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Gregory Domber’s fine article appears in the thirtieth anniversary year of the declaration of martial law in Poland. Domber focuses a scholarly and critical light on the role played by United States (U.S.) foreign policy in the era of Mikhail Gorbachev, as Solidarity’s leaders re-emerged and made their way to the halls of power in Poland. In order to understand Domber’s accomplishment, however, it is first necessary to review the state of the literature on the end of the Cold War.

Earlier publications by former participants in events, all now teaching at universities, loom large in this literature. Notable authors such as Robert Hutchings of the University of Texas (author of *American Diplomacy and the End of the Cold War*), Condoleezza Rice of Stanford University and Philip Zelikow of the University of Virginia (authors of *Germany Unified and Europe Transformed*), and, on the theoretical end of the spectrum, G. John Ikenberry of Princeton University (author of *Liberal Leviathan: The Origins, Crisis and Transformation of the American World Order*) all worked for the George H.W. Bush Administration in either the National Security Council or the State Department.¹

These books are all important studies, enriched by a combination of experience and expertise, and are essential reading for all scholars of the Cold War. By and large, their interpretations of George H.W. Bush’s foreign policy have been favorable descriptions of both process and radical outcome. As Hutchings wrote in 2009: “[E]ven two decades...

later, it is hard to see how the process of German unification could have been handled any better."\textsuperscript{2} Zelikow has argued that the Bush administration achieved “radical” goals in 1989-90. He found that, “[b]eginning in late March of 1989...the U.S. government chose, as its basic goal, to support change and fashion a new international system” and any accounts to the contrary “have fundamentally misread this period.”\textsuperscript{3} And Ikenberry has theorized that the inherent attractiveness of the American “championing of rule-based order” is what made it into a liberal leviathan at the end of the Cold War (Ikenberry, xv).

With the passage of time and not a few Freedom of Information Act requests (often filed by the Cold War International History Project and the National Security Archive), American sources have become abundant and available to those historians and political scientists without direct experience in the U.S. foreign policy decision-making of those years. Scholars have also enlarged the frame of reference, using non-English-language primary evidence to consider U.S. foreign policy from the point of view of actors and institutions beyond U.S. borders. The new scholarly work on both the international and transnational history of the late Cold War is now bearing fruit in terms of publication. Intriguingly, the emerging consensus of this initial round of historical scholarship challenges the conclusions of participants in events.

The picture that is emerging from the new scholarship is not one of Washington establishing a radical new order on the basis of rules and norms. Rather, it is one of a power interested in stability, and willing to use its leverage as the sole remaining superpower to protect itself against what it saw as overly dramatic change. Jeffrey Engel, an expert on Bush foreign policy and the editor of Bush’s \textit{China Diary}, concluded in 2010 that “Bush is best understood...not as the progenitor of something radically new.”\textsuperscript{4} Sarah Snyder, author of the 2011 book \textit{Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War}, finds that the key question for scholars studying George H.W. Bush’s foreign policy is “how an administration could confront such fundamental transformation in international affairs with such limited revision of national security policy.”\textsuperscript{5} And Domber, in this article,

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{5} Sarah Snyder, \textit{Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); quotation is from “Special Forum: Reconsidering the Foreign Policy of the First Bush Administration, Twenty Years On,” \textit{Diplomatic History} 34:1 (January 2010): 25-175, in H-Diplo Roundtable, Volume XI, No. 25 (11 May 2010), 13.
\end{itemize}
concludes on the basis of both American and Polish sources that the Bush Administration “was an inhibitor – a substance that decreases the rate of a reaction – purposefully working to slow down the revolution that occurred for the sake of stability” (54). He thereby challenges Bush’s own claim to have been a “catalyst” for change at the end of the Cold War (52).

Domber describes the interactions of U.S. policymakers with a range of Polish leaders, Solidarity and otherwise, in 1989. A constant theme was Poland’s search for help in managing its enormous debts to the West. Domber’s article sheds light on, among other topics, the role of the White House and specifically of the U.S. Ambassador in Poland, John Davis, in this context. Both worked hard to increase the chances that, despite Solidarity’s electoral victory in June 1989, General Wojciech Jaruzelski – the man who had ordered martial law in 1981 – would become president in the new Polish system to ensure continuity and stability. Behind the scenes, Davis convinced newly elected Solidarity representatives on how they could get around their campaign pledges not to vote for Jaruzelski as president. In public, Bush also showed his preferences for Jaruzelski. As Domber puts it: “Bush’s public support and positive view of Jaruzelski denied [Solidarity] the expected public relations advantage” after its June 1989 electoral victory (p. 73). The U.S. President “purposefully empower[ed] Jaruzelski...during a shaky, unsure period” (73). The “net effect” of U.S. actions, Domber concludes, “was to help prop up an unrepresentative and unpopular regime” (76). Under Bush, “U.S. policy was being formulated in an atmosphere steeped in skepticism and fear” (78). While the Bush Administration was in theory on the side of reform, it wanted change only “at a glacial rather than a brisk pace” (76).

In short, the historical study of U.S. foreign policy at the end of the Cold War – that is, scholarly work based on primary sources freely available to all, enabling experts to evaluate one another’s claims independently – is still in its early days. The interesting discrepancy already apparent between accounts by participants and accounts by younger scholars, however, suggests more to come. Domber has made an important contribution to this emerging scholarship.

**Mary Elise Sarotte** is the author, most recently, of 1989: The Struggle to Create Post-Cold War Europe (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009). 1989 won the 2009 DAAD Prize for Scholarship on German and European Studies from the American Institute for Contemporary German Studies (AICGS), the 2010 Ferrell Prize from the Society of Historians of American Foreign Relations (SHAFR), and the 2010 Shulman Prize from the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies (AAASS, recently renamed ASEEES, co-winner). Sarotte, who received her AB from Harvard University and her PhD in History from Yale University, holds a joint appointment as Professor of History and Professor of International Relations at the University of Southern California. She has been a
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