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**Michael Lumbers. *Piercing the Bamboo Curtain: Tentative Bridge-Building to China during the Johnson years.*** Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2008. ISBN 978-0-7190-7778-4. x + 286 pp.

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**Introduction by Yafeng Xia, Long Island University**

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**T**his book is the first full-length study on Lyndon Johnson's China policy based on U.S. and British archives. Michael Lumbers contends that "the Johnson presidency did not represent a period of stagnation, and the senior officials contemplated significant departures from long-standing China policy more than was recognized at the time." (3) He traces the evolution of the views of Johnson's chief advisers on China, and their impact upon the president himself. Lumbers affirms the central role of Vietnam to any understanding of Johnson's China policy. He concludes that Nixon and Kissinger "built on ideas that had already gained high-level credence" between 1964 and 1968. (231)

Lumbers' book makes an important contribution to the literature on U.S.-China relations during the Cold War and the Johnson presidency. In foreign affairs, Lumbers argues, Johnson was actually more stable, prudent, and careful than Kennedy. He agrees with earlier historians such as H. W. Brands and Thomas A. Schwartz in portraying Johnson as an engaged and informed foreign policy president who was responsible for most of the important decisions on China policy. Thus, Lumbers continues the process of re-examining the foreign policy of the presidency of Lyndon Johnson. Although this study may not be the last word on LBJ's China policy, our distinguished commentators, Mitchell Lerner, Andrew Preston, Priscilla Roberts and Qiang Zhai all agree that it does offer new and fascinating insight into the personalities and accomplishments of the Johnson administration. It is a must read for all scholars interested in U.S.-China relations during the Cold War and the Johnson presidency.

### **Participants**

**Michael Lumbers** graduated from the London School of Economics in 2005 with a Ph.D. in International History. His articles have been published in *Diplomatic History* and the *Journal of Cold War Studies*. He is currently an independent scholar living in Toronto.

**Mitchell Lerner** is an associate professor of history at Ohio State University –Newark and the Mershon Center for National Security Studies. He is the author of *The Pueblo Incident: A Spy Ship and the Failure of American Foreign Policy* (2003), which won the John Lyman Book Prize, and the editor of *Looking Back at LBJ: White House Politics in a New Light* (2005). He has been a fellow at the Miller Center of Public Affairs at the University of Virginia, and has held the Mary Ball Washington Distinguished Fulbright Chair at UC-Dublin. He is currently at work on a policy history of the Johnson administration.

**Andrew Preston** is a senior lecturer in history and a fellow of Clare College at Cambridge University. He is the author of *The War Council: McGeorge Bundy, the NSC, and Vietnam* (2006) and co-editor, with Fredrik Logevall, of *Nixon in the World: American Foreign Relations, 1969-1977* (2008). He is currently writing a book on the religious influence on American war and diplomacy from the colonial era to the present, to be published by Knopf in 2010.

**Priscilla Roberts** teaches history at the University of Hong Kong, where she is also Honorary Director of the Centre of American Studies. She has edited the Chinese Diaries of David Bruce, George Bush's predecessor as head of the U.S. Liaison Office in Beijing. Her research interests focus upon the development and influence of the U.S. foreign policy elite. She is currently working on a biography of the banker Frank Altschul, and a study of Anglo-American think tanks and the making of China policy.

**Qiang Zhai** is a professor of history at Auburn University at Montgomery. He specializes in the history of Chinese foreign relations during the Cold War. He received his doctoral degree from Ohio University, where he studied with John Lewis Gaddis. He is the author of *The Dragon, the Lion, and the Eagle: Chinese-British-American Relations, 1949-1958* (1994), *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950-1975* (2000), as well as numerous articles and essays on Sino-American relations. He is also co-editor of *The Encyclopedia of the Cold War* (2008).

**Yafeng Xia** is an associate professor of East Asian and Diplomatic history at Long Island University, Brooklyn, and a visiting professor at the Center for Cold War Studies, East China Normal University. He is the author of *Negotiating with the Enemy: U.S.-China Talks during the Cold War, 1949-72* (2006). He has also published numerous articles in such publications as *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, *Journal of Cold War Studies*, *The Chinese Historical Review*, *The International History Review*, among others. He is currently at work on a monograph on the early history of the PRC's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, tentatively titled *Burying the "Diplomacy of Humiliation": New China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1949-1956*.

“I don't believe that I'll ever get credit for anything in foreign affairs, no matter how successful it is,” Lyndon Johnson once said, “because I didn't go to Harvard.”<sup>1</sup> One can, of course, debate the legitimacy of the claim that it was his educational pedigree that lay at the heart of the criticisms of his foreign policy. But it is hard to dispute the fact that for the first decades after he left office, Johnson did receive much criticism and little credit in this aspect of his presidency. The earliest writings pictured him as simply unfamiliar with the world beyond America's shores, a domestic policy maven who had neither a background nor an interest in the complexities of the world beyond the United States. Historian (and Johnson advisor) Eric Goldman described his boss as one who:

Preferred to think about and deal with domestic relations than international affairs;... lacked extensive acquaintance with foreign leaders or significant knowledge of foreign civilizations... had no carefully thought out conception of the workings of the international system, few broad-gauged premises concerning diplomacy or war, even less feel or sense of things international.

Johnson, Goldman concluded, had “entered the White House not only little concerned with the outer world, but leery of it.”<sup>2</sup>

As time passed, historians began to reject the contention that Johnson's foreign policy failed because of inexperience or lack of interest, but they nevertheless generally agreed that it still failed. From Vietnam to Latin America to the Cold War, LBJ was frequently measured and found wanting. “Driven on by his enormous ego,” wrote Robert Divine in 1987, “he tried to triumph both at home and abroad, and he lost out on both endeavors, thereby jeopardizing his place in history.”<sup>3</sup> His “persistence in pursuing an often unidimensional foreign policy,” echoed Nancy Bernkopf Tucker seven years later “severely limited its accomplishments elsewhere, strained friendships, aggravated animosities, and left a problematic legacy.”<sup>4</sup>

Over the past decade, however, a more positive overall picture of Johnson's diplomacy has emerged. The sources of this re-appraisal are numerous: new materials from communist-bloc archives have helped us to better understand the complexities of the problems LBJ inherited and the impacts of his responses; new materials from the Johnson White House have helped us to better understand LBJ's objectives, values, and efforts; and the simple passage of time has allowed scholars to overcome the domestic trauma of the Vietnam War

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<sup>1</sup>Quoted in Thomas Schwartz, *Lyndon Johnson and Europe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 7.

<sup>2</sup> Eric Goldman, *The Tragedy of Lyndon Johnson* (New York: Knopf, 1969), 379.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Divine, “The Johnson Revival,” in *The Johnson Years, Volume II* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1987), 18.

<sup>4</sup> Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, “Lyndon Johnson: A Final Reckoning” in Tucker and Warren Cohen (eds.), *Lyndon Johnson Confronts the Word* (Cambridge, 1994), 318.

that so shaped popular memory, paving the way for more dispassionate analyses. H.W. Brands' *Wages of Globalism* offered perhaps the first such positive appraisal, concluding that "considering the dimensions of his tasks, it is surprising he [LBJ] did as well as he did."<sup>5</sup> Others, notably Thomas Schwartz, John Prados, and Robert Dallek, have agreed. "Ugly American though he may have been," wrote Schwartz, "Lyndon Johnson emerges from these various documents as an astute and able practitioner of alliance politics, a leader who recognized how to assemble cross-national coalitions and work towards his overriding goals and objectives."<sup>6</sup>

To this growing list of positive appraisals we must now add Michael Lumbers' *Piercing the Bamboo Curtain*. Lumbers rejects the traditional claim that stagnation and drift marked U.S.-China relations during the Johnson years. Instead, he finds an administration that brought some imagination and flexibility to this critical policymaking arena, and in doing so laid the foundation for the normalization of this relationship a decade later. The Johnson that emerges here is by no means perfect—he can be a bit too attuned to public opinion; a drop slow in rejecting Cold War orthodoxies; and much too quick to force everything into a paradigm dominated by Vietnam—but nevertheless, Lumbers argues convincingly that LBJ has been unfairly denied the credit he deserves for the skill he displayed in this aspect of his diplomatic relations. Johnson, he concludes, "ultimately emerges as an attentive and well informed leader who dominated the foreign policy process, intellectually flexible, adaptable to changing variables at home and abroad, an adept conflict manager with an ability to empathize with the concerns of the other side, and mindful of the limits of America's capacity for shaping events to its liking." (7)

Relying mostly on American primary sources, Lumbers traces the swings of U.S.-China relations throughout the 1960s. He draws a critical portrait of the Kennedy years, finding an administration (and especially a president) that, for fear of provoking opposition at home that might damage its domestic agenda, was unwilling to listen to the growing number of government officials who advocated new openings towards Beijing. Lumbers reveals a surprisingly high number of advisors pushing such efforts, including Chester Bowles, Roger Hilsman, James Thompson, Averell Harriman, and even Walt Rostow, whose voices nevertheless failed to sway JFK. When Johnson assumed the Oval Office, however, policy began moving in the direction they advocated. Numerous factors underlay this shift, and Lumbers explores them in great depth. French recognition of China in 1964 and the Chinese explosion of a nuclear device that same year helped convince recalcitrant American officials and the general public of the need for a new approach. The growing American commitment in Vietnam encouraged Johnson to seek more stable relations with China, if not to pressure Hanoi then at least to keep the Chinese from overt involvement. And as Johnson's term wound down, his desire to be remembered as a man of peace rather than war was certainly not far from his mind.

Lumbers acknowledges that LBJ moved slowly and often unsteadily in this direction, which reflected the President's political caution, his acceptance of fundamental Cold War axioms,

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<sup>5</sup> H.W. Brands, *The Wages of Globalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 257.

<sup>6</sup> Schwartz, *Lyndon Johnson and Europe*, 7.

and the ever-changing world dynamics. Still, steps were being taken. In late 1965, his administration allowed American medical experts to visit China and welcomed Chinese journalists to the U.S. without a reciprocal agreement. This change was soon followed by the lifting of most restrictions against travel by American scholars and writers. In the summer of 1966, LBJ delivered a nationally televised speech that affirmed his commitment to reconciliation, part of a broader administration effort to tone down its rhetoric. This effort was accompanied by steps intended to restrict Taiwanese operations against the mainland, and to rein in the anti-PRC efforts of America's own intelligence services. Other efforts, many coming after LBJ personally ordered a policy review in early 1968, were never enacted but were studied and developed in case of presidential approval, which in many cases would be forthcoming over the next decade. Overall, his efforts suffered some setbacks, most notably during the Cultural Revolution which re-kindled anti-Chinese hostility within the U.S., and during his last months in office when the Chinese leadership was clearly biding its time until the new administration arrived. Moreover, these bridge-building efforts failed to produce significant tangible benefits during his tenure in office. Still, the ground had been prepared for his successors. Lumbers' conclusion is clear: LBJ's moderation and flexibility "maximized America's policy options and his successor was well positioned to pursue rapprochement with the PRC if he so chose." (257)

The strengths of Lumbers' book are many. It is well written, logically presented, and clearly placed within the emerging historiography of LBJ. The thorough research into American materials makes it the best study of American policy towards China during the Johnson years that has yet been published. The book's reliance on secondary sources for Chinese decision-making hinders it a bit, and makes it somewhat less valuable overall than those few studies with a broader source base, most notably Yafeng Xia's *Negotiating with the Enemy* or Chen Jian's *Mao's China and the Cold War*, but that does not lessen the value of its contribution towards our understanding of American policymaking. The book also closely connects American policy towards China with American policy towards Vietnam, noting in particular the role that internal Chinese dynamics played in shaping American decisions about Vietnam throughout the period (a conclusion that is perhaps not as unprecedented as Lumbers suggests, but is interesting and thoughtful nonetheless). Overall, those interested in the shaping of American policy towards China in the 1960s will find no better resource than *Piercing the Bamboo Curtain*.

Still, one might quibble with a few of Lumbers' specific contentions. I think he exaggerates the extent to which the Johnson Administration seriously considered a pre-emptive military strike against Chinese nuclear facilities in 1964. (69-73) A detailed Policy Planning Council report in April of that year noted in its first sentence that "It is evident on the basis of [the] analysis in this paper and the basic paper on the implications of a ChiCom nuclear capability that the significance of such a capability is not such as to justify the undertaking of actions which would involve great political costs or high military risks."<sup>7</sup> Lumbers is correct to note that some officials expressed concerns about this report's conclusions, but

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<sup>7</sup> "An Exploration Of The Possible Bases For Action Against The Chinese Communist Nuclear Facilities," Policy Planning Council paper, April 16, 1964, *Foreign Relations of the United States* (Hereafter cited as *FRUS*), 1964-1968, Vol. XXX, China, document # 25.

there is little evidence to suggest that these concerns sparked (or even reflected) a real willingness to risk setting off a superpower conflict. In fact, some of the hawks who Lumbers mentions as seriously considering a first strike, including Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara and National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy, refused to even endorse a CIA proposal for a U-2 flight over priority targets in South China that summer because of the risks involved; the notion that the same men would have endorsed an attack on the mainland, even perhaps a nuclear first-strike, is hard to accept.<sup>8</sup>

Similarly off-target, I think, is an important element of his description of LBJ's foreign policy-making apparatus. Lumbers faults Johnson's "centralized, hierarchical, advisory system," noting that it resulted in "limited exposure to the alternative viewpoints of those outside the inner circle." (60) One might reasonably contend that LBJ had a "centralized" and "hierarchical" advisory system, although I am not sure his was any more so than most modern day presidents, but the notion that this system prevented him from hearing viewpoints from outside a few cabinet officials seems a bit troubling. The White House tapes show Johnson frequently going outside the "inner circle" for advice, contacting, among others, Richard Russell, Abe Fortas, Arthur Goldberg, Arthur Krim, Robert Anderson and (before he joined the cabinet) Clark Clifford. When the Panama Crisis broke out in early 1964, to give just one example, LBJ sought the input of many from outside the "inner circle," including Ted Sorenson, Ralph Dungan, Mike Mansfield, Thomas Mann, Robert Anderson, and Richard Russell. How much of their advice he actually listened to might be up for debate, but to suggest that his system removed such voices from the conversation seems somewhat off the mark.

A final concern is a bit more significant. For all of its detail about U.S.-Asian affairs, Lumbers rarely offers a glimpse of the world beyond this region, and thus makes no real effort to place Johnson's efforts within a wider context. In doing so, he misses a not insignificant part of the story. It strikes me as revealing that the book's subtitle contains the phrase "bridge-building," a term that the Johnson administration often used to describe their larger program to reach out to the Communist bloc states as a whole. These efforts predated LBJ's decision to extend an open hand to China. As early as May 1964, while Cold War axioms still precluded such efforts towards China, Johnson pledged to "build bridges across the Gulf which has divided us from Eastern Europe. They will be bridges of increased trade, of ideas, of visitors and of humanitarian aid."<sup>9</sup> Accordingly, he approved a Soviet request to purchase American beet harvesters and fertilizer plants despite the opposition of the Commerce, Defense, and Agriculture Departments, justifying the sale to a roomful of advisors with the explanation that "We are doing everything to encourage good relations and ease tensions."<sup>10</sup> Later that year, Dean Rusk argued in favor of a proposed air transport

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<sup>8</sup> See, for example, "Meeting of 303 Committee on 6 August 1964," August 8, 1964, *FRUS, 1964-1968, Vol. XXX, China*, document # 42.

<sup>9</sup> "Remarks in Lexington at the Dedication of the George C. Marshall Research Library," *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Lyndon B. Johnson, 1963-1964, Book I* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1965), 708-710.

<sup>10</sup> "Minutes of Meeting of the Export Control Board, January 20, 1964," document #149; Memorandum from Hodges to M. Bundy, "Quid-Pro-Quo from the Soviets," February 27, 1964, document #150; Memorandum from M. Bundy to Johnson, "Beet Harvesters for the Soviet Union," March 11, 1964,

agreement with the Soviets, noting that “additional Russian tourists and other visitors should be able to come to America, it will be easier for United States travelers to visit the Soviet Union, and a significant expansion of professional contacts in the civil aviation field will ensue—all these represent important strengthening of our program to increase and improve communication.”<sup>11</sup> These and other similar efforts that mirrored the subsequent Chinese program proved so successful that some within the administration warned of an inevitable backlash; “We should bear in mind,” Dean Rusk warned at an NSC meeting, “the classic distinction between rape and seduction.”<sup>12</sup> Bridge-building to China thus may well have been driven primarily by the Asian imperatives that Lumbers addresses so well, but they nevertheless evolved in a context where other, similar efforts, already existed. Surely, then, a book that aspires to offer the fullest picture of LBJ's efforts towards China would have benefited from integrating this larger context. Were there differences in the approaches? Were there lessons learned from the Eastern European version? And perhaps most importantly, to what extent should we ask how much of the program derived from immediate circumstances in Asia and how much merely reflected a global program that would have extended bridges to China regardless of the specific circumstances in Asia?

In the end, though, these are all minor quibbles in a work that will stand for a long time as the definitive study of American policy towards China under LBJ. In *Piercing the Bamboo Curtain*, Michael Lumbers has continued the process of re-examining the foreign policy of Lyndon Johnson, and has offered a major contribution to the school of thought that gives LBJ much credit for previously overlooked accomplishments. Even if he didn't go to Harvard.

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document #151; Summary of Record of 527<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the NSC, April 16, 1964, document #152, all from *FRUS, 1964-8, Vol. IX, Economic Defense Policy*.

<sup>11</sup> Memorandum from Secretary of State Rusk to President Johnson, April 4, 1964, “The Air Transport Agreement with the Soviet Union,” *FRUS, 1964-8, Vol. XIV 14, Soviet Union*, document #22.

<sup>12</sup> Memorandum for the Record, “NSC Meeting of April 24--Eastern Europe,” April 24, 1968, *FRUS, 1964-1968, Vol. XVII, Eastern Europe*, document #20.

Reading Michael Lumbers' new book *Piercing the Bamboo Curtain* against the backdrop of the recent Iranian elections made for a slightly surreal experience. Just as Lyndon B. Johnson confronted a perplexing, frustrating, and seemingly self-destructing adversary in the People's Republic of China, President Barack Obama is faced with the task of devising a foreign policy to deal with an equally enigmatic Iran. Both countries have represented Washington's ultimate enemy, and American policymakers have seen both as the source of all trouble in their respective regions. For China, trouble arose over Taiwan and Vietnam; for Iran, it is Israel, Lebanon, and the Persian Gulf. Both, moreover, have posed their era's ultimate ideological threat to the United States, in communism and Islamic fundamentalism. But the parallels are even more strikingly precise. Just as the disputed Iranian elections have thrown Obama's Middle East policy into flux, in China it was the Cultural Revolution that brought the country to the edge of anarchy and left policymakers in Washington scratching their heads for ways to come up with a sensible policy in the midst of madness. Just as Obama has needed to rein in the Israelis from attacking Iran, Johnson had to restrain Taiwan from acting on its (admittedly more implausible) military threats to the mainland. And just as Obama is faced with the prospect of a nuclear-armed Iran, Johnson had to wrestle with the regional and global consequences of the PRC obtaining nuclear weapons in 1964.

In Lumbers' balanced assessment, Johnson handled the Chinese conundrum about as well as could have been expected given the political culture of the time and the bewildering complexity of the challenge. Like Iran over the past thirty years, China did not have diplomatic relations with the United States in the 1960s, and indeed had not since the communist victory in October 1949. The People's Republic was terra incognita for most Americans, including the State Department and Central Intelligence Agency; the White House, needless to say, was hardly any better informed. Yet Johnson moved cautiously, judiciously, and wisely. Perhaps he could have done more to smooth relations between Washington and Beijing, but as Lumbers notes Beijing was not especially interested in talking, which made any sort of rapprochement impossible. In the absence of a partner, Johnson instead managed not to make the situation worse—no mean feat given the depths of recent Sino-American hostility and the tensions of the Cold War—and even prepared the ground for a future president to open relations with the PRC.

For decades, historians portrayed Lyndon Johnson as a warmongering cowboy in the White House, a buffoon who had a disastrous foreign policy for the simple reason that he knew nothing of the outside world. Lumbers helps shatter this myth by illustrating the depth and sophistication of Johnson's China policy. *Piercing the Bamboo Curtain* thus marks another entry into the burgeoning literature of what might be called LBJ Revisionism. Following in the footsteps of H. W. Brands' *The Wages of Globalism* and Thomas Alan Schwartz's *Lyndon Johnson and Europe*, Lumbers' *Piercing the Bamboo Curtain* does not seek to vindicate

Johnson's foreign policy so much as to separate it from the disaster in Vietnam.<sup>1</sup> In so doing, Lumbers, like other LBJ Revisionists, contextualizes Johnson's foreign policy and illustrates a nuance and purposefulness normally obscured by ROLLING THUNDER and search-and-destroy. Johnson presided over some completely preventable foreign policy failures, most notably in Vietnam and the Dominican Republic, but he could boast of some successes too. China was clearly one of them.

One of the virtues of an H-Diplo roundtable is built-in redundancy: a book's central premises are recapitulated, discussed, and analyzed by several reviewers in addition to the roundtable's editor, and so few authors could ever claim misrepresentation. This also gives individual reviewers the freedom to focus on what they find particularly noteworthy or objectionable about a book. Thankfully, in *Piercing the Bamboo Curtain* there is much of the former and little of the latter. Overall, Lumbers has written an articulate, fluid, and intelligent account of the Johnson administration's China policy. His primary research—especially his digging in the archives at the Johnson and Kennedy presidential libraries—is as impressive as it is exhaustive. His use of the voluminous relevant secondary literature is decent, though this time not exhaustive, and he has made excellent use of primary records from China that have been translated and published in English. His analysis is always level-headed, marred by neither the vindictiveness nor the adulation that mars much of the literature on presidential foreign policymaking, especially Johnson's. Like Brands and Schwartz before him, Lumbers helps historians of the Johnson era get beyond Vietnam.

Yet Vietnam looms large in this study, as it should. Lumbers does a superb job of integrating the war into his narrative without allowing it to overwhelm the China story. While Chapter 3, on the impact of Vietnam on China policy in 1964-65, offers little that historians did not already know, it does provide a more thoroughly comprehensive account of the American diplomatic record than is available elsewhere. A valuable exception is the insight that it was the Vietnam hawks Walt Rostow and the Joint Chiefs of Staff who recognized traditional Sino-Vietnamese hostility and argued that it meant the PRC would not intervene in Vietnam, thus enabling the United States to escalate the war at a much faster pace and widen it geographically. (100) Usually, it was the Vietnam doves who presented the Sino-Vietnamese rivalry as a reason not to go to war because it meant that an expansionist, China was not driving Vietnamese communist strategy after all.

It is in the next chapter that Lumbers makes a real contribution by brilliantly teasing out another "irony of Vietnam."<sup>2</sup> Here, he points out that "a war undertaken in part to check Chinese expansionism...created pressures for an accommodation of sorts with the PRC and encouraged U.S. decision-makers who might not otherwise have been inclined to reassess the tenets of a line of containment and isolation." (137) As Lumbers points out, the sheer difficulties of Vietnam constrained American power, which in turn made it impracticable to

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<sup>1</sup> H. W. Brands, *The Wages of Globalism: Lyndon Johnson and the Limits of American Power* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Thomas Alan Schwartz, *Lyndon Johnson and Europe: In the Shadow of Vietnam* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003).

<sup>2</sup> Following, of course, Leslie H. Gelb with Richard K. Betts, *The Irony of Vietnam: The System Worked* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1979).

pursue a rigidly anti-communist foreign policy. Johnson needed to build bridges in Europe and Asia simply in order to relieve the massive amounts of systemic pressure created by Vietnam. As Campbell Craig and Fredrik Logevall argue in their forthcoming book on the Cold War, the absence of constraint and the presence of relatively free security had allowed U.S. foreign policymakers to assume every burden and avoid making hard choices. Vietnam changed that, and it is no coincidence that Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger's policies of détente and the opening to China resulted from the disaster in Vietnam.<sup>3</sup>

But as Lumbers also points out, the sheer unpopularity of Vietnam, at home and abroad, forced Johnson to show that he was not a warmonger, and that his intentions were peaceful. To be sure, the Johnson administration did not rush out and recognize the PRC, but it did moderate its tone and explore, behind the scenes, possibilities for a new approach. Public opinion, Lumbers shrewdly observes, had moved far beyond that and solid majorities expressed a willingness to work with Beijing, and so by moving cautiously Johnson may have missed an opportunity that Nixon seized several years later. "Much of this sentiment was latent," writes Lumbers, "reflecting more a mellowing of attitudes than any concerted demand for change," which the Johnson administration "proved either unaware of, or unwilling to respond to." (242) Yet as Lumbers ultimately concludes, without Johnson's careful preparatory work Nixon may never have been in such an advantageous position at all.

This is an excellent book, sure to be a standard on the subject, yet some quibbles remain. Lumbers' focus on the American primary record is impressively comprehensive but at times too narrow. One wishes he had at times surfaced for some air and a wider perspective than that seen by the State Department or the White House—or only from Washington and Beijing, for that matter. To be fair, Lumbers does include other countries when relevant, such as Britain, France, Canada, and of course Vietnam, but mostly his narrative turns on close readings of the documentary record as it was produced in Washington, D.C. On occasion, obvious people or events cry out for inclusion into his narrative. For a book that (unusually) pays so much attention to Canada, for example, it is odd that Chester Ronning—the Canadian Sinologist and diplomat who in 1966 attempted to broker talks between Hanoi and Washington and personally knew many in the PRC leadership—is not even mentioned once, let alone given a supporting role. It is also odd that the ambassadorial-level contacts between the PRC and the United States, occurring on neutral ground in Warsaw, receive such cursory attention. And while Lumbers' discussions of important events in Indonesia and India is good, they are all too brief and never approach the richness of his examination of Vietnam. This is a relatively short book that, given the importance and breadth of its subject, could have been much longer.

Moreover, sometimes Lumbers' microscopic focus allows him to miss or pay insufficient attention to cultural and political developments beyond the Johnson administration; for example, I wanted much more discussion of the changes in American political culture, changes to which Lumbers only occasionally hints and never develops as fully as he should.

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<sup>3</sup> Campbell Craig and Fredrik Logevall, *America's Cold War: The Politics of Insecurity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009).

At other times, the microscopic focus on the particular document in front of him leads to unexplained contradictions or complications. Walt Rostow, for example, is portrayed as a relative dove on China during the Kennedy administration (30-33, 41) but is termed “hawkish” by 1966. (162) I don’t doubt that Rostow’s views changed, but why? And when? Lumbers never explains. With his nose buried in the files, he sometimes doesn’t realize the changes occurring right in front of him.

Nonetheless, *Piercing the Bamboo Curtain* is a fine study. Even its omissions will point future scholars in the direction of fertile ground for further research. Like any good LBJ Revisionist, Lumbers has done exactly what Lyndon Johnson would have wanted from historians: to take the diplomacy of the 1960s seriously.

The jury is still out on President Lyndon B. Johnson's foreign policy accomplishments and achievements, especially in areas other than Vietnam. Robert A. Dallek, with Randall B. Woods one of Johnson's two most perceptive biographers, has suggested that historians must "free ourselves from conventional judgments about LBJ's personal limitations as a foreign policy leader" and, instead, discuss the options open to him and the wisdom or otherwise of his various decisions.<sup>1</sup> His outsized personality, as well as scholars' preoccupation until recently with the Vietnam War, has tended to make balanced assessments difficult. So, too, has the fact that Johnson himself was one of the few Cold War presidents in whose intellectual outlook domestic problems ranked higher than international affairs. Revisionist studies of President John F. Kennedy have often highlighted that he was much less of a liberal and more a conventional Cold Warrior than his lofty rhetoric and attractive style seemed to suggest. Revisionist studies of Johnson, by contrast, have focused on the supposedly unlikely revelation that he had any foreign policy abilities or genuine engagement with international affairs whatever, taking issue with an accepted image of Johnson that verges on caricature.

For over two decades the overwhelming quest to elucidate U.S. involvement in Vietnam almost monopolized diplomatic historians' efforts to study Johnson's foreign policies, an emphasis reflected not only in the literature, but also in the priority Vietnam-related official records received on the fast track for declassification and publication as volumes of the State Department's influential *Foreign Relations of the United States* series. In the mid-1990s Warren I. Cohen and Nancy Bernkopf Tucker edited a stimulating collection of essays on Johnson's foreign policies beyond Vietnam, though these fundamentally endorsed the established conventional wisdom, that involvement in Vietnam proved highly distorting and detrimental to virtually every other Johnson administration international policy.<sup>2</sup> The president was also allowed to take center stage in the making of his own foreign policies. Studies such as that by Fredrik Logevall emphasized the key role of Johnson, rather than his advisers, in the 1964-1965 decision to escalate American involvement in Vietnam, disputing the long accepted version of a foreign policy tyro so dazzled by the high-powered officials he had inherited from John F. Kennedy that he uncritically acquiesced in their advice.<sup>3</sup> Whether right or wrong, the president's policies were at least his own.

Since the mid-1990s, some depictions of Johnson's role in foreign affairs have even been relatively complimentary. H. W. Brands' book-length 1995 study of Johnson's international policies argued that, although he handled Vietnam "disastrously" and would "never be

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Dallek, "Lyndon Johnson as a World Leader," in H. W. Brands, ed. *The Foreign Policies of Lyndon Johnson: Beyond Vietnam* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1999), 17.

<sup>2</sup> Warren I. Cohen and Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, eds., *Lyndon Johnson Confronts the World: American Foreign Policy 1963-1968* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

<sup>3</sup> Fredrik Logevall, *Choosing War: The Lost Chance for Peace and the Escalation of the War in Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); also Michael H. Hunt, *Lyndon Johnson's War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996).

judged a master of the diplomatic arts,” where Western Europe, Turkey, Greece, the Middle East, South Asia, Indonesia, and Cuba were concerned, Johnson “did better managing other aspects of the transition to a world no longer dominated by the United States,” as his country’s post-World War II international hegemony was almost inevitably eroded by forces it could do little to counter.<sup>4</sup> Thomas A. Schwartz’s revisionist study of Johnson’s policies toward Europe presented the president as a shrewd and sophisticated leader of the Western alliance, whose judicious insistence on restraint, over the counsel of his more experienced advisers, enabled NATO to weather serious potential crises, most notably those provoked by French president Charles de Gaulle. Schwartz also credits him with substantial achievements on arms control, at least until the Czech crisis of summer 1968 temporarily ended progress in that field.<sup>5</sup> John Dumbrell, by contrast, in a book that focused upon Johnson’s Soviet policies, was less flattering. His shrewd assessment of Johnson’s existing foreign policy views and experience when he became president in November 1963 belied those who would depict LBJ as merely a Southern hick or the ignoramus of popular myth, but emphasized his commitment to the orthodox Cold War mindset he shared with most contemporary American officials. Dumbrell largely agreed with Henry Kissinger’s assessment of Johnson in the first volume of his own memoirs, *White House Years*, that “the very qualities of compromise and consultation on which his domestic policies were based proved disastrous in foreign policy.”<sup>6</sup> Dumbrell also highlighted the detrimental impact of Vietnam upon Johnson’s foreign policies, as the war obsessed the president, taking time and energy that he could have spent pushing moves toward détente, while complicating U.S. relations with the Soviets, since the latter could not compromise their position as leader of the Communist world by seeming too ready to ignore American actions in Vietnam. In addition, the dedication of U.S. military forces to Vietnam limited the president’s options in the Middle East and elsewhere.<sup>7</sup>

While studies of the Johnson’s foreign policies have begun moving “beyond Vietnam”, until very recently the only book-length studies to do so were those of Schwartz and Dumbrell, on Europe and the Soviet Union, an emphasis that undoubtedly reflects the Eurocentric and Atlanticist hierarchy of Cold War international concerns to which Johnson and most of his closest advisers subscribed. Michael Lumbers’ new work turns the spotlight to China. The opening to China engineered by Johnson’s successor as president, Richard Nixon, and his national security adviser Henry Kissinger, is a story retold in numerous accounts by participants, beginning with the sometimes self-serving memoirs of the two men themselves, and historians have studied their China policies at length, both in freestanding works and as part of broader assessments of their international record. Admirers of Johnson’s charismatic predecessor have for decades sought to burnish his posthumous image by suggesting that, had Kennedy not been assassinated, he would have jettisoned the policies of rigid U.S. non-recognition of mainland China set in place after 1949 and moved

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<sup>4</sup> H. W. Brands, *The Wages of Globalism: Lyndon Johnson and the Limits of American Power* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), quotations from vii.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Alan Schwartz, *Lyndon Johnson and Europe: In the Shadow of Vietnam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

<sup>6</sup> Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1979), 18.

<sup>7</sup> John Dumbrell, *President Lyndon Johnson and Soviet Communism* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2004).

to restore friendlier relations with the People's Republic of China. These counterfactual speculations as to what might have happened had Kennedy but lived are only one facet of broader claims that, but for the assassin's bullets in November 1963, overall American foreign and even domestic policies would have been far happier for the United States, since Kennedy would have avoided major military escalation in Vietnam, moved decisively on arms control and détente with the Soviet Union, and pushed liberal causes, including civil rights, at home and abroad. Such roseate conjectures pertain more to the realm of hagiography than historiography, and must be considered rather in the light of laments for a lost and greatly missed heroic leader than as realistic suppositions. Noam Kochavi's full-length study of Kennedy's China policies portrays an inflexible president who was fundamentally unsympathetic toward the mainland, regarding Mao's communist regime as an appreciably more dangerous and intransigent competitor than the Soviet Union. While officials within the Kennedy foreign policy bureaucracy occasionally put out suggestions that the United States might make conciliatory gestures toward China and eventually make steps in the direction of restoring friendlier relations, Kennedy himself was quite hostile toward the PRC.<sup>8</sup> Debate is still continuing as to whether the prospect of a nuclear-armed China so alarmed him that he genuinely contemplated a surgical strike on Chinese nuclear facilities if he could obtain Soviet acquiescence in this operation.<sup>9</sup> Clearly, however, Kennedy had little love for Mao's China, a state whose dominating though erratic leader rivaled himself in his appeal to the international imagination, especially among young people, and his claim to represent dynamic forces of global change.<sup>10</sup>

Lumbers' volume on Johnson provides an equivalent in-depth account of Johnson's China policies. Most previous accounts of his dealings with China have suggested that the president's almost obsessive preoccupation with Vietnam, and his belief that the mainland was encouraging revolution not just in that country but throughout Southeast Asia and beyond, meant that he was almost as hostile and inflexible toward China as Kennedy had been. Robert J. McMahon and H. W. Brands described how deeply Johnson resented Pakistan's rapprochement with China in 1963-1965, a pragmatic move triggered by the American tilt toward India during the Sino-Indian War of 1962 and the apprehensions this provoked among Pakistani officials, including President Ayub Khan and Foreign Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. The pressure Johnson exerted on Pakistan to break off its new friendship with China merely succeeded in effectively destroying the alliance that had previously linked the United States and Pakistan. Johnson's embargo on supplying American arms to both sides during the September 1965 Indo-Pakistan border war and his instructions to Iran and Turkey to remain aloof from the conflict, when their fellow Baghdad Pact ally Pakistan sought assistance from them, were added inducements to

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<sup>8</sup> Noam Kochavi, *A Conflict Perpetuated: China Policy During the Kennedy Years* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002).

<sup>9</sup> See, e.g., Gordon Chang, *Friends and Enemies: The United States, China, and the Soviet Union, 1948-1972* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 243-247; and William Burr and Jeffrey T. Richelson, "Whether to 'strangle the baby in the cradle': The United States and the Chinese nuclear program, 1960-64," *International Security* 25:3 (Winter 2000/01), 54-99.

<sup>10</sup> Fidel Castro's comparable ability to capture the loyalties of impressionable leftists around the world and so pose a challenge to Kennedy's own charisma may have likewise contributed to the profound antagonism between him and Kennedy.

Pakistan to improve relations with China, something the United States was unable to prevent.<sup>11</sup> Nancy Bernkopf Tucker and Gordon Chang pointed, however, to a gentle shift toward American policies of “containment without isolation” of China in the final two years of the Johnson administration. Tucker and Chang nonetheless tended to minimize the impact of this nascent move in the direction of rapprochement, arguing that, due in part to China’s absorption in the Cultural Revolution, in practical terms this had little effect.<sup>12</sup>

A recent study by James Peck agreed that, during the Johnson years, American policies toward China began to demonstrate greater flexibility. Peck also pointed out that, despite subsequent complaints by Kennedy and Johnson administrations that they had lacked the benefit of sophisticated expert analyses of the political, historical, and social dynamics of the situation in both China and Vietnam, in practice this was not true. Within the national security bureaucracy, in a single document or group of documents, China could appear as the model of revolutionary nationalism, as a nation advancing interests bitterly at odds with those of the USSR, as a centuries-old enemy of the DRV, and as part of the communist alternative to the American global order. National security officials repeatedly explored the complexity of China’s relations with the DRV; the implications of the Sino-Soviet dispute for Hanoi’s policies in South Vietnam, the usefulness of Beijing as a revolutionary model for guerrilla warfare and national development, the Chinese military strategy (offensive or defensive) and nuclear weapons program.

It was not that policymakers lacked access to carefully nuanced, balanced, and informed assessments, but rather that, “after engaging in such detailed reviews, the very same government officials could still invoke, both in public *and in private*, the most sweeping simplifications.” During the 1960s staffers working for the State Department, the Joint Chiefs of Staff in the Pentagon, the Central Intelligence Agency, and the National Security Council habitually produced National Intelligence Estimates, Reviews of the World Situation, and Long Range Studies that called into question some of the orthodoxies governing existing policies toward both China and Vietnam and suggested these be modified, usually in the direction of greater accommodation with China.<sup>13</sup> Churning out yet another analytical memorandum recommending changes in prevailing norms was not particularly difficult. Navigating those policy prescriptions through the bureaucracy, so that top policymakers were willing to accept them and engaged enough to push for their implementation, was an infinitely greater challenge, akin, it seems, to steering a fully laden oil tanker into a major change of course.

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<sup>11</sup> Robert J. McMahon, “Ambivalent Partners: The Lyndon Johnson Administration and its Asian Allies,” in Brands, ed., *The Foreign Policies of Lyndon Johnson*, 170-172; McMahon, “Toward Disillusionment and Disengagement in South Asia,” in Cohen and Tucker, eds., *Lyndon Johnson Confronts the World*, 135-165; Brands, *The Wages of Globalism*, 123-145.

<sup>12</sup> Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, “Threats, Opportunities, and Frustrations in East Asia,” in Cohen and Tucker, eds., *Lyndon Johnson Confronts the World*, 105-111; and Chang, *Friends and Enemies*, 270-275, 280-284.

<sup>13</sup> James Peck, *Washington’s China: The National Security World, the Cold War, and the Origins of Globalism* (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006), 226-247, quotation from 234.

Peck rightly discerns a gradual change of emphasis during the Johnson years in the view of China that prevailed within the administration, a move away from fierce ideological opposition to a more pragmatic approach, and to a new appreciation of diversity within the communist camp. American embroilment in Vietnam notwithstanding, he argues, by about 1966 communist-backed nationalism and romantic revolutionaries seemed to pose less of a threat to the United States, while the destabilizing Cultural Revolution and the chaos it generated both within China and in the country's external policies helped to discredit and weaken China internationally. The ability of the United States to ensure that Taiwan remained the sole representative of China in the United Nations was also becoming increasingly problematic, with an ever expanding number of new entrants to the organization, many of them former African and Asian colonies who were likely to be sympathetic to mainland China's case. What is less clear in Peck's analysis, which focuses primarily upon the thoughtful, well-reasoned, and sometimes elegantly crafted papers produced by mid-level bureaucrats within the national security apparatus, is just how this evolving intellectual shift toward greater flexibility translated into concrete changes in China policy.

Lumbers' study, by contrast, focuses first of all on Johnson himself, in conjunction with his top advisers. He makes it amply clear that major changes in China policy required active presidential engagement and involvement and that, lacking such impetus, it was very difficult to overcome the entrenched bureaucratic forces of inertia. The Johnson Lumbers portrays, though far from a professional diplomat, was shrewd, able, and cautious. He subscribed almost reflexively to prevailing Cold War orthodoxies, as he had since the late 1940s, but he was not particularly bellicose, and was less ideological than Kennedy. In part, this was due to what Ernest R. May has termed "lessons of the past." When using this phrase, May was thinking particularly of the analogy of Munich, perennially popular among American policymakers—including Johnson—from the late 1940s to the early twenty-first century, and usually invoked as a justification for military confrontations with dictatorial opponents.<sup>14</sup> Statesmen, diplomats, and policymakers may well, however, have more than one formative memory of immediate personal reference in their mental landscape, and this was apparently true of Johnson. Numerous historians have suggested that policymakers of the 1950s and 1960s always had, lurking at the backs of their minds, the memory of how the "loss" of China to communism in 1949 became a hair shirt for the Truman administration, exposing everyone involved in the making of China policy, from the president downward, to accusations that they were deluded fellow travelers if not outright communist agents. Throughout the 1950s and most of the 1960s, it is argued, fear of provoking similar political fallout inhibited Americans leaders from making any serious initiatives to change China policy. Such memories were undoubtedly significant for Johnson, though, interestingly enough, he was more open to change on China than that even more cagey political animal John F. Kennedy had been.

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<sup>14</sup> See Ernest R. May, *"Lessons" of the Past: The Use and Misuse of History in American Foreign Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973); Yuen Foong Khong, *Analogies at War: Korea, Munich, Dien Bien Phu, and the Vietnam Decisions of 1965* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992); and Göran Rystad, *Prisoners of the Past?: The Munich Syndrome and Makers of American Foreign Policy in the Cold War* (Lund, Sweden: CWK Gleerup, 1982).

Lumbers, however, highlights another facet of Johnson's worldview, his recollections of how in late 1950, as American victory in the Korean War seemed to be impending, the entry of Chinese troops into that conflict transformed optimistic anticipations of an easy and triumphant ending to a relatively small scale war into a brutal, bloody stalemate that lasted three years and was settled in what was essentially a draw. Johnson undoubtedly felt a need to hold the line in Vietnam, but his memories of these events, which took place just a decade before he became vice-president, meant he was never tempted to underestimate China. As American involvement in Vietnam escalated, one of the president's highest priorities was his determination to ensure that U.S. forces did not once again find themselves fighting several million Chinese opponents. To prevent this, he was prepared to place appreciable limits on U.S. involvement in Vietnam, refraining from launching an invasion of the North, and carefully calibrating American bombing of targets near Hanoi at a level he thought would not provoke full scale Chinese intervention. Johnson was also prepared to turn a blind eye to the presence of tens of thousands of Chinese support troops in North Vietnam, some of them anti-aircraft specialists who were shooting down U.S. bombers. Chen Jian and James G. Hershberg have written a lengthy account of how in 1965 Chinese officials, including Premier Zhou Enlai, indirectly sent messages to the United States that sought to limit Chinese and U.S. involvement in Vietnam to a level that each side could tolerate. The Chinese warned quite specifically that, if the United States pushed North Vietnam too far, they would be obliged to retaliate, as they had in 1950. Each party, China and the United States, therefore had a tacit interest in limiting the war in Vietnam to a level that each considered tolerable. And, as Chen and Hershberg suggest, perhaps such implicit cooperation in preventing the conflict spiraling into disastrous escalation facilitated the two powers' subsequent collaboration on the normalization of relations.<sup>15</sup> Despite pressure from the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who at least toyed with the idea of launching all-out war against China with the objective of settling all outstanding questions in Southeast Asia, outright hostilities with China were one scenario Johnson was determined to avoid. While recognizing that China was reluctant to enter the conflict, he also believed that bonds of ideological solidarity could override strategic problems, and might easily lead China and perhaps even the Soviet Union to intervene. In his quest to avoid provoking China, he even sought to direct U.S. bombing raids on North Vietnam away from bases believed to be housing Chinese support troops.

Johnson's fear of involvement in full scale war with China reflected a certain wary respect for that country's military potential, but was far from indicative of any warmer feelings for the People's Republic. Before he became president, Johnson's interest in China was minimal. Like Kennedy, Johnson initially regarded China as a maverick revolutionary power bent on destabilizing Third World countries, and luring them away from the American orbit. To American policymakers in the first half of the 1960s, especially those who believed the United States was engaged in ferocious competition for the loyalties of

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<sup>15</sup> Chen Jian and James G. Hershberg, "Informing the Enemy: Sino-American 'Signaling' and the Vietnam War, 1965," in Priscilla Roberts, ed. *Behind the Bamboo Curtain: China, Vietnam, and the World Beyond Asia*, (Washington, DC, and Stanford: Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Stanford University Press, 2006), 193-258.

non-aligned developing powers, China often appeared a greater threat than the Soviet Union, and this was true of Johnson. The Soviet Russia of Nikita Khrushchev and Leonid Brezhnev seemed to have evolved into a state which, however opportunistic it might be on occasion, had a strong interest in maintaining the status quo, and could even function as a partner for the United States in encouraging international stability. The unpredictable and bombastic Mao Zedong, by contrast, seemed an egocentric maverick bent on upsetting the international balance, even at the risk of nuclear war. During Kennedy's presidency, American bureaucrats debated whether the Sino-Soviet split was genuine and, if so, was likely to be permanent. By the time Johnson succeeded to the office, most policymakers accepted the Sino-Soviet split as a given, and feared that a nuclear-armed China would throw its weight around in Asia and seek to use the tactics of armed struggle to encourage revolution in all its Asian neighbors. Following in Kennedy's footsteps, in 1964 Johnson and his advisers debated the possibility of a pre-emptive strike on Chinese nuclear facilities before a successful test could take place. Johnson appears to have leaned in favor of restraint, and to have agreed with those who believed that, while China might explode nuclear devices, for several decades these would be more a symbolic than a real addition to the mainland's arsenal, since it lacked the delivery systems necessary to use them against an opponent.

A major theme of Lumbers' volume is the central role of Vietnam to any understanding of Johnson's China policy. In that respect, he reinforces the accepted view of Johnson's foreign policies, that Vietnam bulked larger than any other concern, serving almost as a straitjacket on the president's handling of international affairs. His fear of the magnetic attraction that China might exercise upon its neighbors, especially those in Southeast Asia, was one major reason, Lumbers plausibly argues, why Johnson felt obliged to try to prevent a Communist victory in Vietnam. Initially, Lumbers argues, Johnson ascribed to China much of the responsibility for the deteriorating situation in Vietnam, suspecting that the North's growing incursions on South Vietnam were undertaken at China's urging. This outlook made him reluctant to contemplate any moves to improve U.S. relations with the mainland. Johnson and his advisers also feared that allowing a communist takeover of South Vietnam would destroy American credibility with other Asian allies. Moreover: "U.S. officials believed that China, as the standard bearer of national liberation and as the most vocal proponent of upheaval and violent change in the Third World, was ideally positioned to capitalize on the anticipated fallout from an American defeat in Vietnam." (108) Abandoning South Vietnam would, he feared, give China free rein in Southeast Asia. Consistency, however, was not necessarily the hallmark of the Johnson administration's China policies. In Lumbers' words: "The administration's perception of the PRC's role in Vietnam, as with its general assessment of Chinese power, was riddled with contradictions." (99)

A turning point in Johnson's apprehensions over China's designs came in 1965, when Indonesian conservative army officers led by General Suharto overthrew the long-established regime of President Sukarno and violently eliminated up to 300,000 opponents, many of them communists, according to their executioners. This rightist coup gave American officials, the president included, new confidence that Chinese-backed communist parties would not take power throughout Southeast Asia, and that Red China was not, after

all, capable of expelling American power from much of the Asian mainland and periphery. China's efforts to restrict its involvement in Indochina to a manageable level were viewed by at least some American policymakers as another indicator of the weakness of Chinese military power and the limits to Mao's ability to incorporate China's neighbors in its own regional sphere of influence. American officials soon strongly suspected that China resented Soviet involvement in Vietnam, which brought Russian power uncomfortably close to its own borders. From mid-1966 onward, too, China was absorbed in the Cultural Revolution, a development that played havoc with its diplomatic relations around the world, alienated China from most of the communist camp and many other countries, and for several years brutally curtailed the mainland's ability to conduct any coherent foreign policy.

Lumbers deftly depicts the evolution over time of the views of Johnson's chief advisers on China, and their impact upon the president himself. By 1966 domestic political pressure in favor of recognition of China was mounting, and key U.S. allies, such as France, Japan, Australia, and Canada, were publicly or privately making it clear to the Johnson administration that they not only wished to open relations with China, but also felt that the mainland should be seated in the United Nations. China's acquisition of nuclear weapons alarmed some of its neighbors, but also convinced growing numbers of states that it was foolish to seek to continue the exclusion of the mainland from the United Nations and other international forums. Japan was a case in point. According to recent newspaper reports, in January 1965 Japanese Prime Minister Eisaku Sato asked Johnson and Defense Secretary Robert McNamara for guarantees that, should war break out between Japan and China, the United States would employ nuclear weapons against the mainland, and offered to make Japanese base facilities available for this purpose. Johnson affirmed the American commitment to the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty, under which Washington was obliged to defend Japan against attack, but apparently made no specific pledge to use atomic weapons in the event of a Sino-Japanese conflict.<sup>16</sup> Ironically, by 1967 Johnson administration officials were urging Japan to be more rather than less suspicious of Chinese intentions and to refrain from becoming overly dependent on Chinese markets.<sup>17</sup>

Such warnings coexisted with tentative moves toward rapprochement with China. In late 1965 and early 1966, the Johnson administration relaxed bans on travel by Americans to the mainland. According to Lumbers, this "concerted political and diplomatic campaign to disabuse the PRC of its sense of American hostility" was motivated primarily by the desire "to prevent China's overt involvement in Vietnam." (150) This "tentative bridge-building" (153) included signals by senior American officials to Beijing of their interest in improving relations. One reason for doing so was that by no means all U.S. policymakers were yet convinced that China would refrain from outright war in Vietnam. A State-Defense Long Range Study, completed in June 1966 and largely written by the Harvard scholar Edwin O.

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<sup>16</sup> Associated Press, "Japan saw a nuclear option in a China war," *International Herald Tribune*, December 23, 2008, p. 4. This request was not made public, perhaps because there was strong opposition among the Japanese population—sentiments Sato purported to share—to allowing the presence of American nuclear weapons on U.S. bases on Japanese soil or on ships or aircraft using these facilities. Tucker, "Threats, Opportunities, and Frustrations in East Asia," 118-119.

<sup>17</sup> Tucker, "Threats, Opportunities, and Frustrations in East Asia," 126.

Reischauer, urged further American moves toward China, even as it presciently warned that internal developments within China, rather than American actions, were likely to be the major forces pushing any warming of relations. Well-publicized hearings on China by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that year, chaired by Senator J. William Fulbright, increased the pressure on the Johnson administration to make some overtures. Johnson's influential aide William Moyers saw political advantage in doing so and, with James Thomson of the State Department, a long-time advocate of an opening to China, drafted a speech that the president delivered in July 1966, that tentatively advocated a new China policy. "It was," Lumbers argues, "no coincidence that the high-water mark of policy innovation in 1966 dovetailed with LBJ's personal engagement with China strategy, a level of interest that hitherto had been lacking." (166)

The new direction was, however, still only tentative, and China was not a top priority. The Cultural Revolution, then only beginning to dominate Chinese internal politics, largely precluded any Chinese response, while American officials were wary of making any move that might have a negative impact on the outcome of the turmoil in China. They also believed that the turbulent state of affairs in China made military intervention in Vietnam less likely. The pervasive chaos of China's domestic scene damaged the country's popular image within the United States, so that public support for new policies evaporated. Presidential attention, too, soon switched to other issues, including the 1967 Middle Eastern war. "Just as the possibility of Chinese intervention kindled LBJ's personal interest in bridge-building in 1966, the diminished threat of an enlarged war as China turned inward, rendered the need for new overtures to the mainland less urgent." In consequence, "substantive policy reform was put on the backburner." (196) Not until late 1967 and 1968, when it seemed that moderate elements were regaining control in China, did Johnson show further personal interest in encouraging rapprochement with China. Johnson's January 1968 State of the Union Address contained proposals for promoting American travel to and cultural exchanges with China. Once again, Vietnam featured prominently among his motives: he hoped that "heightened Sino-American dialogue would unnerve Hanoi." (220) In February he met with a group of leading American Sinologists to discuss China policy, and they recommended bold initiatives, in particular American efforts to treat China as a major power and reduce its sense of isolation and beleaguerment. Shortly afterwards, the massive Tet offensive temporarily overwhelmed all other international issues, and in its aftermath Johnson announced that he would not run for re-election, making him effectively a lame duck president. Walt W. Rostow, his national security adviser, believed that if this had not been the case, the president would have sought a major breakthrough in relations with China, and made this a high priority. If so, his China policies had once again taken second place to developments in Vietnam.

Perceptive and judicious though it is, there is a missing dimension in this study. Lumbers considers the "Johnson team's complex relationship with Taiwan [to be] largely unexamined and deserving of a full-length treatment." He correctly states, moreover, that "during the Johnson years . . . the U.S. attitude toward Taiwan, much more than its activities in Vietnam, was Beijing's greatest grievance." (250) While the scope of his own volume may not have allowed for prolonged discussion of the inter-relationship between the United States, Taiwan, Vietnam, and mainland China, he seems to give this rather short shrift.

From 1964 onward the Johnson administration began to pressure its Asian allies to contribute troops and other assistance to the war effort in Vietnam. Chiang Kai-shek was eager to respond, seeing this as an opportunity to win American support in his long-contemplated campaign to retake part or all of the mainland. Lumbers describes how, in late 1965 and early 1966, and again in 1967, the Johnson administration discouraged proposals by Chiang Kai-shek and his son, Taiwan's Defense Minister Chiang Ching-kuo, for an invasion of the five southwestern Chinese provinces, an operation that would have required American air support. American officials apparently feared that launching this assault might provoke China into full scale intervention in Vietnam; they also thought that Communist control of the mainland was far more entrenched than Chiang Kai-shek claimed, and that any such invasion was more likely to arouse popular Chinese anti-colonialist fervor in resistance to it than to succeed. Lumbers fails, however, to mention what Nancy Bernkopf Tucker has rightly termed the "multiple and only marginally less provocative" ways in which Taiwan assisted the United States during the Vietnam War.

Though initially tempted to include Taiwanese troops among the military forces openly engaged in fighting in Vietnam, Johnson followed the advice of his more cautious officials and politely declined offers from Chiang Kai-shek to send contingents of uniformed Taiwanese soldiers to be incorporated among the allied combat units deployed in Vietnam. This pragmatic caution did not, however, preclude extensive involvement by Taiwan. In Tucker's incisive words:

Nationalist officials provided small units of specially trained men for covert action conducted by the CIA and American military intelligence. They sent aircraft crews to fly transport and espionage missions, as well as technical maintenance teams, some of whom were camouflaged as Nung soldiers (an ethnic minority living along the Vietnam-China border) or given Vietnamese identities to hide them from both the Chinese Communists and the Vietnamese who were often bitterly anti-Chinese. A large contingent served in southernmost Vietnam as part of the Sea Swallows unit led by a Catholic priest and supported by American aid. In Taiwan the Nationalists set up training programs for Vietnamese troops. The United States also turned to Taiwan as a key staging area for operations in Vietnam: lengthening runways; stationing C-130 transport squadrons, KC-135 tankers, 13<sup>th</sup> Air Force fighter aircraft, and two fast-reaction F-4 nuclear bombers; establishing repair facilities; and using the island for armed forces' rest and recreation.

Taiwan was rewarded with a major share of the American-financed commercial import program the United States established for Vietnam in the early 1960s, boosting the island's economy. Nationalist technicians also took part in U.S.-funded agricultural, medical, and public works programs in Vietnam.<sup>18</sup> But gratitude only went so far. American officials, including Johnson, still rejected, as they had ever since the early 1950s, Taiwan's insistent proposal of a regional military alliance or Pacific Pact that would include the United States,

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<sup>18</sup> Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, *Uncertain Friendships: Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the United States, 1945-1992* (New York: Twayne, 1994), 96-98, quotations from 97; see also Tucker, "Threats, Opportunities, and Frustrations in East Asia," 111-115.

Taiwan, and South Korea. The most they were prepared to tolerate was regional economic cooperation, through such agencies as the Asian Development Bank.<sup>19</sup>

While a fuller discussion of Johnson's dealings with Taiwan would have enriched our understanding of his China policies, Lumbers' insightful study is a welcome addition to the historiography of both Sino-American relations and Johnson's diplomacy. He ably charts the evolution of thinking on China within the national security bureaucracy during the 1960s, relating this to broader public trends. Although there were no dramatic developments on his watch, by the time LBJ left office, the groundwork had been laid for the near tectonic shift in Sino-American relations that would occur during the next administration. Memories of McCarthyism during the 1950s had not prevented Johnson and his advisers from making gestures toward China, even if these had met with little response. His memories of the brutal impact of Chinese intervention in Korea left him determined that on this occasion history would not be allowed to repeat itself in Vietnam, a constant preoccupation that informed all his China policies.

Equally valuable is Lumbers' nuanced portrait of Johnson as international statesman. In foreign affairs, he argues, Johnson was actually more stable, prudent, and careful than Kennedy, his dazzling predecessor, a paradoxical view given that it was LBJ rather than JFK who so drastically boosted the American commitment to Vietnam. Lumbers agrees with those earlier historians who depict Johnson as tactful, smooth, and skilled in handling foreign leaders, including such towering but difficult personalities as Charles de Gaulle. He notes that Johnson never condemned or vilified Mao Zedong in public, thereby leaving the door open for a future reconciliation. He also follows such earlier historians as Brands and Schwartz in portraying Johnson as an engaged and informed foreign policy president, who was responsible for most of the important decisions on China policy. Johnson listened carefully to his advisers, but was capable of rejecting their advice, especially when he considered this too bellicose, and following his own counsel, relying "on his own instincts and preoccupations." If his foreign policy experience, especially on China, was limited, Johnson was a quick and intelligent learner, with a voracious appetite for facts and phenomenal energy, by no means the crude and unsophisticated southern boor of popular legend. Lumbers argues "that his capacity for adjusting his thinking in response to changing variables suggests a degree of suppleness and inquisitiveness that hitherto has not been captured in the existing literature." (257) Undoubtedly, this study will not be the last word on Lyndon B. Johnson. It does provide new and fascinating insight into the personality and accomplishments of one of the most complex and perhaps ultimately tragic men to serve as president of the United States.

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<sup>19</sup> Tucker, "Threats, Opportunities, and Frustrations in East Asia," 115.

**M**ichael Lumbers' book is the first comprehensive study of the Lyndon Johnson administration's policy toward the People's Republic of China (PRC). It is based on careful and extensive research into American and British archives. It also fully incorporates the findings of recent research on Chinese foreign policy. The result is a highly revealing investigation of a neglected period in the evolution of Sino-American relations during the Cold War.

Lumbers' discussion of Johnson's preparation as President in dealing with China is informative and convincing. Highlighting continuity between the Kennedy and Johnson administration's policy toward Beijing, Lumbers writes that "there was no commensurate shift in Washington's obstinate posture toward Beijing in 1964." (53) He attributes Johnson's decision to stay the course to his "complex China mindset and modus operandi as a foreign policy leader in the early stage of his presidency." (53) Johnson's understanding of world affairs, according to Lumbers, was determined by his own reading of the major historical events that took place when he came of age. Lumbers identifies two primary historical lessons that left an indelible mark on Johnson. The first was the Munich-New Deal mindset that shaped his view of the political and psychological threat that China posed to American interests. The second was the horrific memory of the Korean War. Lumbers concludes that "if the lessons of Munich demonstrated the imperative of *containing* the PRC, the example of Chinese intervention in the Korean War underlined the risks of *confronting* the mainland" (italics in the original). (56)

Lumbers devotes a major portion of his narrative to an exploration of the connection between the Vietnam War and Johnson's China policy. During the first two years of his presidency, Lumbers indicates, Johnson did not display sustained interest in issues concerning China. He was "far more preoccupied with the priorities of elections, the passage of domestic legislation, and the unfolding war in Vietnam." (121) His fixation with Vietnam reaffirmed Washington's policy of containment against China. In a chapter titled "The Irony of Vietnam," Lumbers shows that Johnson's escalation of the war in Vietnam, instead of precluding any change in China policy, ironically served as the catalyst for a new approach to Beijing. As Johnson deepened the American entanglement in Vietnam, he became increasingly worried about a replay of Korea. To prevent a direct clash with China, he gradually escalated American military involvement in Vietnam, took Chinese warnings and signals seriously, and refrained from adopting drastic measures that might trigger a Chinese intervention. In the meantime, he modified policy toward China, replacing the previous line of containment plus isolation with a new approach of containment plus engagement. Specifically, he lifted the travel ban against China. Lumbers is correct to emphasize that Johnson's bridge-building to Beijing was tentative and limited and that the adjustment in China policy "resulted more from reaction to unanticipated circumstances and events beyond the control of decision-makers than from design or natural inclination." (242)

Lumbers' treatment of the impact of Mao's Cultural Revolution on Johnson's policy toward China is judicious and nuanced. On the one hand, he ascribes the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution to the interruption of Johnson's tentative bridge-building to China. He points out that "as the mainland turned inwards and the contingency of China's military involvement in Vietnam became less apparent, the logic underpinning the extension of tentative feelers to Beijing in early 1966—the need to relieve its fears of American intentions—lost its momentum." (203) On the other hand, Lumbers makes clear that China's political upheaval aroused Johnson's "interest in exploring means of nurturing moderate elements in Beijing." (213) Thus, as Mao threw China into the vortex of the Cultural Revolution, "a further thawing of high-level attitudes toward the PRC" (214) occurred in Washington. Developments in China—the apparent loss of influence of the Maoists in the second half of 1967—sparked Johnson's renewed interest in establishing contact with Beijing in early 1968. Even Secretary of State Dean Rusk, the most recalcitrant hardliner on China in the administration, modified his position and began to exhibit interest in probing the intentions of Mao's potential successors. In December 1967, Rusk instructed the Policy Planning Council to explore the feasibility of bringing China into world technical organizations as a way to increase Beijing's contact with the international community.

In the last part of his account, Lumbers addresses the implications of Johnson's tentative bridge-building to China for the Nixon administration. Contradicting the conventional view that gives all the credit to Nixon and Kissinger for initiating a departure from the rigid and confrontational approach toward China, Lumbers stresses that Johnson's tentative bridge-building actually paved the way for Nixon's breakthrough.

Although Lumbers is insightful in explaining how formative experiences and historical memories shaped Johnson's perceptions and images of China, his discussion of the intellectual roots of Johnson's China approach is not informed by the recent scholarship on modernization as an ideology in American foreign policy in the 1960s. As Michael Latham has convincingly demonstrated, modernization theory represented an important belief among liberal intellectuals and government officials during the 1960s. It served as an approach to policy, as a justification for Washington's interventions abroad, and as a set of self-flattering assumptions about American superiority and exceptionalism. It was "an ideology shared by many different officials, theorists, and media sources about the nation, its historical 'development', and its ability and duty to transform the 'less developed' world around it."<sup>1</sup> Latham's findings help us better understand what Lumbers calls "Johnson's reformist impulse," which, according to Lumbers, provided Johnson "with an intuitive understanding of the socio-economic maladies that afflicted so many of the newly independent nations in Southeast Asia, and the opportunities that this widespread discontent presented to adversaries such as China in the battle for the 'hearts and minds' of Asians." (55)

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<sup>1</sup> Michael E. Latham, *Modernization as Ideology: American Social Science and "Nation Building" in the Kennedy Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 13.

Another important element to which Lumbers fails to pay sufficient attention in his examination of the ideological background of Johnson's China policy is the idea of racial hierarchy in American thinking. As Gordon Chang and James Peck have suggested, racial bias against Asians shaped the views of American leaders during the Cold War, and expressions of racial fear, mistrust, and hostility frequently appeared in the discussions and deliberations of policymakers. U.S. officials believed that the Chinese valued life less than Westerners did, including the Russians. They were convinced that no matter what gaps in culture and tradition, beliefs or language, the Russians were human beings, and wanted to stay alive. The Chinese, according to their view, were different, often fanatical, irrational, and caring little for human life. In the National Security Council, the Soviet Union was regarded as white and still part of Western civilization while China was treated as the other.<sup>2</sup>

Despite these quibbles, Lumbers' study remains a valuable contribution to the literature on Sino-American encounters during the Cold War. It is well-researched and clearly written. It should remain the standard account on the Johnson administration's policy toward China.

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<sup>2</sup> Gordon H. Chang, *Friends and Enemies: The United States, China, and the Soviet Union, 1948-1972* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 170-174; James Peck, *Washington's China: The National Security World, the Cold War, and the Origins of Globalism* (Amherst & Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006), 5-6.

Author's Response by Michael Lumbers

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Writing history is a labor of love. Barring the few “celebrity historians” in our midst, fame and glory will likely elude most visitors to, and participants in, an H-Diplo forum. I certainly never entertained any illusions that the release of *Piercing the Bamboo Curtain: Tentative Bridge Building to China During the Johnson Years*, catchy title and alluring cover price notwithstanding, would trigger a frenzied rush to the book store (as I write this, my book is currently ranked 2,624,099 in sales on [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com); a message on the site imploring the potential buyer to “Order now! Only 1 copy left” has remained unaltered for at least six months).

More gratifying than a royalty check (unless it's a very large one) is the opportunity to research and write on a topic of personal interest, with the hope that the final product expands our existing knowledge and is of sufficient historiographical value to be taken seriously by one's peers. With that in mind, I would like to thank Yafeng Xia for assembling such a distinguished panel of commentators on my book. I find it very humbling that all concerned have taken the time to digest my work and offer very stimulating, thoughtful feedback. After reading all four favorable reviews, moreover, my already considerable regard for the judiciousness of each historian has grown inestimably.

I will devote the bulk of my response to addressing the separate comments of the reviewers, each of whom offers a unique perspective. As a lead-in, however, it's worth noting that all four highlight the top-down approach I take to explaining U.S. China policy. As I state in the introduction, this was intentional. Of the very few works that touch on China policy during the Johnson years, the focus has been on the evolution of China mindsets among policymaking elites in the bureaucracy.<sup>1</sup> Lyndon Johnson, the dominant figure of his administration, has been lost in the shuffle as a consequence. I devote considerable attention to exploring LBJ's contribution to the formulation of China policy, both because I don't think foreign policy can be fully explained without looking at the personality atop the decision-making apparatus ultimately responsible for approving or vetoing questions of war and peace, and I also saw an opportunity to make a fresh contribution to the burgeoning debate over Johnson's diplomacy “beyond Vietnam.”

I think the overall China record as presented in my book provides ammunition for both critics and defenders of Johnson's foreign policy leadership, though probably more so for the latter. Yet while none of the four reviewers takes exception to the largely sympathetic portrait I draw of the President, I think anyone attempting to convince a wider audience of LBJ's diplomatic gravitas faces a steep uphill climb. A very recent C-Span survey of historians ranked him an unimpressive 35th in this category among all Presidents.<sup>2</sup> Vietnam, understandably, continues to dominate assessments of Johnson's international

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<sup>1</sup> For example, see Gordon H. Chang, *Friends and Enemies: The United States, China, and the Soviet Union, 1948-1972* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990); Evelyn Goh, *Constructing the U.S. Rapprochement with China, 1961-1974: From “Red Menace” to “Tacit Ally”* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.c-span.org/PresidentialSurvey/Overall-Ranking.aspx>

performance. Another factor accounting for negative judgements of this complex, elusive character, Robert Dallek notes, was the Texan's unique "technique for obscuring his intentions...through rhetorical bombast, jokes, role playing, and a folksy sentimentalism that encouraged lots of people to misjudge his intelligence and shrewdness".<sup>3</sup> The challenge for any historian attempting a balanced appraisal of Johnson's overall foreign policy is to place both Vietnam and his personal idiosyncrasies in context, a task ably managed by H.W. Brands and Thomas Alan Schwartz.<sup>4</sup> I hope my own work will be seen in this light.

Placing Vietnam in context obviously does not mean ignoring it. Vietnam figures prominently in my account, another point to which all reviewers refer. Again, there was no dissension regarding my contention of the war's centrality to the narrative or my interpretation of how it shaped Johnson's policy toward the mainland. The most enlightening discovery of my research was that Vietnam, hitherto thought of as a primary cause of Sino-American deadlock during the 1960s, actually had a moderating impact on both Washington and Beijing and helped pave the way toward their rapprochement in the early 1970s. It seems that the possibilities for new interpretations of how this pivotal conflict influenced the course of the Cold War are virtually endless.

After providing a complimentary overview of my book, Mitchell Lerner advances an alternative view to some of my specific interpretations. First, he wonders if I exaggerate the extent to which the Johnson team contemplated military action against China's nuclear program in 1964. Ironically, I cite Johnson's disinterest in this very option as an example of his nuanced, flexible China mindset. (254) Unlike Kennedy, for whom the prospect of a nuclear China evoked considerable dread, Johnson never offered his views – in public or private – on the subject, let alone seriously considered a pre-emptive strike. In their authoritative study of America's handling of the Chinese nuclear program in the early 1960s, William Burr and Jeffrey T. Richelson reach the same conclusion.<sup>5</sup>

As I make clear, Lyndon Johnson's non-alarmist opinion held sway and ultimately determined the wise decision to forego a military response. In discussing this subject, however, I thought it important to present the range of views among Johnson officials. Indeed, there was a significant hawkish faction of senior policymakers, all holdovers from the Kennedy administration, who, if not pining for a pre-emptive strike, at least thought it prudent to keep this option on the table. Lerner correctly makes reference to a Policy Planning Council report in April 1964 that discounted the military significance of a Chinese nuclear capability. Yet not all officials concurred. That same month, National Security Adviser McGeorge Bundy remarked that this paper had "defused the issue [China's nuclear

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<sup>3</sup> Robert Dallek, "Lyndon Johnson As a World Leader," in H.W. Brands, ed., *Beyond Vietnam: The Foreign Policies of Lyndon Johnson* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1999), 8.

<sup>4</sup> H.W. Brands, *The Wages of Globalism: Lyndon Johnson and the Limits of American Power* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Thomas Alan Schwartz, *Lyndon Johnson and Europe: In the Shadow of Vietnam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).

<sup>5</sup> William Burr and Jeffrey T. Richelson, "Whether To 'Strangle the Baby in the Cradle': The United States and the Chinese Nuclear Program, 1960-64," *International Security* 25:3 (2000/2001).

program] too much ... such a development would have far greater political consequences” than the study’s author had suggested.<sup>6</sup>

Both Bundy and Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara pressed the President in September 1964 to discuss with the Soviets the “possibilities for joint action...even a possible agreement to cooperate in preventive military action.”<sup>7</sup> LBJ acquiesced in an ultimately unsuccessful approach to Ambassador Dobrynin, likely to preserve unity among his senior advisers and satiate those troubled by the specter of a nuclear China. Mindful of the bloody Korean stalemate of the early 1950s, however, Johnson was consistently averse to reigniting a military confrontation with the PRC, especially as he deepened America’s commitment to Vietnam. In other words, I doubt there is much difference between Lerner and myself on our understanding of this topic.

Second, Lerner questions my characterization of Johnson’s foreign policymaking apparatus as centralized and hierarchical. He reminds us that LBJ frequently canvassed the opinion of those outside his Cabinet on a full range of foreign policy issues. As an “LBJ revisionist,” I’m certainly not inclined to dispute Lerner’s insinuation that Johnson’s curiosity about external matters compelled him to seek information and views from those beyond his official circle. Instances of this phenomenon are documented in my book. For example, Clark Clifford’s report on his tour of Southeast Asia in August 1967 evidently influenced the President’s conclusion that the Cultural Revolution had decreased the possibility of Chinese intervention in the Vietnam War, thereby encouraging him to expand the bombing of North Vietnam. (195)

Applied to China policy on the whole, however, I think there is some merit to the conventional criticism leveled against Johnson’s advisory system. Certainly for the first two years of his presidency, he passively deferred to his inherited national security team and allowed Bundy, McNamara, and especially Secretary of State Dean Rusk to define the parameters of China policy. This triad adhered to the image of a militant, predatory China that was seeking to spread its regional influence by subversion. With heightened anxieties over the possibility of Chinese intervention in Vietnam and the beginning of Mao’s Cultural Revolution, Johnson became more interested and engaged in China policymaking. Even so, the documentary record does not reveal other voices entering the debate in a substantive manner. Johnson continued to rely heavily on his most senior advisers. Rusk and National Security Adviser Walt Rostow were decisive in applying the brakes on any move to recognize “two Chinas” in the United Nations in the fall of 1966 and on the China policy review initiated in early 1968.

Finally, Lerner most thoughtfully raises the Johnson administration’s almost simultaneous bridge building efforts toward other communist states, most notably, the Soviet Union and its partners in Eastern Europe. He suggests that a discussion of these initiatives would have contextualized the Johnson team’s adoption of “containment without isolation” toward

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<sup>6</sup> Memorandum for the Record, 20 April 1964, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968*, Vol. 30 (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1998), 56-7.

<sup>7</sup> Memorandum for the Record, 15 September 1964, *Ibid.*, 94.

China. I don't dispute this excellent point. One can take Lerner's argument only so far, however. He wonders if inclusion of these other bridge building efforts might have altered the conclusions I reach in my book. Perhaps Johnson officials applied lessons learned from the Eastern European variant of bridge building when crafting China policy? Maybe bridge building toward China resulted more from a cohesive global strategy than from a reaction to unfolding events in Asia?

I

must disagree on these latter points. The documentary record I consulted points to a clear conclusion: Johnson approved a moderation of China policy in 1966 to head off the perceived threat of Chinese intervention in Vietnam and to convince a war-weary American populace of his peaceful long-term ambitions in Asia. Johnson's interest in this initiative waned in 1967 as China descended into the cataclysm of the Cultural Revolution and the threat of its military involvement in Vietnam lessened concomitantly. The President's flirtation with reviving this project in early 1968 again derived from Asian considerations: the hope of unnerving Hanoi and nurturing anti-Mao factions in China's domestic struggle. Without the catalyst provided by the unforeseen consequences of the Vietnam War and the Cultural Revolution, Johnson and his most senior aides would not have been inclined to contemplate any departures in China policy, certainly not as early as late 1965. The example provided by Eastern Europe never makes an appearance in any of their deliberations on the PRC.

Andrew Preston suggests the contemporary relevance of *Piercing the Bamboo Curtain* by effectively drawing a parallel between Johnson's China puzzle and America's current conflict with Iran, another ideological and strategic adversary. While no two contexts are ever identical, I broadly agree with his observation. When writing this book, in fact, I flirted with the idea of highlighting lessons learned from the Johnson team's handling of China for today's debate on U.S. foreign policy choices. I ultimately balked, thinking an op-ed piece a more appropriate and timely vehicle for such discussion. In a vain attempt to generate a torrent of interest in my book (and thereby crack the top 2 million in sales on amazon.com), I submitted an article to *The New York Times* in the summer of 2008 that mirrored Preston's framing of the similarities between China in the 1960s and Iran today. Alas, the paper's editors did not deem the subject worthy of publication. I do maintain, however, that Johnson's efforts to keep the lid on tensions with Beijing and his realization that there was little America could do to favorably influence China's domestic politics offer a good model for President Obama to follow as he deals with Iran.

Preston's criticisms of my book are fair. I meekly concede that had his suggestions been incorporated, an improved product would have resulted. A more extensive discussion of the China perspectives of various U.S. allies (Preston lists Britain, France, and Canada; I would also include Taiwan, Thailand, and South Korea) and of the ambassadorial-level talks in Warsaw would certainly have fleshed out the story. Faced with a strict word limit from my publisher, however, I could only devote attention to these topics when they directly influenced China policy (as when allied pressure prompted the consideration of a "two Chinas" motion in the UN in 1966) or shaped perceptions of the mainland (as when the Chinese shift to a moderate tone in the Warsaw talks in early 1968 stirred hopes in

Washington of an anti-Maoist ascendancy). Accordingly, these subjects do not form a continuous part of the narrative.

I very much enjoyed reading Priscilla Roberts' comprehensive review. She provides an excellent overview of my book's findings and, with solid command of the secondary literature, situates them in the historiography of U.S. China policy during the 1960s. I do not dispute her interpretation. Much like Preston, her primary misgiving with my work is not so much with its content as with what was omitted. Specifically, she cites the lack of a fuller discussion of Johnson's relations with Taiwan.

Roberts' observation is completely valid. With a longer word count, I certainly would have extended my focus on Taiwan. What I hope I did manage to convey in my book, albeit in an abbreviated fashion, is that Johnson's insistence on maintaining diplomatic and strategic solidarity with this major, if troublesome, Asian ally precluded bolder initiatives toward the mainland at this time (in the conclusion, I claim that alliance politics, with Taiwan at the forefront, was one of three factors acting as a brake against major China policy reform during the Johnson years). Perhaps someone reading my book will be sufficiently motivated or inspired to explore the fascinating interaction between Washington and Taipei during this crucial decade in considerably more detail; it's a subject worthy of a full-length study.

I was very interested in the thoughts of Qiang Zhai, a leading historian of Chinese foreign relations during the Vietnam War whose own work has shaped my understanding of Beijing's motives and actions. Zhai, quite astutely, argues that I could have provided a more thorough explanation of the ideological origins of American hostility toward China during the 1960s. Indeed, while I explore in some detail the events and beliefs that informed LBJ's China mindset, I pay less attention to the preconceptions of the U.S. foreign policy elite as a whole.

In particular, Zhai suggests two strands of thinking that helped define the parameters of Washington's China debate throughout the bureaucracy and, indeed, at the highest echelons of power: modernization and ethnocentrism. There is much merit to this argument. While I certainly stress the significance of ideology as a major factor that militated against more substantive bridge building to China (250-52), it went beyond the anti-revolutionary, anti-communist sentiment to which I refer. There was undeniably an element of racism underlying the widespread belief that Mao and his comrades, unlike their "civilized" counterparts in the Kremlin, were irrational, almost maniacal, and seemingly unconcerned about the prospect of a nuclear holocaust. These racially tinged attitudes were deeply embedded in the American psyche and ultimately narrowed policy options toward the mainland.

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