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**Roundtable Review**

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Introduction by James Graham Wilson

**Jeffrey Engel. *When the World Seemed New: George H.W. Bush and the End of the Cold War.*** New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017. ISBN: 9780547423067 (hardcover, \$35.00); 9781328511652 (paperback, \$17.99).

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**Introduction by James Graham Wilson, U.S. Department of State<sup>1</sup>**

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**M**ore time has transpired between the fall of the Berlin Wall and today than the entire duration of that iconic Cold War barrier. Meanwhile, George H.W. Bush, the main subject of Jeffrey Engel's *When the World Seemed New*, became the longest-living U.S. president, while there are undergraduates this semester who were born during the presidency of his son, George W. Bush. In short, this book can make a lot of readers feel old.

It should also makes us feel hopeful. "Tomorrow our children will go to school and study history and how plants grow," President Bush said in his 1992 State of the Union address. "And they won't have, as my children did, air raid drills in which they crawl under their desks and cover their heads in case of nuclear war."<sup>2</sup> Scholars can forever debate the causes and consequences of the end of the Cold War, yet one ought not lose sight of the fact that good and incredible things happened.

The reviewers here are unanimous in their praise for Engel's research and writing. The result is a "wonderful book" in which "Engel does a terrific job recreating the tension and exhilaration" of the era, as James Goldgeier puts it. Christopher Preble calls it a "fine historical synthesis," while Timothy Sayle finds that it "reads like a narrator's script for a blockbuster film." Sergey Radchenko sums up: "Engel has written a remarkably honest, thought-provoking, emotional book."

Goldgeier considers Engel to be a bit generous when it comes to the Bush administration's early strategic review of Soviet policies, which critics derided as 'the pause.' The Cold War was already over, by Goldgeier's account. Moreover, "Russia was never the West's to lose," for it was Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev who ended the Cold War, and then Russian President Boris Yeltsin who ended the Soviet Union.

Prudence and reflection, according to Preble, can still result in "hubris, not humility." He encourages readers to think critically about some of the public statements from this time, such as National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft's insistence that the Bush administration did not have a choice in confronting Iraqi strongman Saddam Hussein. "Actually, they did," Preble states. That point is worth pondering, almost three decades after the start of a conflict that never really ended. And, "even if we conclude they *were* right in 1989 and 1990 and 1991," Preble argues, "it does not automatically follow that a similar mindset should guide U.S. conduct today and into the future."

While Radchenko suggests that Engel depicts Bush as acting in accordance with the Taoist principle "to do by not doing," he also contends that the author associates his account with the triumphalist narrative of the end of the Cold War, in which the U.S. won and Communism lost. Radchenko states: "The tragedy of the new world order was in the American inability or unwillingness, and probably both, to fathom democratic values as anything other than extension of American power." Whereas Engel blames Bush's successors in the White

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<sup>1</sup> The views expressed here do not necessarily reflect those of the U.S. Department of State or the United States government.

<sup>2</sup> George H.W. Bush, "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union," 28 January 1992, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/PPP-1992-book1/pdf/PPP-1992-book1-doc-pg156-2.pdf>, 157.

House for squandering the country's unrivaled power and moral authority, Radchenko does not seem convinced.

Nor, Sayle suggests, would have been Frank Roberts, the British Minister to the Soviet Union early in the Cold War, who believed that containment was “impossible” for Americans, who were too impulsive and whose political system demanded immediate results. That line of argument almost certainly applied to the politics of Bush's day, according to Sayle: “Indeed, the public comments of the day that Engel cites—those made by journalists and elected representatives—are sometimes more shocking than anything Engel discovered in previously secret minutes and memoranda.”

The world of 1989-1992 “seemed new,” but, Sayle and the other reviewers suggest, just how much of it was actually “new”? Here and elsewhere, Jeffrey Engel has done an extraordinary service to scholars who might aspire to take on that question: almost thirty years after the Berlin Wall fell, scholars now have access to a trove of primary source material at the George H.W. Bush Library in College Station thanks to the declassification requests submitted by Engels in the writing of this superb book.

### Participants:

**Jeffrey A. Engel** is the founding director of the Center for Presidential History at Southern Methodist University. Author or editor of twelve books on American foreign policy and the presidency, his latest collaborative effort is *Impeachment: An American History* (Random House, 2018).

**James Graham Wilson** is a Historian at the Department of State, where he compiles volumes in the *Foreign Relations of the United States series*. He is the author of *The Triumph of Improvisation: Gorbachev's Adaptability, Reagan's Engagement, and the End of the Cold War* (Cornell University Press, 2014).

**James Goldgeier** is Professor of International Relations at the School of International Service at American University, where he served as Dean from 2011-17. He is also a Visiting Senior Fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations. Previously, he was a professor at George Washington University, where from 2001-05 he directed the Elliott School's Institute for European, Russian and Eurasian Studies. He also taught at Cornell University, and has held a number of public policy appointments, including Director for Russian, Ukrainian and Eurasian Affairs on the National Security Council Staff, Whitney Shepardson Senior Fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, and Henry A. Kissinger Chair at the Library of Congress. In addition, he has held appointments at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, the Hoover Institution, the Brookings Institution, and the Stanford Center for International Security and Cooperation. He is past president of the Association of Professional Schools of International Affairs, and he co-directs the Bridging the Gap project, funded by the Carnegie Corporation of New York, and as co-editor of the Oxford University Press Bridging the Gap book series. He has authored or co-authored four books, each of which analyzes some aspect of the years reviewed here, including Mikhail Gorbachev's leadership style, NATO enlargement, U.S.-Russia relations, and the politics of American foreign policy.

**Christopher Preble** is the vice president for defense and foreign policy studies at the Cato Institute. He is the author of three books including *The Power Problem: How American Military Dominance Makes Us Less Safe, Less Prosperous and Less Free* (Cornell, 2009), and has co-edited several other books and monographs, including most recently *Our Foreign Policy Choices: Rethinking America's Global Role* (Cato, 2016), with Emma Ashford and Travis Evans. His work has appeared in major publications including the *New York*

*Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *Foreign Policy*, and he is a frequent guest on television and radio. Preble also teaches the U.S. Foreign Policy elective at the University of California, Washington Center. He holds a Ph.D. in history from Temple University, and is a former commissioned officer in the U.S. Navy.

**Sergey Radchenko** is Professor of International Relations at Cardiff University. His research interests include the Cold War and the history of Chinese and Soviet foreign relations. He is the author of *Two Suns in the Heavens: the Sino-Soviet Struggle for Supremacy* (Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Stanford University Press, 2009) and *Unwanted Visionaries: the Soviet Failure in Asia at the End of the Cold War* (Oxford University Press, 2014). His next book: *The First Fiddle: a History of the Cold War and After* is forthcoming in 2019.

**Timothy Andrews Sayle** is Assistant Professor in the Department of History at the University of Toronto and Senior Fellow of the Bill Graham Centre for Contemporary International History. His *Pax Atlantica: NATO and the Postwar Global Order* will be published by Cornell University Press in 2019.

Review by James Goldgeier, American University

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It now seems like forever ago: A president steeped in a career in foreign policy, working with a seasoned team, managing the extraordinary transition out of the four-decade long Cold War. A president guiding European leaders through the unification of Germany and then the following year working through the United Nations to lead an international coalition to reverse Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. A Republican president believing in the virtues of the U.S.-led liberal international order. A foreign policy team that had major differences in viewpoint yet worked together closely. It was forever ago.

While we already knew much of the history of those years, Jeffrey Engel has written a wonderful book, focusing the majority of his attention on the first two years of the Bush presidency, in particular the startling events in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in 1989-1990. The pace is brisk, and Engel does a terrific job recreating the tension and exhilaration.

In addition to the grand, sweeping stories of communist regimes collapsing in Eastern Europe, Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev's efforts to salvage his political situation amidst the dramatic changes in the USSR, and President George H.W. Bush's cautious treatment of China before, during, and after the massacre in Tiananmen Square, Engel includes great little vignettes to bring the story alive: National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft and Deputy Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger secretly crammed into a cargo plane on their way to China after Tiananmen; the produce stalls stocked with fresh fruits and vegetables along the route Gorbachev took in Romania besieged by citizens after the cars went by; sportswriter Tony Kornheiser writing about the Malta summit.

The book is extremely poignant in places, such as when Bush, flying back from Europe in July 1989, wrote letters to Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping and Gorbachev. Engel really makes us feel as if we are on the plane with Bush. To Gorbachev, Bush wrote, "I would like very much to sit down soon and talk to you...Up until now I have felt that a meeting would have to produce major agreements so as not to disappoint the watching world. Now my thinking is changing...I just want to reduce the chances that there could be misunderstandings between us" (228). And to Deng: "Dear Chairman Deng, Dear Friend: I use this unique form of conversation because General Scowcroft told me that if I would continue to treat you as a friend, you would welcome that—no matter the outcome of the difficulties now between us. Of course, I, too, want it to be that way.... If there is to be a period of darkness, so be it; but let us try to light some candles" (229).

Engel does a terrific job with the climate of uncertainty: June 1989 in China, January 1991 in the Baltic states, and ultimately the dramatic fate of Gorbachev and the USSR later that year. He also describes importantly and in great detail the complete capitulation by Gorbachev to the West, a capitulation that became so important later as Russia in the 2000s under President Vladimir Putin would seek to push back against American domination of global affairs.

*What Bush represents*

Engel reminds us why Bush Sr. was the lodestar for President Barack Obama as the latter thought about the kind of foreign policy he wanted to pursue, with the United States bogged down in Iraq and Afghanistan and suffering through the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression. Bush 41 was Obama's favorite because the former appeared to foster a non-ideological foreign policy with limited aims, one that sought to confine American engagement to what were seen as core interests and to avoid unnecessary intervention.

While it is a great read, in today's context, it is at times a hard read: where did those Republicans go? A GOP that was conservative but internationalist, where diplomatic engagement was the key frame. Engel describes Bush's nervousness that in picking Dick Cheney (then known for his ability to compromise) for Secretary of Defense after the fiasco with the failed nomination of John Tower, he would be opening the door to a leadership role for Newt Gingrich in the House of Representatives. Gingrich was always a flamethrower; he even criticized President Ronald Reagan for his meeting with Mikhail Gorbachev in the fall of 1985, calling it "the most dangerous summit for the West since Adolf Hitler met with Neville Chamberlain in 1938 in Munich."<sup>1</sup> Gingrich's leadership of the party helped lead the GOP to victory in both houses of Congress in 1994 for the first time in four decades, a pivotal moment for the Republican Party in more ways than one.

Bush's respect for others was a hallmark of his career. As U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, Bush visited counterparts such as the Burundi ambassador, disregarding the advice of former ambassador Arthur Goldberg, who told him that everyone should come calling on the U.S. representative.

We applaud Bush and his stellar foreign policy team, not because they were visionary like the post-World War II institution builders, but because they were extremely competent at a time when competency was really needed. It would prove ironic that the success they experienced sowed the seeds of Bush's demise; after all, if the post-Cold War had not begun, a draft-dodging Democrat with no foreign policy experience could never have been elected president in 1992.

In his recent book *The Peacemakers*, Duke political scientist Bruce Jentleson borrows from baseball's "Moneyball" craze to come up with the metric "Statesmanship-above-replacement-leader."<sup>2</sup> We can apply that here to ask how much added value Bush provided above someone else who might have been in office at the time. As will be discussed below, for most of 1989, not so much, as Bush put the brakes on the progress Reagan and Gorbachev achieved in ending the Cold War. But on German unification and the Gulf War, Bush provided huge added value, and it is hard to imagine a president performing at a higher level in those two instances. Interestingly, as we look back, we can also see that both victories carried costs that would only much later become apparent.

*The signature achievements: German unification and the Persian Gulf War*

Bush was committed to ensuring U.S. primacy in the post-Cold War World. The United States was eager not just to prevent the rise of any peer competitor; it sought to prevent any country from achieving regional hegemony, whether an adversary such as Iraq or an ally such as Germany or Japan.<sup>3</sup> As Engel writes, "Bush...wanted calm in the heart of Europe. But he also saw in Germany's unification an opportunity to

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<sup>1</sup> Samuel Kleiner and Tom Zellner, "Republicans' 'Munich' Fallacy," *Los Angeles Times*, 20 July 2015, <http://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-zoellnerandkleiner-munich-and-iran-20150720-story.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Bruce W. Jentleson, *The Peacemakers: Leadership Lessons from Twentieth-Century Statesmanship* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2018), xix.

<sup>3</sup> Hal Brands, "Choosing Primacy: U.S. Strategy and Global Order at the Dawn of the Post-Cold War Era," *Texas National Security Review* 1:2 (6 February 2018), <http://hdl.handle.net/2152/63941>.

cement an American place across the Atlantic for the foreseeable future, no matter what Gorbachev's revolution might bring" (274). Bush's generation believed wholeheartedly that U.S. withdrawal from Europe after 1918 had produced a Great Depression and a second World War, whereas U.S. engagement after 1945 had kept the peace, particularly in Europe. Bush was determined that NATO remain in place under U.S. leadership to prevent another war in a time of uncertainty.

German unification really was his moment, perhaps even more than the Gulf War. Of all of his foreign policy achievements, it required a vision, a vision of a Germany that was able to move beyond its past, and a Europe that could become "whole and free," as Bush had put it in May 1989 in a speech in Mainz, West Germany.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps because they were too close to the situation, British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and French President François Mitterrand were afraid of what unification could bring. While an achievement, the Gulf War was much less visionary; it was a visceral reaction to Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait. And while German unification sowed the seeds of Russia's belief that it was being dictated to, the coming together of East and West Germany in NATO and the European Union was an extraordinary long-term achievement that is now hard to imagine otherwise. The Gulf War, while an impressive diplomatic and military display, left Saddam Hussein in power, and the long-term deployment of U.S. troops in Saudi Arabia led to the rise of Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda.

Despite his focus on top diplomats, Engel does a masterful job reminding us that in terms of the actual opening of the inter-German border, the people played a key role. The East German exodus that summer and fall created a crisis situation. While the German Democratic Republic (GDR) spokesman accidentally announced that people could cross on 9 November 1989, the border guards had to make their own decisions in the moment to let people through. Even Kohl and Gorbachev were to some extent bystanders, once Gorbachev made the decision earlier that he was not going to use force to prop up Warsaw Pact regimes. And Bush, who had come into office dubious that Gorbachev was for real turned to Scowcroft as they watched the scenes from Berlin and remarked, "If they are going to let the Communists fall in East Germany, they've got to be really serious" (267).

The speed at which Germany unified shocked everyone. And while Russians complained later that the United States and its allies had promised during the course of the 1990 discussions that NATO was not going to expand to the East, Gorbachev was focused more than anything else on gaining financial assistance for his domestic program of *perestroika*.

As for the Gulf War, Engel shows quite well that there was a great deal of uncertainty about whether the United States should respond forcefully to the invasion of Kuwait or simply contain Iraqi expansion to that country. Once again, Bush's lessons from the interwar period proved critical, as he saw any appeasement of Saddam Hussein's invasion as comparable to the appeasement of Hitler, and he decided he had to draw a line in the sand.

Bush and Secretary of State James Baker worked extremely hard to put together an international coalition to support the United Nations' authorization for the war. The contrast with the U.S. decision to go to war in

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<sup>4</sup> President George H.W. Bush, "A Europe Whole and Free. Remarks to the Citizens in Mainz, Federal Republic of Germany, 31 May 1989," <https://usa.usembassy.de/etexts/ga6-890531.htm>.

Iraq in 2003 could not be more striking. The United States also demonstrated its complete military dominance. As General Colin Powell later told Derek Chollet and me for our book on those years, “The Gulf War was the war against the Russians we didn’t have. There were no trees and no hills, but that’s what we were trained to fight. The Iraqis sat there and we kicked the shit out of them.”<sup>5</sup>

While many have focused on Bush’s decision to leave Saddam Hussein in power (because of concerns about holding together the international coalition if the U.S. marched on Baghdad as well as fears of what an occupation would entail), the deployment of American troops to Saudi Arabia was also a fateful move. Engel writes, “Arab nationalists and religious fundamentalists alike, veterans of the jihad against the Soviets in Afghanistan, lobbied for the chance to defend the Kingdom without resorting to Washington’s aid. King Fahd heard their pleas but accepted Bush’s offer instead, driving the most radical—including a wealthy young zealot named Osama bin Laden—to pledge to cleanse holy Muslim lands of any Western stain” (408).

#### *Bush’s role in the End of the Cold War*

Engel writes, “To be clear, Bush did not end the Cold War. No single person did. But he could have ruined its outcome” (6-7). There were a number of people of whom that could be said, including Gorbachev and German Chancellor Helmut Kohl. It was true of the August 1991 coup plotters in the USSR as well; after all, if they had not been drunk, they might have succeeded in stemming the country’s immediate collapse and returned to a policy of confrontation with the West.

But we should also keep in mind that the Cold War ended before Bush took office. As historian Sarah Snyder reminds us, much of the credit goes to the transnational ties developed among civil society in the East and the West after the signing of the 1975 Helsinki Final Act.<sup>6</sup> At the top levels, it was Reagan and Gorbachev who, by December 1988, had put an end to the four decades of hostility between the two countries. When Gorbachev went to the United Nations that month, he did so, he told his aides, to deliver the “anti-Fulton,” referring to Winston Churchill’s 1946 speech in Fulton, Missouri declaring that an iron curtain had descended across Europe (49).

There was no reason why George H.W. Bush needed to declare a pause in 1989. Officials from his administration would later argue that because the Soviet Union collapsed at the end of 1991, no harm was done.<sup>7</sup> But it does show us Bush’s limits. The Bush we see in 1989 is not the decisive Bush of German unification in 1990 or the Gulf War in 1991; it is a president who was extraordinarily suspicious of what Reagan and Gorbachev had achieved. To him it seemed to be time to slow down in Washington, D.C. just as events were speeding up in Central and Eastern Europe. To be fair, as the year wore on, there was an

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<sup>5</sup> Derek Chollet and James Goldgeier, *America Between the Wars: From 11/9 to 9/11* (New York: Public Affairs, 2008), 12.

<sup>6</sup> Sarah B. Snyder, *Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War: A Transnational History of the Helsinki Network* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

<sup>7</sup> James M. Goldgeier and Michael McFaul, *Power and Purpose: U.S. Policy toward Russia after the Cold War* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2003), chapter 2.



understandable fear that the type of massacre that occurred in Tiananmen Square in June 1989 might occur in Eastern Europe or even the Soviet Union. But above all, the pause demonstrated a lack of understanding of Gorbachev.

Engel argues that the pause of 1989 gave the Bush team time to think. But that seems overly generous—the pause showed how badly they understood what was happening.<sup>8</sup> It certainly left Gorbachev fuming. As Engel writes, “He understood that Bush’s prospective pause would consume the one commodity he could ill afford to lose: time. The longer Bush waited to endorse *perestroika*, and the longer foreign governments and investors waited to send aid and extend credit, the less likely his prospects for success” (87).

While in general over their four years in office, Bush and his team were great stewards of American foreign policy—something that was critical at a time of such great uncertainty—they were incapable for the most part of laying out a vision of what the world should look like after the Cold War despite Bush’s talk of a new world order. Surprisingly, the vision for Europe that Bush laid out in Mainz in May 1989 for a Europe “whole and free” receives only brief mention in the book. It was a vision that Presidents Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama adopted in turn. But it was a vision that never really found a place in Europe’s security architecture for post-Soviet Russia, despite the lip service paid to it.

*Could things with Russia have turned out differently?*

With all the talk going around after the collapse of the Soviet Union about the possibility of a “Weimar Russia,”<sup>9</sup> alluding to the failures after World War I to find a place for defeated Germany, the United States made an effort in the 1990s to create symbolic wins for Russia, such as the creation of a NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council and inclusion into what became the G-8 later in the decade. But the message from the Bush years through the 1990s was clear: ‘we won, you lost, here are the terms we are setting. And we don’t really need you.’

The humiliation experienced by Russians in that period as the world’s second superpower collapsed, and which has been used so effectively at home by Vladimir Putin, is described well by Engel. Despite George H.W. Bush’s recognition that events were making things hard for Gorbachev, despite his sensitivity toward the Soviet leader, he could not avoid inflicting on Gorbachev the humiliation over the loss of status. By the end of 1989, Gorbachev was complaining to his staff about American arrogance. He told Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney that the U.S. behaved as if it owned a “hotline to God” (293). After hearing Bush describe his plans at the Malta summit to oust Panamanian dictator Manuel Noriega, Gorbachev asked why the United States was intervening in its backyard if the Soviets were supposed to show restraint in Eastern Europe. “The U.S. passes judgment and executes that judgment,” the Soviet leader told Bush (301). Or as one

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<sup>8</sup> Derek H. Chollet and James M. Goldgeier, “Once Burned, Twice Shy? The Pause of 1989,” in William C. Wohlforth, ed., *Cold War Endgame: Oral History, Analysis, Debates* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 141-173.

<sup>9</sup> See for example, Charles Gati, “Weimar Russia,” *The Washington Post*, 17 March 1995, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/1995/03/17/weimar-russia/0ae764ff-2c0e-452d-b7ac-bf55a511d9c7/>.

of Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze's aides told U.S. ambassador to the Soviet Union Jack Matlock, "It seems we've turned the Brezhnev Doctrine over to you" (312). The United States wanted the Soviets to intervene in Romania in late 1989, but they refused. One can draw a straight line from Gorbachev's reaction to U.S. unilateralism in Panama to Putin's speech at the Munich Security Conference in 2007 decrying American hegemony.<sup>10</sup>

In Europe, Gorbachev's notion of a 'Common European Home' was predicated on the notion of the USSR as an equal. But the United States was pursuing a strategy of primacy. NATO not only continuing after the collapse of the Warsaw Pact but enlarging became a central feature of that strategy from the fall of the Wall onward. While most analysts think of post-Cold War enlargement as something that occurred a decade later with the inclusion of Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic, it began in 1990 with the inclusion of the former East Germany, the first member of the Warsaw Pact to join NATO.

The formal policy of NATO enlargement undertaken by the Clinton administration became the vehicle for the extraordinary expansion of the West across the East as most of Eastern Europe joined NATO and the European Union in the decade after 1999. But Russia did not in the end join Europe, and neither the West nor Russia ever figured out a way to manage that outcome. And so today, we have a Russian leader who continues to promote the politics of humiliation and has drawn a red line against the idea of former Soviet republics such as Ukraine and Georgia joining Western institutions.

Russia was never the West's to lose. Yet the inability to recognize that it was Gorbachev who ended the Cold War, and that it was his successor Boris Yeltsin who, with the people behind him, put an end to the USSR, affected how the United States approached Russia after the end of the Cold War, with some pretty important consequences. Because Gorbachev and Yeltsin accepted the terms of settlement at the end of the Cold War and the beginning of the post-Cold War, the United States convinced itself that Russia had accommodated itself to the American approach. Events in recent years have made clear that it did not.

### *Conclusion*

It was an extraordinary era, and Bush and his foreign policy team, particularly Scowcroft and Baker, deserve tremendous credit for skillfully navigating German unification and building the vast Gulf War international coalition. While they were slow initially to pick up on the reality of Gorbachev's desire to end the Cold War and truly create a new world order, they deserve the praise that permeates this book.

It is also the case that Bush looks even better as a foreign policy president because of the administrations that followed, particularly the presidency of his son, who even with many of the same foreign policy advisers (e.g.,

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<sup>10</sup> "Putin's Prepared Remarks at 43<sup>rd</sup> Munich Conference on Security Policy," 12 February 2007, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/02/12/AR2007021200555.html>.

Dick Cheney, Condoleezza Rice, Paul Wolfowitz) created one of the worst blunders in U.S. history with his decision to invade Iraq with little thought to what would come after.<sup>11</sup>

The United States achieved much in those years, but those years also sowed the seeds of some of the failures to follow, particularly with respect to the relationship with Russia. One of the central features of the time was an unrealistic assessment of the meaning of the end of the Cold War and America's global domination. In his inaugural address, Bush prematurely declared "The day of the dictator is over" (72). Even with someone celebrated for his humility, there were still unrealistic assessments of future. Like the Clinton administration that followed (and most political scientists), Bush believed that Chinese economic growth would create a strong middle class that would press hard for democracy as had occurred in South Korea and Taiwan. And most of all, because Gorbachev capitulated when pushed, and since Yeltsin sought to outflank him by being even more pro-Western, pro-democracy, and pro-market, the United States believed that Russia would join the U.S.-led liberal international order. After coming to power at the beginning of the century, Putin soon made clear that his country was not going to be a junior partner in an American-dominated Europe, and by 2014 and the Russia invasion of Ukraine, we had returned to talk of a new cold war.

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<sup>11</sup> On the comparison of the two presidents, see Elizabeth N. Saunders, "No Substitute for Experience: Presidents, Advisers, and Information in Group Decision Making," *International Organization* 71:S1 (April 2017): S219-S247, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S002081831600045X>.

Review by Christopher A. Preble, Cato Institute

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Jeffrey Engel's *When the World Seemed New* is a fine historical synthesis, relying on an impressive blend of sources, and pulled together in a brisk and engaging narrative. Engel is ideally suited to write such a book given his previous studies of a crucial early phase of George H.W. Bush's professional career as U.S. envoy to Beijing<sup>1</sup> and the end of the Cold War.<sup>2</sup> But whereas those earlier projects were edited collections, this work reveals Engel's skills as a storyteller.

This short review will focus on a few of those stories that have particular relevance for contemporary policy: the integration of Europe into a U.S.-dominated security order; the Bush administration's response to the Chinese government's crackdown on pro-democracy protesters in the spring and summer of 1989; and the decision to reverse Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait in early 1991.

Overall, this book makes clear that George H.W. Bush deserves great credit for what critics, then and since, scorned as excessive caution. Engel notes in the conclusion, "Faced with uncertainty, and unsure of the best response, [Bush] paused, considered, and learned" (477). His "Hippocratic impulse," as Engel describes it, i.e. do no harm, served the United States (and the world) well in the waning days of the Cold War, and in the months and years that followed.

Ultimately, however, after a period of thoughtful reflection, Bush and his cohort came to believe certain things about the post-Cold War order. One of their beliefs, above all others, reflects hubris, not humility. In their view, Engel writes, "Real long-term peace could be assured only through continued American vigilance, oversight, and strength. This reading of history, a coupling of democratic triumphalism with the centrality of American power, would drive almost everything Bush's inner circle did in office" (76). Engel continues, "There was simply something *innate to Europeans* that made them unable to live peacefully with their neighbors, Bush and those around him believed" (My emphasis). Accordingly, "The United States...needed to remain [Europe's] nurse and nanny" (76).

Such sentiments are hardly unique. One encounters them even today. In spite of the many decades of peace between the major European states, and the evolution of the European Union from a customs union to a full-on political entity, many foreign policy elites in the United States continue to believe, as Bush and his advisers did, "that the Old World required oversight from the New" (77). "The basic lesson of two world wars was that American power is essential to any stable equilibrium on the continent," National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft reminded Bush. "[James] Baker was blunter... 'we prevented for 40 years war in Europe'." Engel notes that "the pronoun is what mattered... the 'we' was not NATO. Neither was it a grand democratic alliance. It was the United States...the central lesson of the twentieth century, to Bush and those he gathered around him," Engel concludes, "was their own indispensability." (77).

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<sup>1</sup> Jeffrey A. Engel, ed., *The China Diary of George H.W. Bush: The Making of a Global President* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> Jeffrey A. Engel, ed., *The Fall of the Berlin Wall: The Revolutionary Legacy of 1989* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

It is worthwhile to dwell on those passages, in both their historical and contemporary context. By treating U.S. power as *the* indispensable tool for ensuring peace and Europe, Bush and his team subverted alternative arrangements that might have encouraged greater self-reliance by U.S. allies and partners. In other words, by framing U.S. policy around the ‘basic lesson’ that ‘American power’ *had been* essential, they—especially Bush, but also Scowcroft, and Secretary of State James Baker, as well as other major players who would reappear in future administrations, including Dick Cheney, Colin Powell, Robert Gates, and Richard Haass—simultaneously sought to ensure that it *always would be*.

Were they right to do so? Given the information available to them at the time, perhaps. But, even if we conclude they *were* right in 1989 and 1990 and 1991, it does not automatically follow that a similar mindset should guide U.S. conduct today and into the future. A related issue, which Bush *et al.* took as an article of faith, is also showing signs of wear: the ultimate triumph of liberal democracy over illiberalism and autarchy. George H.W. Bush betrayed a quiet confidence that “We know what works” (73). Did they?

This question seems particularly relevant with respect to China in the aftermath of the Tiananmen Square massacre. Engel notes that “Bush worked so hard to keep the ‘butchers of Beijing’ a part of the world” (192). Engel’s treatment of this episode and its aftermath seems to cast doubt, however, on the wisdom of this decision, perhaps not in the immediate aftermath of Beijing’s crackdown on pro-democracy protesters, but in the ensuing decades. It is too soon to say that democracy will never follow rising prosperity in China, but it is not too soon to wonder whether it necessarily flows that way. Will keeping Beijing a part of the world benefit the cause of peace and prosperity? And what of individual Chinese? Will they enjoy greater freedom, and, eventually, more political rights, so long as their country is kept integrated into the global order?

The Trump administration, for its part, has concluded that the answer to those questions is definitively ‘no.’ Its *National Security Strategy*, issued in December 2017, explains that “[T]he assumption that engagement with rivals and their inclusion in international institutions and global commerce would turn them into benign actors and trustworthy partners ... turned out to be false.”<sup>3</sup> A number of commentators lamented such conclusions as unduly pessimistic, or at least premature,<sup>4</sup> but there also seems to be backsliding with respect to human freedom elsewhere, including U.S. NATO allies such as Turkey, Hungary and Poland.<sup>5</sup> The mere fact

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<sup>3</sup> The White House, *The National Security Strategy of the United States*, December 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Zack Cooper and Mira Rapp-Hooper, “China, America, and the End of the Responsible Stakeholder Theory,” *Texas National Security Review*, 21 December 2017, <https://tnsr.org/roundtable/policy-roundtable-make-trumps-national-security-strategy/#essay5>; and Phil Levy, “Economics in the National Security Strategy: Principles vs. Practices,” *Texas National Security Review*, 21 December 2017, <https://tnsr.org/roundtable/policy-roundtable-make-trumps-national-security-strategy/#essay6>.

<sup>5</sup> Turkey’s ranking slipped from 58<sup>th</sup> in 2011 to 84<sup>th</sup> in 2015; Hungary from 34<sup>th</sup> to 44<sup>th</sup>; and Poland from 21<sup>st</sup> to 32<sup>nd</sup>. See Ian Vásquez and Tanja Porčnik, *The Human Freedom Index: A Global Measurement of Personal, Civil, and Economic Freedom* (Cato Institute, Fraser Institute, and Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom, 2017), <https://object.cato.org/sites/cato.org/files/human-freedom-index-files/2017-human-freedom-index-2.pdf>.

that even those countries that are tightly enveloped within the United States' protective grasp might become less democratic calls into question one of the key selling propositions of NATO expansion.

George H.W. Bush believed in "democracy's inevitable triumph" (227). So did his son, but President George W. Bush was less inclined than his father to wait for it to materialize, especially after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. Convinced that democracy was the cure for violent extremism, Bush 43 set out to implant it in Afghanistan, and later Iraq.

Of course, Bush 43 was not the first American president to send U.S. troops into the Greater Middle East. Andrew Bacevich traces the roots of America's current struggles in that region to the administration of Jimmy Carter, and explores how President Ronald Reagan's bid to help both sides of the Iran-Iraq War bore ignominious fruit in the Iran-Contra affair, and produced deadly consequences for U.S. sailors on the USS Stark. In this context, George H.W. Bush's bid to block Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait in 1990 is merely one of many battles in what Bacevich casts as a single big war raging across a vast region for many decades.<sup>6</sup>

Bush 41 and his team portrayed U.S. intervention as necessary. "We don't have the option to be inactive in reversing this," Scowcroft wrote (391). Actually they did. Other flawed thinking flowed from this, including the idea of falling dominoes, e.g. "If he [Saddam] succeeds, others may try the same thing" (393), and over-the-top comparisons of Saddam to Adolf Hitler.

Given the incongruity between the claims of what was at stake, and what was actually at stake, one wonders whether Bush 41 and his team seized upon this particular Gulf crisis not because of any intrinsic principle about the inviolability of national sovereignty and recognized borders, or even a compelling U.S. national security interest with respect to access to the region's oil, but rather as a test case to prove the utility—indeed, some might later claim, indispensability—of American power. Engel appears to suspect as much: "What...ultimately drove Bush to act? It was the opportunity to demonstrate American leadership, on American terms" (405). We can lament or celebrate that decision, on its own, and feel differently about it, in retrospect. The costs, after all, were not negligible, and arguably continue to accumulate—over 27 years after the beginning and end of a supposedly 100-hour war.

Engel is generally careful to obscure his own views and opinions in this book. He understands a historian's obligation to convey the facts, and give the reader wide latitude to assess their implications. That said, this reviewer welcomed a few of the occasions when Engel showed his hand. Especially this: "It is fashionable in American circles in the twenty-first century," Engel writes:

to argue that the United States and its allies won the Cold War... Realizing their inability to keep pace, this reading of history argues, Gorbachev's cadre wisely, if grudgingly, surrendered.

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<sup>6</sup> Andrew J. Bacevich, *America's War for the Greater Middle East: A Military History* (New York: Random House 2016).

This America-centric reading of history is both wrong and dangerous, implying both that American action alone determines global affairs, and that any adversary can simply be steamrolled by American military might. Neither is true (52).

It is understandable why George H.W. Bush and the policymakers who surrounded him might have been tempted to overreach. In the heady days of the early post-Cold War period, it seemed that the United States could achieve almost anything. Bush 41 resisted this impulse on crucial occasions, and deserves great credit for these moments of introspection and true humility.

The world that he briefly presided over is gone. The United States simply is not strong enough, wealthy enough, or wise enough to singlehandedly fashion a global order as Americans wish it to be. And those in other countries are not content to let it try. Whether U.S. leaders learn that lesson, and reorient U.S. foreign policy away from indispensability, and toward encouraging greater self-reliance among allies and partners, remains to be seen.

Review by Sergey Radchenko, Cardiff University

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There exists, at the core of the Taoist philosophy, a seemingly paradoxical principle: ‘to do by not doing’ (*wei wu wei*). Doing by not doing means finding one’s place in the grand scheme of things, fitting harmoniously with the Tao (the ‘Way’). President George H.W. Bush—the subject of Jeffrey Engel’s fascinating study—comes across as a Taoist of a kind: sensing the tides of history, floating along, not doing anything particularly stupid, nor particularly imaginative, just acting cautiously or (a word used repeatedly in the book) “prudently” to achieve his objectives. Engel commends the “underappreciated president” (8) for shepherding the world through dangerous times. Someone less in tune with the Way could have brought us all to grief. So many things could have gone wrong in 1989. Instead, lo and behold: America won.

The book is somewhat tinged with post-Cold War triumphalism. Engel gives the other side a platform to vent their frustration, reminding readers, via Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, that if the West “thought themselves triumphant, they would seek to dictate terms to their onetime foes. Any peace built on such a shaky foundation would never last” (292). Yet elsewhere Engel embraces the triumphalist discourse, noting that the Soviet Union “surrendered” (3) and should have known its place, for “few vanquished foes are given so much” (483). But how much is so much, and what if so much is not enough? Bush’s famous answer: “To hell with that. We prevailed and they didn’t” (350). Not quite in those terms, of course, but Engel associates his narrative with the triumphalist narrative. What is there to be ashamed of? Communism lost.

Bush, Engel writes, “was willing to ride the stream of time, avoiding rocky shoals while flowing with the current” (480). From a different perspective, this sentence can perhaps be read as: Bush was willing to pocket concession after concession, patting his pockets until Gorbachev had nothing more to give. ‘Prudent,’ one might say. After all, Bush was the president of a superpower, not some “stupid peacenik” (his term, 351). Superpowers have interests, and the American interest was, first and foremost, in the assertion of global leadership. Convinced that the American leadership was good for the world, Bush strove “to maintain America’s position as the world’s dominant power” (8).

Engel gives him a high score. Bush managed, for instance, to keep the United States engaged in Europe. This meant a renewed commitment to NATO (with East Germany now a part of the alliance). This meant, too, keeping American troops on the ground. The Americans, after all, had earned their place in Europe, by rescuing it from itself in two world wars. “Bush believed that American oversight simply ‘worked’” (344). The Soviets, by contrast, needed to go. “It gives me heartburn,” Bush said, to think of allowing the Soviets to preserve their military presence in Germany (347). And so Bush played “power politics in the extreme” (334), effectively forcing the West German chancellor Helmut Kohl to accept U.S. presence in Germany as a *quid pro quo* for the American support for German unification. A neutralized Germany—something the Soviets desperately hoped to bring about—would have been “disastrous” (280). Only a stupid peacenik like Gorbachev could ever think otherwise.

There was something very prudent, too, about Bush’s unwillingness to provide funds to bolster the ailing economies of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. “It’s crazy,” Bush thought, to throw money at the likes of Gorbachev and Polish leader Lech Walesa, and there was in any case not enough money to go around, given Washington’s growing budgetary woes (250). Bush prudently decided that he was no Truman, and instead spent his money on fighting a war in the Middle East. The war was a very important one: it was needed “to demonstrate American leadership on American terms” (405). But Engel, again relying on Gorbachev for a



proxy, points to the ‘irony’ of the situation. There was no new Marshall Plan but at least we got a new world order, one where everyone voluntarily deferred to the American leadership.

Some certainly did. The new Czech leader Vaclav Havel, for instance, duly reversed his peacenik talk of a bloc-free Europe and soon sought alignment with the West to the probable satisfaction of diehard Cold Warriors like National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft. Other Eastern European more or less fell into line. Only Gorbachev pleaded for American “humility” (293) and the “balance of interests” (272). As he presently discovered, no such things existed. The Russians could still “join the West,” argues Engel but, seemingly, only as supplicants. They could not join NATO, for example, although Gorbachev and Foreign Secretary Eduard Shevardnadze actually asked to be considered. “Neither Kremlin leader truly wanted to join the organization,” Engel opines (370), though who really can tell?

Engel wisely gives Gorbachev a lot of space in the book. There is remarkable prescience in the Soviet leader’s musings about the possibilities of a new world, and his unheeded warnings not to squander the unique opportunities afforded by the end of the Cold War. He was beating a dead horse, we know today, but his visions are a reminder of where things went wrong. These visions do not really impact Engel’s assessment of Bush’s record. The Cold War still ended peacefully. The Soviet Union fell apart without rivers of blood. A quarter of a century later such a conventionally optimistic assessment merits a correction but the bleeding wounds across the post-Soviet space perhaps belong to a different story, one that was not even on the horizon when Bush boasted: “This is a victory for democracy and freedom. It’s a victory for the moral force of our values. Every American can take pride in this victory” (473).

One thing comes through with particular clarity in the book: the conflation between so called ‘American values’ and ‘American leadership.’ Gorbachev’s effort to de-Americanize freedom and democracy was seen by Bush as, at best, annoying, and quite possibly subversive. The tragedy of the new world order was in the American inability or unwillingness, and probably both, to fathom democratic values as anything other than extension of American power. Combine that with all-too-frequent proclivity to ignore one’s own alleged values (viz. Panama), and one arrives at the basic ingredients for America’s moral decline. Engel blames Bush’s successors in the high office. But the book tells a somewhat different story.

“The mark of a moderate man,” said Lao Tzu, the father of Taoism, “is freedom from his own ideas.” By this measure, alas, Bush was certainly no practitioner of Taoism. He was a practitioner of the philosophy of American exceptionalism, and this goes a long way to explain what happened, and what failed to happen “when the world seemed new.”

Engel has written a remarkably honest, thought-provoking, emotional book. As I flipped through the pages, I felt surprised, fascinated, challenged, vindicated, and even angry at times. I congratulate Jeffrey Engel on an eminently readable book, which opens a new window on an important and highly contested turning point in world history.

Review by Timothy Sayle, University of Toronto

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The introduction to *When the World Seemed New*, with its short, clipped sentences, reads like a narrator's script for a blockbuster film. What follows borders on the cinematic: Engel re-creates the key scenes of the end of the Cold War with color—green table cloths off the coast of Malta—and with light: the flash of news photographers' bulbs illuminating President George H.W. Bush. These vignettes, are not—or not only—stylistic flourishes. Engel's tableaux emphasize the contingency, chance, and humanity in these larger-than-life moments that marked the end of the Cold War and the beginning of something new (or new-ish).

One of the most gripping passages in the book takes the reader, along with Bush, Secretary of State James Baker, and National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft, through choppy waters on a small launch from the USS *Belknap* to meet Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev aboard the *Maxim Gorky*. After this Malta summit, Engel writes, "little that can be measured changed in Soviet-American relations as a result" (304). Why, then, is it so important that Engel describe in detail the hastily prepared meeting room, with uneven tables covered over by the green cloth, or Gorbachev's efforts to force a joke in the early moments, or Bush's trembling hands as he delivered his opening statement? Anyone who reads Engel's description of the Malta meeting will come away understanding the immeasurable but intangible importance of the connection made between leaders aboard the ship. Across the too-narrow table, Bush was able to convince Gorbachev of his support for *perestroika*, and Gorbachev recognized "the end of economic warfare" (298). It is the people, Engel implies, time and again, who are the key to understanding Malta and so much else in this historical era: Not because of any great man theory of history but because people matter: what they think, what they saw, how—and if—they heard each other.

Because the writing is so lively, a reader might be forgiven for thinking of the book a literary event and not what it truly is: a marvel of archival research. Engel conducted extensive interviews with many of his subjects and shared Double Stuf Oreos with the former President. The reams of notes at the back of the book reveal Engel's research in previously classified records from the George H.W. Bush Presidential Library. Historians studying postwar (and especially post-Cold War) policy now rely almost exclusively on a 'requester driven' model of declassification, meaning there is little chance records will be declassified without someone filing the necessary paperwork. Engel's sustained and no doubt tedious efforts to request records gave him the raw material for his book, but they also opened those records for all future students and scholars.

American foreign policy at the end of the Cold War prompts a reflection on its beginning. America's allies once worried about Washington's ability to maintain its policy of containment. In 1947, the British Minister in the Soviet Union Frank Roberts told his Canadian counterpart that he had doubts about George Kennan's "'containment' thesis." Containment, Roberts thought, was "excellent for the British, but impossible for the Americans." The Americans were too impulsive and their political system demanded immediate results. They would need to show containment working within five years, Roberts expected.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Roberts remark quoted in "Relations with the U.S.S.R.: A Re-Assessment, "memorandum by European Division, November 1954 in Greg Donaghy and Ted Kelly, eds., *Documents on Canadian External Relations*, vol. 20, (Ottawa: Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, 1997): 1586-1587.

Fast forward more than 40 years to the end of the Cold War and Engel's depiction of Bush's efforts to move 'beyond containment.' In the interim decades, the Americans had adopted various strategies of containment and proved Roberts wrong—to a point.<sup>2</sup> But the politics of moving beyond containment underline Roberts concern, and the concern of American allies, that the American political system demands quick and easy solutions to difficult problems. Indeed, the public comments of the day that Engel cites—those made by journalists and elected representatives—are sometimes more shocking than anything Engel discovered in previously secret minutes and memoranda.

Bush, Engel reminds us, was cool, even detached, in the immediate aftermath of the fall of the Berlin Wall. He famously refused "to dance on the wall." For this he was pilloried for seeming inaction, even though he told reporters that "The big question I ask myself is ... how do we capitalize on these changes? ... I don't want to miss an opportunity" (268). Finding answers to questions like these takes time. For myriad reasons they are better discussed in private, if only to allow bad answers to be offered, considered, and discarded. Much of Engel's book is concerned with how Bush and his aides carefully, and *sotto voce*, sought to capitalize on change and how, as Bush put it, to 'capitalize' on events in Eastern Europe.

But while the secret meetings were held, and policy papers were drafted and re-drafted, Bush was chastised again for moving too slowly or not at all. "At the very time freedom and democracy are receiving standing ovations in Europe," Dick Gephardt, the House Majority Leader, said, "our President is sitting politely in the audience with little say and even less to contribute" (268). The reporter Helen Thomas passed on some of former President Jimmy Carter's critiques, telling Bush: "You have failed to show leadership. You have failed to put the U.S. ahead of the curve on these things that are happening ... [W]hy don't you have any new ideas?" (248-9). The caricature of an inert Bush came to be coupled with accusations that he was sticking with an outmoded system of Cold War alliances and defense structures. The journalists asked: "Why do the West Europeans need us once the military threat recedes? ... Why should there be a NATO?" "Who's the enemy?" (306, 343).

These questions suggest how Americans understood—or misunderstood—their accumulated military power as simply and only an extension of the Cold War. They reveal one side effect of having drummed up support for containment with Cold War Manicheism, of having used a "bludgeon"—as Dean Acheson put it—to beat the American bureaucracy and society into developing preponderant power.<sup>3</sup> When the Cold War ended, the justification for maintaining America's military strength seemed uncertain. Uncertain to the journalists and Bush's political opponents, at least, but not to the President or his staff.

Helen Thomas's question, then, "Why don't you have any new ideas," is especially important for understanding Engel's Bush. The notion of novelty lies at the heart of the book and in its title. There is no doubt that the international system, and so many of its states, faced dramatic change between 1989 and 1991. But did the world really seem new? Engel argues that "the world that emerged from the ashes of the cold war

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<sup>2</sup> The plural phrasing owed to John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy During the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> Dean Acheson, *Present at the Creation: My Years in the State Department* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1969), 374.

was indeed new” (9). But as he also points out that “Bush’s ‘new world order’ was merely Franklin Roosevelt’s finally put into practice” (419). This is a fitting reply to those, like the British Foreign Minister Douglas Hurd, who argued that 1989 was a failed opportunity to “remake the world, update everything.”<sup>4</sup> The novelty, Engel argues, lay not in the ideas themselves but in the opportunity to implement the grand plans laid out decades before. Bush saw that “Things are going our way” (7).

This tricky balance between old and new is an ever present theme as Engel, the author, and Bush and his Cabinet and NSC members, his historical subjects, all seek to place the events of 1989-1991 in the broader sweep of history. One is struck by how many of the pithy quotes made by presidents and prime ministers at the end of the Cold War were recycled from previous decades. When Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney considered and rejected the abandonment of NATO, he invoke the Canadian toll paid in two world wars: “we are not renting our seat in Europe ... We paid for it. If people want to know how Canada paid for its seat in Europe, they should check out the graves in Belgium and France” (348). Over twenty years earlier, another Canadian Prime Minister, Lester B. Pearson, had rejected French President Charles de Gaulle’s challenge to NATO by telling the French: ““Do you want us to move out our hundred thousand dead, too?”<sup>5</sup> Lyndon Johnson’s Secretary of State, Dean Rusk said something similar at the time. De Gaulle, in retrospect, was perhaps the most important tutor for NATO, offering a dress rehearsal for the drama of a major threat to the alliance’s staying power.

With the Berlin Wall down, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher fretted about German unification and the latent German economic-cum-political power in the heart of Europe: if “we are not too careful ... the Germans will get in peace what Hitler couldn’t get in the war” (346). The British had long agonized over the peaceful aggrandizement of Germany; as far back as 1959, if not before, members of the British Cabinet had worried that while in “the short term the French had emerged as leaders, in the long term the probability was that the Germans would predominate and this would carry all sorts of risks as their judgment was sometimes terribly at fault.”<sup>6</sup>

The Americans, too, saw history on repeat. In Gorbachev’s public campaigns they saw a ‘peace offensive,’ a re-run of the dangerous Soviet smile of the 1950s. Engel writes about NATO’s plans in case the Soviets intervened in East Germany in 1989. NATO had begun contingency planning for Brezhnev Doctrine-style interventions after the Prague Spring was crushed in 1968 and NATO leaders feared another such event might lead to combatants and refugees spilling across NATO borders. Even Gorbachev, with his suggestion that the Soviet Union join NATO, was repeating history: In 1954, Vyacheslav Molotov had proposed that

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<sup>4</sup> Mary Sarotte, *1989: The Struggle to Create Post-Cold War Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 4.

<sup>5</sup> “deGaulle and NATO,” memorandum of conversation, Chamcook, New Brunswick, 21 August 1966. Charles S. Sampson, ed., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968, Volume XIII, Western European Region* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1995), 452.

<sup>6</sup> Chronological Minute [of a Meeting at Chequers at 3pm on November 29, 1959], The National Archives of the United Kingdom, Kew [hereafter TNA], PREM 11/2679.

the Soviet Union be admitted to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization as part of Moscow's efforts to throw a wrench into the development of the European Defence Community.<sup>7</sup>

The point, ultimately, is that in small but important ways, Europeans and Americans had worried about this stuff before. They had thought about the collapse of NATO, or change in European politics, or crisis on their Eastern borders. As a result, the official minds in Washington, London, Ottawa and other capitals had scripts—unwritten perhaps, but memorized—to deal with crisis and change.

Some of the repetition at the end of the Cold War was farcical. After the emergency committee put martial law into place in Moscow in 1991, Soviet television played a “looped video of the ballet *Swan Lake*, the same programming as when Brezhnev, Andropov, and Chernenko had died.” (459) Thatcher's concern about Germany's power, however, was anything but comic. She saw the phantoms of the Somme and of the Blitz. As Engel points out, Bush understood the power of these historical precedents that haunted his allies, but was willing to reject them at times: “We don't feel the ghosts of the past; Margaret does” (349).

Bush, Baker, and Scowcroft all applied their own historical knowledge and legends to their policymaking. They were encouraged and enabled by a remarkably historically-minded National Security Council (NSC) staff. Memoranda that Engel has had declassified are littered with discussions of the history of European international relations dating back to the Prussian statesman Otto von Bismarck. The papers discuss the interwar period and reference the treaties of Brest-Litovsk, Rapallo, and Molotov-Ribbentrop. The arc of history is invoked frequently to explain and understand what America had achieved by positioning itself and remaining as a European power after the Second World War. Where Frank Roberts was concerned that American officials thought only in terms of electoral campaigns and Congressional politics, the Bush administration was making policy with reference to epochs, not elections. The book reveals a striking chasm between public discussions that assumed, by default, a peaceful world, and the secret memoranda that paint a world not quite Hobbesian but one in which states compete and might even go to war even after the ideological contest between capitalism and communism had ended peacefully.

By arguing that Bush used history, but was not the discipline's prisoner, Engel makes a nuanced argument about the effective use of historical reasoning in policymaking. Bush decided that some of the events he was watching unfold were not the past in repetition but were, instead, new. He seized these breaks with history as opportunities for new policies toward the states of the Warsaw Pact, Japan, and the Germanies. The United States had seen unrest in Soviet satellites before, in 1953, in 1956, and in 1968; each uprising had been met with the same result: Red Army tanks. In 1989, however, a review of U.S. policy toward the Soviet Union stated that, for the first time, these cracks were emanating from the centre, the USSR, and not the Warsaw Pact periphery. Thus, in 1989, the review concluded that “the time may have come when creative American policies can make a more significant difference” (94-95). Engel examines Bush's “cognitive shift,” a slow but real change in how Bush understood that this time was different, and that Gorbachev and Gorbachev's policies represented opportunities for change.

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<sup>7</sup> Geoffrey Roberts, “Molotov's Proposal that the USSR Join NATO, March 1954,” 21 November 2011, *Cold War International History Project*, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/molotovs-proposal-the-ussr-join-nato-march-1954>.

Bush travelled to Japan to attend the funeral of Emperor Hirohito. He knew this would offend some Americans, but believed that by paying his respects, “what I am symbolizing is not the past but the present and the future by going there” (107). His support of German reunification was even more significant and rested on rebuffing the “basic assumption of Germany’s innate aggressiveness” harbored by most of Germany’s former enemies and current allies (278). Engel argues that Bush could ‘forgive’ Japan and Germany for two reasons. The first was this unwillingness to be history’s prisoner or, as Engel puts it, “how lightly he [Bush] wore the past.” Bush himself spoke this way: “we can learn from history, but we can also look to the future” (279). But the second reason why Bush could look to the future was because he was, in other ways, adhering very closely to past policy.

Bush and his administration’s steadfast support for the maintenance of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization—and, despite the rhetoric, for the maintenance of NATO in essentially its Cold War form—never wavered. NATO was a forum for diplomacy, but it was also an integrated military command with an American serving as Supreme Commander. The Commander was, as one sharp-penned official in the British Foreign Office put years before, a “military proconsul.”<sup>8</sup> Yes, Bush’s trip to Japan, his encouragement of German reunification, his support for Gorbachev, all looked to the future. But Bush could feel confident in taking these steps because the fundamental organization of American military power and its auxiliaries did not change, and American officials worked very hard to keep it that way.

Engel describes a Bush willing, in deliberate, careful and calibrated moments, to break with the past and seize opportunities. These moments—what ‘seemed new’—were striking and important. That Bush could effect these changes of policies was a testament to his individual experience, talents, and personality. At the same time, however, Bush represented the apotheosis of postwar U.S. policy and the culmination of a relatively consistent policy—far beyond what American allies, like Roberts, thought possible.

“Like sex, NATO is a good thing to be knowledgeable about, and to experience on occasion. But it can become a bit wearing.” So wrote the U.S. diplomat Lawrence S. Eagleburger to Dean Acheson in 1970 describing his service at NATO headquarters.<sup>9</sup> One might have thought Eagleburger was prophesying future debates over NATO expansion. And yet, readers will have to excuse a coda here to address the myths of broken promises and the Russian complaint that the U.S. promised not to enlarge the alliance.

Engel assesses Gorbachev’s complaints that the spirit of the Bush era was violated as both “true” but also “worthless” (482).<sup>10</sup> He is half right: they are certainly worthless. Engel’s lengthy account of the diplomacy of 1990 might have been a good place to downgrade, if not bury, the much-hyped February 1990 Baker-Gorbachev conversation. Instead it conflates the February discussion of NATO’s place in a unified Germany

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<sup>8</sup> Marginalia on “Reorganisation of N.A.T.O. Military Structure,” by K.B.A. Scott, 9 March 1966, TNA, FO 115/4626.

<sup>9</sup> “May 7, 1970.” Lawrence S. Eagleburger to Dean Acheson, 7 May 1970, *Dean Gooderham Acheson Papers* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 2004), microfilm, General Correspondence, Box 9, Folder 116.

<sup>10</sup> Engel quotes Gorbachev via an article by Joshua R. Ishkowitz Shiffrinson focused on the “deals” made about NATO’s future. For the H-Diplo/ISSF Review see Timothy Andrews Sayle, Article Review 63 on “Deal or No Deal? The End of the Cold War and the U.S. Offer to Limit NATO Expansion.” *International Security* 40:4, 18 November 2016, <https://issforum.org/articlereviews/63-deal-no-deal>.

(an issue on which Gorbachev says no promise was broken) and the issue of NATO expansion, which Gorbachev considers distinct from the German issue.

Engel recounts in detail the 9 February 1990 meeting in which Baker adapted the German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher's 'Tutzing Formula' and told Gorbachev that NATO would not move "one inch eastward." Engel then writes that "Baker nonetheless felt confident enough in his performance to publicize his offer" to Gorbachev in public remarks he made afterward. Those public remarks included the statement: "there should be no extension of NATO forces eastward in order to assuage the security concerns of those of the East of Germany" (330). Later on Engel writes that "by Ottawa"—the Ottawa Open Skies Conference, immediately after Baker's trip to Moscow—Baker had "begun referring instead to NATO's 'forces,' suggesting the GDR's territories might yet fall under the Western alliance's security pledge while remaining devoid of forces" (338).

But as is clear from the above quoted passages, Baker had in fact started referring to 'forces' immediately after his meeting with Gorbachev while still in Moscow. As Philip Zelikow and Condoleezza Rice wrote two decades ago, Baker's public comments in Moscow were already an attempt to walk back his "jurisdiction" comment (which, as Engel points out, Baker recognized was made in error) and that the key word was 'forces.'<sup>11</sup> This fabled 'promise' was alive for a mere matter of hours before Baker started walking it back in Moscow. The Soviets, in April and May of 1990, certainly were not formulating policy as if a binding promise or bargain had been made in February.<sup>12</sup> Gorbachev himself has been explicit that he believes no promises were broken over Germany.<sup>13</sup>

The idea of a February promise is a red herring. What is far more significant, and what Engel captures effectively in his book, is the meeting between Bush and Gorbachev and their advisors in Washington in May. This is the moment that matters. Engel depicts the meeting in detail, and I will not re-hash it less eloquently here. But it was in Washington that Gorbachev agreed that a sovereign unified Germany could choose its

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<sup>11</sup> Philip Zelikow and Condoleezza Rice, *Germany Unified and Europe Transformed: A Study in Statecraft* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 184.

<sup>12</sup> Valdislav Zubok has explained how, in April 1990, the Politburo instructed the Soviet Foreign Minister, Eduard Shevardnadze, that "President [Bush] should be told clearly that we cannot agree to see the united Germany in NATO." This is at odds with any suggestion that a bargain had been struck the month before. In May 1990, to quote Zubok again, the head of the Soviet Foreign Ministry's legal department "sent Shevardnadze a memo that read: 'It is apparent that we cannot thwart the presence of the [Federal Republic of Germany] FRG, and therefore a united Germany, in NATO. Possible political 'framings' of this fact does not change the essence of the matter.'" Vladislav Zubok "With His Back Against the Wall: Gorbachev, Soviet demise, and German Unification," *Cold War History* 14:4 (October 2014): 635-636.

<sup>13</sup> "Everything that could have been and needed to be done to solidify that political obligation was done. And fulfilled. The agreement on a final settlement with Germany said that no new military structures would be created in the eastern part of the country; no additional troops would be deployed; no weapons of mass destruction would be placed there. It has been observed all these years." Maxim Kórshunov, "Mikhail Gorbachev: I Am against All Walls," *Russia Beyond the Headlines (RBTH)*, 16 October 2014, [http://rbth.com/international/2014/10/16/mikhail\\_gorbachev\\_i\\_am\\_against\\_all\\_walls\\_40673.html](http://rbth.com/international/2014/10/16/mikhail_gorbachev_i_am_against_all_walls_40673.html).

place in NATO with no conditions. Whatever Russians officials have said since, Soviet officials knew at this moment just what had happened. That is why they were “screaming at one another on the White House lawn” afterward. (372) This is why a Soviet general said “We have lost World War III without a shot being fired.”

Where, then, lies the confusion over assurances about NATO? Gorbachev himself thinks that later NATO expansion “was definitely a violation of the spirit of the statements and assurances made to us in 1990,” even as he distinguishes this from the German-NATO relationship.<sup>14</sup> To understand—though not necessarily to accept—Gorbachev’s grievance, historians should look away from Moscow in February 1990 and to the NATO Summit in London that same year. The Bush administration, both to protect political flanks at home, but especially to try and protect Gorbachev’s position in Moscow, promised that NATO would change. The London Communiqué offered—to those who wanted to see it—hope that NATO was going to transform. The allies lived up to the promises in the communiqué, though reading it today one can understand why some, especially Gorbachev, might have attached more hope to certain phrases in the document than was prudent.

The London Communiqué stressed the importance of defence. But it also claimed NATO “must and will adapt,” would “help build the structures of a more united continent,” and promised the allies would enhance the “political component” of NATO. The allies, according to the Declaration,

recognise that, in the new Europe, the security of every state is inseparably linked to the security of its neighbours. NATO must become an institution where Europeans, Canadians and Americans work together not only for the common defence, but to build new partnerships with all the nations of Europe.<sup>15</sup>

Here, if you wanted to see them, were assurances that NATO was changing. This was something that Gorbachev could hold up as evidence that while the Cold War was over, the main Soviet enemy in Europe, NATO, would not remain as a military threat but become a political forum.<sup>16</sup> The Communiqué also provided the easy answers to journalists who were inquiring as to whether NATO was still necessary, and obscured Washington’s insistence that the alliance, with its integrated military command system, remain intact and capable of waging general war if necessary. As NSC staffer Peter W. Rodman wrote to Brent Scowcroft in March 1990, the talk of NATO transforming from a military to a political organization was “a cliché of the current period,” and, perhaps, “escapism, since it implies an aversion to addressing continuing needs of security.”<sup>17</sup> The cliché was politically useful at home and abroad, and perhaps came to represent what Gorbachev thought was the ‘spirit’ of the time. But beneath the flowery language, the Bush administration

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> “London Declaration On A Transformed North Atlantic Alliance,” issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council, London, 5-6 July 1990, <https://www.nato.int/docu/comm/49-95/c900706a.htm>.

<sup>16</sup> On the importance of these “symbolic gestures” see Zubok, “With His Back Against the Wall,” 639-640.

<sup>17</sup> “NATO as a ‘Political’ Organization,” Memorandum for Scowcroft from Rodman, 26 March 1990, George H. W. Bush Presidential Library, NSC, APNSA, 9001935.



saw the importance of maintaining the alliance and command: they felt the ghosts of the past more closely than Bush was willing to say out loud.

**Author's Response by Jeffrey A. Engel, Southern Methodist University**

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**W**e live in tumultuous, but not yet catastrophic, times. After nearly two years, Donald J. Trump's presidency has thus far proved less altering than anxiety-provoking. He has attacked NATO, frightened Asian allies, rattled global markets, declared his intention to pull the United States out of multilateral agreements ranging from climate controls to postal rates, and consistently if less flamboyantly has withdrawn American influence from international hot-spots. He has initiated an 'easy to win' trade war between the world's two largest economies, routinely touts the merits of despots, and ridicules democratic leaders for their weaknesses.

In other words, he has assailed the trinity of American, and for that matter, global, power and prosperity, which has been at work since before his birth to an immigrant mother: security, trade, and democracy. Put another way, in Trump's crosshairs are nothing less than the fundamental structures of the post-1945 world that produced the greatest period of prosperity and relative peace (globally speaking) the world has ever seen.

Stop for a moment and consider that statement. On aggregate humans today live longer, better, and with less threat of violence than at any other time in history. None of Trump's moves to undermine the sources of this progress thus appears wise. Not only do they run counter to the worldview of the president whose narrative centers *When the World Seemed New*, a president who championed this-1945 system and in particular its dependence on American leadership, but Trump's entire existence defies the prudence George H.W. Bush embodied. Donald J. Trump and George H.W. Bush were both well-born, Ivy League educated, and national figures for years before assuming the Oval Office. I think it fair to say the comparison ends there.

Yet despite Trump's best efforts to undermine what Bush championed, the basic structures of America's defensive alliances and engagement with the world continue, thus far, anyway. Washington remains tied to NATO; its troops remain stationed on the Korean Peninsula and around the world; global finance continues to flow through New York, research through American universities, and technology through Silicon Valley. For how long, no one can rightly say. The four horsemen of the apocalypse are not yet riding roughshod over our twenty-first century civilization. Yet we look more often to the sky just to make sure.

I make these broad points in order to compare today's overall strategic environment to that of 1989-1990. Trump has thus far avoided the spontaneous international crises that typically face new presidents in their first year in office. By his mid-term elections Bush had already experienced—and to a large sense overseen—the collapse of European Communism and the build-up to the largest American military expedition since Vietnam. One president beheld a world of prosperity and peace and called it at his inaugural “carnage,” choosing to focus instead on the prospect of declining American power. The other, facing equally dire predictions of American decline, instead beheld a world of promise. One looked to unite, the other to divide. One called for a kinder and gentler nation, the other put children in cages.

Trump's relative international stability thus stands in sharp contrast to Bush's challenge of the greatest tectonic shift in global politics since 1945. Perhaps the 45<sup>th</sup> president is more a master of his times than it appears? Perhaps his very presence on the world stage keeps crises at bay? Ponder this hypothetical in search of an answer: would the world have been better served by Trump's presence in the White House from 1989 through 1993, rather than George H.W. Bush's?

Find the educated mind willing to say yes.

The second reason I begin this discussion of the thoughtful and insightful reviews of *When the World Seemed New* with talk of the present-day is that the question that dominates each in one form or fashion is the same: not so much how did we get here, to this place where a boorish narcissist throws dynamite-laden tweets at the basic edifice of our modern world, but instead what role did George H.W. Bush play in bringing that world into being? In reviewing my book on the Cold War's end, it is striking that each reviewer read over 500 pages about 1989-1991, but clearly spent much of the time pondering today.

I wholeheartedly approve. We study history because, as the past two years have shown in particular, reality is far more interesting than fiction. We also study it because, for all its flaws, it remains the best means of understanding who we are, how we got here, and perhaps even where we are going. Thus it neither surprises nor disappoints me to read in each review fundamental queries over what the Cold War's end, and Bush's role within it, mean for our own times, and of equal import, for what might have been. My deep thanks to Professors James Goldgeier, Sergey Radchenko, Christopher Preble, and Timothy Sayle for taking considerable time to assess and engage my history of the Cold War's end. That they found much to praise in the book is gratifying in the extreme, and I am honored by their overall positive assessments. That they found even more to grapple with is I think the far more important point.

"While it is a great read," Goldgeier kindly offers as a case in point, "in today's context, it is at times a hard read: where did those Republicans go?" More importantly, he argues, the "United States achieved much in those years, but those years also sowed the seeds of some of the failures to follow, particularly with respect to the relationship with Russia." Radchenko pursues the same point with literary flair, sagely questioning my declaration that the Cold War had no individual winner by noting the inadvertent ways in which my own vocabulary celebrates one side's victory and the other's defeat. He thus reveals my own book to me, and I only wish that I, or every editor I have ever worked with, possessed his keen eye. Calling Bush less a Taoist than "a practitioner of the philosophy of American exceptionalism," Radchenko notes that *When the World Seemed New* "goes a long way to explain what happened, and what failed to happen" following the Cold War's end. Not during, mind you, but afterwards.

The present dominates Sayle's eloquent discussion as well, placing the transatlantic diplomacy of the Cold War's end within a broader historical context, all while noting that the "novelty" of Bush's approach to his tumultuous period in office "lay not in the ideas themselves but in the opportunity to implement the grand plans laid out decades before." Bush saw that "Things are going our way," and in doing so did little to change the world he bequeathed (earlier than he'd wished) to his successors. Professor Preble is the most explicit: "this review will focus on a few of those stories that have particular relevance for contemporary policy."

I respect their choices. Given our tumultuous present, we are increasingly left merely to shout in painful bewilderment like Steve McQueen's dying lead character in the 1966 film *The Sand Pebbles*: "we were home...what happened...what the hell happened?" It is no wonder that reviewers considering what all concede to be a plastic and pivotal moment in modern history would search for answers within.

But how plastic is this moment really? These reviewers and other scholars too, myself included, have wondered if different American policies at the Cold War's end might not have produced an even more peaceful and prosperous twenty-first century. More specifically, and largely agreeing with one of this book's take-away points, they note that Bush cared little for designing a new world order, and rather hoped to implement the world Franklin Roosevelt envisioned in 1945, and rightly wonder if greater American creativity might not have given us a longer sense of contentment, nirvana, and peace?

I wonder too, yet struggle to think of any alternative system that Bush might have conceived of or proposed that would not have further destabilized an already chaotic world. With half the foundation of global order crumbling around him—with unrest in China and a Soviet Union soon to be no more, taking the Cold War with it—by early 1990 Bush in essence perceived two walls of the global house collapsing and chose to stabilize the remainder. He did not consider that the ideal moment to call in the wrecking crew and call an architect.

What might he have proposed to build from the ground up had he instead bulldozed what was left? Germany's fate in many ways drove the Cold War, and arguably all of European if not world history, since 1848. Preparing for a new century might Bush have proposed ending the bloody twentieth with a neutral Germany, or at least one militarily defanged? The idea wilts when one considers the practicalities, in particular the likelihood that ensuing generations of Germans would forevermore prove both as docile and as content as those of the initial post-Shoah years. Even today, Germany remains, as elder statesman Henry Kissinger once described, too large for Europe yet too small for the world. It is not alone in this respect. One need only look to the size and power of Japanese self-defense forces today to know that renunciation of war and military might can last far longer as rhetoric than as reality in a world in which strategic threats care little for principles or language. Perhaps you might willingly bet that Germans will never again deploy their might in their own narrow national interest. I would not.

Indeed, one need not in turn search too long for a precedent that might predict how Germany's neighbors would react to calls for greater independence and strength emanating from Berlin. On this centennial of the end of First World War, I challenge anyone to propose that an arms race and tension within and between European states is to be desired, or ends well. (This, we should note, is the most likely outcome of Trump's insistence that NATO members up their military spending.) The Cold War's final settlement might well have been plastic, yet Versailles was a plastic moment too, and the defanged Germans of the 1920s held much of continental Europe in their hands less than twenty years later. Five years after that their country lay in ruins.

Perhaps Bush might have solved the perennial German problem by outlining an even broader security rearrangement? Perhaps an end to NATO and in its stead a form of the "common European home" Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev often envisioned? Placing too much emphasis on the latter reveals only a misunderstanding of Gorbachev's real point. He did not want to do away with Europe's burgeoning supra-nationalism but instead to fuse with it. In his ideal world a peaceful Soviet Bloc would be invited over time to share in the Europe already under construction, to enlarge it, not to replace it. Rather than the Brexit we see today, Gorbachev longed for a Russentry. (Go ahead, try to find a better pithy word employing "Soviet Union.") He had no qualms with NATO and Western institutions, save that his country was not yet a member of that club.

As for NATO, for all the talk in the past generation and today over the price of its enlargement, and for all we today might look back and see it as a symbol if not a cause (among many) of contemporary Russian antagonism towards the American-led military coalition, it is equally as easy to conceive that the Soviet Bloc, including Russia, might by 2018 have joined the coalition outright, as it is to have predicted a hardening of a new iron curtain merely to the east of its Cold War position. Recall that Gorbachev himself raised the question. "What if I say to the President [Bush]," he asked, "that we want to enter NATO?" (370) Secretary of State James Baker prudently fielded but did not answer the question. He was true to form a lawyer, after all. But note he did not say no. "It's not such a hypothetical question," Baker responded. "It's also not so far-fetched" (ibid). Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze echoed his leader's point: "if we are to achieve a

new Europe without blocs then it is not such a fantasy to think that the Soviet Union might apply to NATO” (ibid). Note his chronology: a Europe without blocs would not be one devoid of military alliances, but one whose present alliances were instead enlarged. We might alternatively employ the word ‘expanded.’ But expanded into what? Once Soviet-dominated territory, of course.

All of which is to say that NATO’s expansion itself need not have undermined Russia’s sense of security after 1991. More important was the manner in which the organization grew. Here I think we should be careful. It is important to recognize that NATO expansion itself first occurred under Bush’s successor. East Germany’s absorption should not count, since by the spring of 1990 and after months to consider the practicalities of the issue, no leader of merit on either side the suddenly-defunct Iron Curtain suggested that it remain a part of the Warsaw Pact. Neither was it conceivable that a new unified Germany would be part of Moscow’s alliance either. A binary choice thus remained: Germany would either be in NATO, or neutral. Not so for Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and the other countries that joined NATO after Bush left office.

Bush might well have endorsed the same as his successors had he won a second term. We do not know. We do, however, know one thing for certain: Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and the rest wanted in. And until Donald Trump became President, the United States had typically looked fondly, or at least with grudging acceptance, upon refugees fleeing despotic rule, be they nations or solo travelers. Even young children.

Tying Bush to a longer trajectory, Radchenko is right to wonder if American exceptionalism, or rather American self-perception, might not be the real story here: that leaders in Bush’s administration, like most if not all, naively interpreted revolution and calls for freedom as explicit endorsement of *American* values. Like the others, Radchenko asks if the exceptional exceptionalism of the current commander-in-chief might not have been tempered, or better yet neutered, by greater constraints on American power of the kind no American president would likely ever have sought. Fundamentally, did Bush, the president who oversaw America at arguably the moment of its greatest triumph, tee up a subsequent president’s battle-cry of make America great again?

This book was not written about Donald Trump. It was instead composed initially as an implicit comparison between Presidents Bush, father and son. Where the former believed in American exceptionalism but thought the world would in time come to appreciate the merits of the American system, the latter sought to catalyze that realization. Tragedy ensued. Yet the exceptionalism that Radchenko sees in Bush, which I am grateful he noted and which merits considerable further thought (including by me), while clearly present in George H.W. Bush, dominated every American president and every American administration in some form or fashion since World War II. Does Bush therefore need stand trial for the problems (and the benefits, if one believes they exist, as I do) that exceptionalism produced, merely because he was at the helm during a moment when different thinking might have led to a different outcome? If exceptionalism is the one constant of the American political forest, then why do some trees (or, if you prefer, Bushes) stand tall while others of equal height seek to block others from the sun?

The question and embedded critique of Bush, that he might have been more original and done more and thus inoculated us from today’s hyper-nationalist tribalism in which an American president seeks to dismantle a largely American-constructed global system, lies at the heart of every reviewer’s response to *When the World Seemed New*. It is a question simultaneously fascinating and yet unfair. Presidents can create, that is true; but I consider a higher goal their ability to hand the baton to the next. This Bush did, as each of the reviewers noted, and I appreciate deeply their thoughtful engagement with this book. If it generated further questions,

or might even spark one day a wiser historian than I to do more than explain what a wholly new post-Cold War system might have looked like, not merely to lament its absence or point out the current one's deficiencies, that would be all the better.