression that sharp intellectual difference merely dissolved into a vague pragmatism by the end of the decade.

I also accept Prentice's point that the book would have benefitted from a full chapter on the transition between the Johnson and Nixon presidencies. As it stands, I cover that important subject in a lengthy conclusion that both extends my story into the Nixon presidency and recaps the book's central argument. Separating those two agendas into a final substantive chapter and a briefer conclusion would have made for a longer book but also perhaps allowed for fuller attention to a period (1969 to 1972 or so) that marks the culmination of the trends that I aim to describe. I can plead only that the book already contained a heavy dose of detailed narrative and that the contours of American policymaking the Nixon years are rather well known thanks to several incisive studies published in recent years.

An additional chapter focused on the early Nixon years might also have offered crisper answer to the question that McPherson poses in his review: In the final analysis, am I arguing that the Johnson presidency was *transformational* or merely *transitional*? A good answer depends, of course, on how we define these two words. If by "transitional" we allow that the bulk of the shift in American policymaking might have occurred during the Johnson presidency—that the change was not, in other words, gradual or evenly paced across the decade I cover—then I suppose that word it is the better one to capture what I'm trying to describe. Clearly, President Lyndon Johnson and his advisers picked up on ideas that were already circulating in earlier years, and clearly the Nixon administration consolidated and spoke explicitly about the changes wrought in the Johnson period. Thus, it would go a bit too far to credit Johnson with "transformation" even though the key innovations came during his years in office.

My reaction is more mixed to the suggestion that the book would have benefitted significantly from utilization of more foreign sources. On one level, of course, it is hard to disagree. As Prentice points out, documents from Britain, South Africa, and Brazil enrich my book by enabling me to show how foreign governments shaped and understood US behavior. More of the same from the archives of other nations would undoubtedly have added something useful. I wish to emphasize as well that the US relationship with each of the countries I examine deserves thorough research in foreign archives by scholars deeply versed in the histories and cultures of those societies. Still, I do not see a dearth of foreign sources as a significant weakness of my book. For one thing, my heavy reliance on American sources corresponds to my clearly stated goal of explaining American behavior. For another, the sheer richness of US materials permitted me not only to narrate American policy deliberations but also to glimpse the agency of foreign governments as they attempted to mold and constrain Washington's choices.

I have a similarly mixed response to Scanlon's intriguing suggestion that I might have gone further in analyzing the ways in which ideas about race influenced policymakers' responses to crises within the Third World. I acknowledge that I would have done well to address this issue more explicitly throughout the text and perhaps especially in the conclusion. As it stands, the book addresses racial outlooks mostly as elements of the broader schools of thought about the Third World that I lay out in chapter 1. Thereafter, I do not dwell much on the matter. But I think there is a good reason for this choice. American policymakers rarely—even in unguarded moments captured in audio recordings—ventured explicit opinions about the racial characteristics of foreign peoples. Rather, US officials tended to think about race as a factor that might bond foreigners against the United States if Washington misplayed its hand by opposing the legitimate demands of Third World societies. This fear plays out most conspicuously in my chapter on Southern Africa, where Americans worried about the dangers of alienating Black Africans through close relationships with racist white governments. But, to varying extents, US leaders worried in each of my cases about the possibility that Third World peoples would make common cause with each other on the basis of a shared sense of exploitation if the United States failed to win their support through an effective blend of political, economic, and ideological activism. As the ambitions of American leaders declined during the late 1960s, nothing

dramatic changed in their core attitudes about race. Rather, under the pressure of the Vietnam War and the rising tide of global anti-Americanism, US leaders refocused on raw geostrategic calculation and increasingly accepted that the costs of consolidating positions of strength might be the alienation of non-white peoples around the world.

Finally, I want to address the question that all of the reviewers, in differing ways, pose about *The End of Ambition*: does it ultimately succeed in defending its central point about the importance of the Vietnam War in altering American policymaking toward the Third World as a whole? McPherson goes furthest in asserting that he is not convinced that the war played the “crucial” role that I assign it. Scanlon, Schwartz, and Kim, meanwhile, raise the issue more obliquely, challenging me to ponder whether the broad contours of US policy in the 1960s would have been much different if there had been no major war in Southeast Asia. This is a fascinating counterfactual scenario that weighed on me as the project morphed from a relatively narrow study of the impacts of the Vietnam War on larger patterns of American decisionmaking into a broad study of U.S. policy toward the Third World. I acknowledge that I missed an opportunity to drive home my view more forcefully through lengthier discussion in the conclusion. Yet I believe my introduction offers a clear sense of how I understand the interplay of the war with the other causes of declining American ambition that I tease out.

My basic point, as Kim notes in his review, is that the war operated as an “accelerant” of other trends already in play. These trends—shifts in policy owing to the proclivities of a new man in the White House, backlash against ambitious liberalism following the civil rights legislation of 1964 and 1965, and growing hostility to the United States throughout the Third World—would surely have grown across the 1960s even if there had been no major American war in Vietnam. The war, I argue, accentuated the policymaking preferences and style that led Johnson to embrace sources of stability in the Third World, just as it fueled anti-Americanism globally and anti-liberalism on the American home front. It is impossible, of course, to assign relative importance to these different factors with any mathematical precision. Was the war 50 percent responsible for the “end of ambition”? Or 10 percent? It seems silly to attempt any such assertion, not least because the war influenced American policy toward some areas (Indonesia, for example) much more powerfully than others (distant Brazil). In the end, I hope my book shows how inextricably the various causative factors were woven together and how powerfully they altered American policy during the decade that in many ways gave rise to the modern global order.