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Daniel Bessner and Fredrik Logevall. "Recentering the United States in the Historiography of American Foreign Relations." *Texas National Security Review* 3:2 (Spring 2020).

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INTRODUCTION BY DANIEL IMMERWAHR, NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY

It is not typical for H-Diplo to publish a roundtable on an article. But Daniel Bessner and Fredrik Logevall's "Recentering the United States in the Historiography of American Foreign Relations" is not a typical article. Before it was published, it was already provoking hallway conversations at conferences. The Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations (SHAHR) scheduled a rare debate-style panel for its 2020 conference on the still-unpublished article. Surely the attention has been helped by the fact that both Bessner and Logevall are prominent figures: Bessner an up-and-coming young scholar with a polemical social media presence who helped advise the Bernie Sanders campaign on foreign policy; Logevall a recent past president of SHAHR and winner of the 2013 Pulitzer Prize in History for his book, *Embers of War*.¹

On its face, Bessner and Logevall's argument is modest—"extreme only in its moderation," writes Michael Cotey Morgan below. Since the 1990s, the study of U.S. foreign relations has expanded: it includes more studies of foreign causes and contexts for U.S. actions, more stress on transnational and nonstate actors. This has been "salutary," write Bessner and Logevall, who have "adopted international and transnational approaches" in their own work. But it has also, they argue, come at the cost of "downplaying" the domestic factors that are crucial to explaining why the United States "acted in the world as it did." They therefore call for a "rebalancing," for scholars not to lose sight of the importance of domestic factors and U.S. state actors.

The plea seems small, yet standing behind it is a controversial theory about U.S. power. Since World War II, Bessner and Logevall argue, the United States has had more power of nearly every sort than any other country "by a colossal margin." Within the international system, it has been the sun around which other countries are forced to orbit. This "overweening power" has granted the United States a unique immunity from the gravitational pull of other places. "Americans have not had to concern themselves with external realities to the degree that others around the world did—they could afford to remain parochial," Bessner and Logevall write. The inward-looking—one might even say narcissistic—aspect of U.S. power is why U.S. domestic factors are so important to understanding world history.

Writing histories that extend beyond the executive agencies of the federal government has been a way to bring non-elite and non-white actors into the narrative. Bessner and Logevall sympathize with this motive, but they are wary of its effects. They take as an example the Vietnam War, arguing that recent historiography has attributed "too much causal force for the war's course to local and transnational actors"—and too little to U.S. policymakers, who "bore major responsibility." The effect of emphasizing the agency of those beyond Washington has been to let the culprits off the hook for a war that claimed some three million lives.

This roundtable developed out of the debate that had been scheduled for SHAHR's canceled 2020 conference. As such, the participants were not randomly selected; the goal was to elicit critical perspectives. And they have, collectively, delivered. None of the critics disputes Bessner and Logevall's claim that researchers have strayed from studying U.S. policymaking and its domestic causes. Their responses instead largely concern Bessner and Logevall's thesis concerning the "overweening power" of the United States and the degree to which it has insulated U.S. decisions from "external realities."

Starting at the core, Christy Thornton challenges the notion that U.S. policymakers operated in a bubble. Given the extraordinarily rapid ascent to primacy of the United States after World War II, she notes, why would we think that the country arrived on the international scene "already confident of the strategies and tools it [would] use to rule the world"? Turning to her research area of international development, Thornton argues that the United States selectively and

¹ Daniel Bessner, *Democracy in Exile: Hans Speier and the Rise of the Defense Intellectual* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018); Fredrik Logevall, *Embers of War: The Fall of an Empire and the Making of America's Vietnam* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012).

strategically absorbed Latin American ideas as it sought to get a grasp on a complicated field.² Thus, from the start, U.S. power was not entirely made in the U.S.A.

What is more, adds Adom Getachew, history has taken numerous twists since 1945, the moment when the United States towered most visibly over the rest of the planet. Since then, she argues, the country has not been an “unmoved mover.” “Even the most powerful sovereign is not god,” she writes, and in the case of the United States the limits of hegemonic control have been clear. The country has been rocked by “ruptures and periodic crises,” most notably an “imperial unraveling” since the Cold War. It has thus frequently confronted “a political field not fully of its own making.”³

“A political field not fully of its own making” is also a theme that Edward Miller presses, too. On paper, the United States has been surely the single most powerful actor since 1945. But, Miller argues, power does not operate on paper, it works within a complex field of interactions in which a preponderance of military hardware or economic force might not determine the outcome. The Vietnam War—an area of expertise for Miller—is a clear example.⁴ Measured in bombs dropped, the United States should have won the war. But it lost, and to understand that one must appreciate that “Hanoi’s ability to wage war *in Vietnam* was formidable.” While Miller agrees heartily with Bessner and Logevall on the importance of paying attention to power, he writes that “placing *power* at the center of one’s analysis is not the same as centering one’s analysis on the *single most powerful actor*.” Miller argues that new trends in the field—not just new archives and topics—should lead us to reject Bessner and Logevall’s solar model of power “in which non-American people, places, cultures, and societies remain in the outer reaches” of the U.S.-centered system.

Morgan, of all the discussants, is the most willing to take Bessner and Logevall’s article as a moderate call for balance rather than as a polemic. He does not object to the notion that U.S. domestic politics might be of great interest. Still, he points out that “even scholars who care only about American history, assume the supremacy of American power, and accept the primacy of domestic American politics must go beyond the United States.”⁵ All the other respondents echo this sentiment, pointing out that no thick line separates the “domestic” from the “foreign” and emphasizing that causal arrows point in all directions.

Bessner and Logevall offer a robust, substantive response. They do not deny that U.S. power has encountered complications and limits, nor do they deny the agency of foreign actors and transnational movements. “Our argument is simply that international and transnational approaches should be complemented by a renewed emphasis on the domestic,” they write. They suggest that their critics, in interpreting the article as rejecting transnational and international approaches altogether, are attacking a straw man.

Yet if Bessner and Logevall do not reject new methodological developments outright, they insist on putting them in perspective. “Scholars of American foreign relations must never allow the trees of local agency to force our gaze away from

² Thornton’s work is on display in Christy Thornton, “‘Mexico Has the Theories’: Latin America and the Invention of Development in the 1930s,” in *The Development Century: A Global History*, ed. Stephen Macekura and Erez Manela (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 263–282 and Christy Thornton, “A Mexican International Order?: Tracing the Hidden Roots of the Charter of Economic Rights and Duties of States,” *Humanity* 9:3 (2018): 389–421.

³ For Getachew’s own account of a group of largely non-U.S. political actors challenging U.S. hegemony after 1945, see Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019).

⁴ Edward Miller, *Misalliance: Ngo Dinh Diem, the United States, and the Fate of South Vietnam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013).

⁵ As Morgan does in his own work. See Michael Cotey Morgan, *The Final Act: The Helsinki Accords and the Transformation of the Cold War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018).

the forest of U.S. primacy,” they argue. Though that primacy expresses itself in many complex ways, it has “remained remarkably stable over time.” To pull the focus away from that is to implicitly absolve the United States of responsibility. It is to portray it as “an empire of innocence.”

As I hope readers will see, the ensuing conversation grapples with some of the deepest issues confronting scholars of U.S. and the world. It is an intellectually serious exchange among some of the top scholars in the field. The participants should be thanked for offering such a thought-provoking discussion.

Participants:

Daniel Bessner is the Anne H.H. and Kenneth B. Pyle Associate Professor in American Foreign Policy in the Henry M. Jackson School of International Studies at the University of Washington. He is the author of *Democracy in Exile: Hans Speier and the Rise of the Defense Intellectual* (Cornell University Press, 2018).

Fredrik Logevall is Laurence D. Belfer Professor of International Affairs and Professor of History at Harvard University. His new book, *JFK: Coming of Age in the American Century, 1917–1956* (Random House), will be published in September 2020.

Daniel Immerwahr is an associate professor of history at Northwestern University. He is the author of *How to Hide an Empire* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019) and *Thinking Small* (Harvard University Press, 2015).

Adom Getachew is Neubauer Family Assistant Professor of Political Science at the University of Chicago and author of *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* (Princeton University Press, 2019).

Edward Miller is Associate Professor of History at Dartmouth College and the author of *Misalliance: Ngo Dinh Diem, the United States, and the Fate of South Vietnam* (Harvard University Press, 2013).

Michael Cotey Morgan is associate professor of history at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and author of *The Final Act: The Helsinki Accords and the Transformation of the Cold War* (Princeton University Press, 2018).

Christy Thornton is an assistant professor of sociology and Latin American Studies at Johns Hopkins University. Her book, *Revolution in Development: Mexico and the Governance of the Global Economy*, will be published in December 2020.

REVIEW BY ADOM GETACHEW, UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

I come to this dialogue about Daniel Bessner and Fredrik Logevall’s “Recentering the United States in the Historiography of American Foreign Relations” as an outsider in two senses—I am neither a historian nor a scholar of U.S. Foreign Relations. As a political theorist preoccupied with thinkers and political histories of the Black Atlantic world, I have largely conceived the American empire as an object of anti-imperial critique and a site from which black political thinkers developed an acute analysis about the racialization of the global order. In this effort, I have often turned to the insights gleaned from the international and transitional turns in history that have not only transformed the study of the United States but also globalized the study of political ideas. In my response I want to draw from the geographic and disciplinary peripheries not to reject the “recentering” Bessner and Logevall that recommend but instead to probe at its aims and methods.

Historicizing the Turns:

Bessner and Logevall begin by reminding us of the historical context in which the international/transnational turn occurred. Their account emphasizes the role of globalization and its reception among academics in facilitating the new attention to non-state, international, and transnational actors. But equally important, and more perplexing, I think, is that the rise of the transnational appears to coincide with the fall of the Soviet Union and the emergence of the United States as the world’s sole global hegemon. Why was the call for transnational histories, which had been ignored in the 1980s, suddenly legible in a unipolar world? I ask this question to suggest that Bessner and Logevall might better attend to the historiographic debates as they relate to the shifting context and conditions of American power. Though U.S. primacy and hegemony in the post-war world is not in doubt, it has not been a singular and stable formation. If the international turn emerges in a distinct historical conjuncture, if it is an answer to a particular “problem-space” to borrow from the anthropologist and theorist David Scott, we might also ask Bessner and Logevall to historicize their call for a new recentering turn.⁶ To what historical condition and context is their call directed? In what problem-space is it articulated? I do not think it is enough to say that continued American preeminence requires this recentering when the character and structure of this preeminence has been transformed and faces new global and domestic crises. For example, surveying the post-Cold War, the same moment when the transnational turn took off, Asli Bâli and Aziz Rana describe it as a period of “America’s Imperial Unraveling,” by which they signal not the fall of the United States, but instead highlight that the terms of the post-war world order entered a period of crisis. While the post-war American century centered on globalizing its form of market-based capitalism and liberal democracy within a rule-bound international order, the post-Cold War period has produced an American empire unmoored from international institutions and with a waning commitment to a liberal global project.⁷ I think the question about the limits of the transnational turn and the call for recentering should be articulated in terms of the critical leverage each approach offers in grasping the origins of these kinds of transformations with the aim of generating critical histories of our present.

From recentering to problematizing

If we take American global power to be marked by ruptures and periodic crises, then I worry that the framework of “recentering” ends up stabilizing and reifying what was in fact a frequently unstable (albeit successful) bid for hegemony. To

⁶ On the idea of the problem-space see David Scott, *Refashioning Futures: Criticism after Postcoloniality* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 8-11.

⁷ Asli Bâli and Aziz Rana, “America’s Imperial Unraveling,” <http://bostonreview.net/politics/asli-bali-aziz-rana-americas-imperial-unraveling>, accessed 30 April 2020. A longer version of their argument with specific attention to the role of constitutionalism can be found in Asli Bâli and Aziz Rana, “Constitutionalism and the American Imperial Imagination,” *Chicago Law Review* 85 (March 2018): 257-292.

offer an alternative approach I turn again to Scott and to a debate about Eurocentrism in postcolonial theory. The postcolonial turn in the humanities and social sciences has been spurred by an emphasis on decentering colonial power not unlike the transnational turn in U.S. history. Scott argues that decentering Europe, however, is inadequate to the task of conceptualizing “those structures and rationalities through which Europe’s colonial projects were organized,” and which continue to shape the political trajectories of the postcolonial world.⁸ But he eschews the binary of decentering and recentering in which the debate about Eurocentrism and Bessner and Logevall’s essay is framed. Instead, Scott calls for “not less Europe, but a differently configured one. Not a reified Europe, but a problematized one.”⁹

I want to urge an approach of problematizing instead of recentering. In my mind this injects a healthy dose of skepticism. It avoids rehearsing the story that power tells about itself, but not in simple rejection of its reality. To problematize American power would require attending to the multiple modalities, rationalities, and structures through which it was made. This would also be an approach that attends as much to the failures, contradictions, and crises of American hegemony as it does to its triumph and persistence. We often associate attention to the limits of power with efforts to capture and highlight peripheral agency. But recognizing these limits can also help us to illuminate the transforming character of American power. In particular, it complicates how we think about agency, moving away from an account of the United States as the unmoved mover. Even the most powerful sovereign is not god. In a world of many and differently located political actors, the United States’ actions respond to a political field not fully of its own making and generates unintended and uncontained consequences. I think our critical energies should not be framed around returning the United States to the center but to assessing how that center was made and why it appears unable to hold in the current conjuncture.

The Foreign in the Domestic

One of the most salutary consequences of the transnational turn across the disciplines has been to query the bifurcation of the domestic and international, illustrating their entanglements and the ways that political actors deftly navigated their intersection. Whatever form the return to the study of American global hegemony takes, carrying these insights forward will be an important part of telling its history in new ways. Bessner and Logevall write, “Foreign peoples might even know [the impact of the U.S. president on global affairs] better than those who reside in the United States, as it is they who most directly suffer the often malign influence of the U.S. state.” Striking, however, about the transformation of the United States from settler colony to global hegemon, has been that the “foreign peoples” have often been right here at home. From its founding, those “foreign in a domestic sense”—Indigenous peoples, African slaves, and later colonial subjects of the annexed territories were the first subjects of American imperial power. Whether it is black communities reckoning with the violence of militarized policing or indigenous peoples struggling to assert land rights against expanding military bases, extraction, and weapons testing, the consequences of America’s global power redounds domestically.

This suggests a much needed reconfiguration of the disaggregation of foreign relations and domestic policy, modelled for instance in Stuart Schrader’s recent book *Badges without Borders*, which traces the intimate connections between U.S. global counterinsurgency organized through technical assistance and trainings for client states and the militarization of local police forces.¹⁰ Critics and theorists of European imperialism often describe an imperial boomerang in which imperial authoritarian practices reverberated back in the metropole. But Schrader and others show that the case of the U.S. empire is less a story of the chickens coming home to roost.¹¹ Instead techniques for the management of racialized people can be

⁸ David Scott, “Colonial Governmentality,” *Social Text* 43 (Autumn 1995): 191-220, 192.

⁹ Scott, “Colonial Governmentality,” 198.

¹⁰ Stuart Schrader, *Badges without Borders: How Counterinsurgency Transformed American Policing* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019).

¹¹ See also Nikhil Pal Singh, *Race and America’s Long War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017).

exported as well as imported, generating an entangled and simultaneous emergence of imperial practices. I cannot say how scholars of institutions like the imperial presidency or the national security apparatus would pick up on this insight, but an openness and orientation to the distinct porosity of domestic and foreign policy in a settler-colonial state might generate new insights about the kind of global power America is. More broadly, we might rethink a return to the study of American power not as a break from the transnational turn but as an effort that takes up its insights and methods to deploy them toward a new object of inquiry.

REVIEW BY EDWARD MILLER, DARTMOUTH COLLEGE

Has the United States been decentered from the study of the United States in the World? Daniel Bessner and Fredrik Logevall suggest that it has. In their April 2020 article in the *Texas National Security Review*, these accomplished historians of U.S. foreign relations critically discuss two scholarly “turns” that the field has taken over the past twenty years: international history and transnational history. While they acknowledge some “salutary effects” of the scholarship produced by these turns, Bessner and Logevall argue that the benefits have come at a cost. They specifically decry what they see as a shift away from the field’s traditional focus on U.S. elites and U.S. policymaking. Above all, they fear that international and transnational historians have lost sight of the prime importance U.S. state power, which they view as the transcendent fact of post-1945 international affairs. “The United States,” they declare, “is the sun that delimits the entire system’s structure.”

At the core of Bessner and Logevall’s argument lies a simple syllogism. Its first premise is that the United States was the “most powerful actor” in the post-1945 world and its leaders “shaped the direction of global affairs more than any other nation.” Second, the authors assert that U.S. policymakers were almost always more influenced and impacted by American domestic events and domestic politics than by any international or transnational phenomena. They therefore conclude that American actors—specifically U.S. policymakers—and American domestic politics must retake their rightful place at the center of scholarly analyses of American foreign relations history. While Bessner and Logevall do not clearly explain what the fate of international and transnational history might be under this “re-centered” paradigm, they somewhat awkwardly call for the internationalists and transnationalists to unite with the U.S. domestic historians to explore “a diversity of spatial geographies.”

As a member of the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations (SHAFR) and a historian who studies both the international and transnational dimensions of the Vietnam War, I read Bessner and Logevall’s essay with perhaps more than just academic interest. I was especially intrigued by their efforts to “historicize” the international and transnational turns in the field over the past three decades. In both the text and their lengthy endnotes, Bessner and Logevall survey some of the key debates that have roiled the field since the early 1990s. They remind us of the initial resistance to international and transnational approaches voiced by leading members of the field such as Walter LaFeber. They also show that this resistance did not dissuade other members of the field—especially younger scholars—who embraced the international and transnational turns with enthusiasm. Bessner and Logevall plausibly connect the growing interest in these approaches to the end of the Cold War and to improved access to archives in former Communist bloc countries and elsewhere. They note the growing interest in globalization over the course of the 1990s. Finally, Bessner and Logevall point out that the study of U.S. foreign relations prior to the 1990s had been “riven by 25 years of paradigm disputes that pitted ‘orthodox’ historians against ‘revisionists,’ who themselves battled ‘post-revisionists’ and ‘corporatists.’” The rise of international and transnational approaches thus helped the field to move beyond old debates that were generating diminishing intellectual returns.

For all of its documentary and contextual detail, however, I still found Bessner and Logevall’s historiographical survey incomplete. The most obvious lacunae have to do with the authors’ rather narrow description of the international and transnational turns. In their account, “international history” is defined mainly or solely by the incorporation of non-American sources and archives into scholarly research agendas. Indeed, the primary reason that they offer for the rapid embrace of the international turn by scholars of U.S. foreign relations in the early 1990s was the sudden availability of non-U.S. archives. Meanwhile, their definition of “transnational history” revolves mainly around the subject of one’s research. Specifically, the transnational historian focuses on “nonstate actors, people-to-people relations, and transstate processes.”

In my view, these definitions of the international and transnational approaches are problematic because of what they leave out. While the use of non-U.S. archives and the attention to nonstate actors are important aspects of international and transnational history, they are not the most distinctive features of those approaches. Just as the pioneering work undertaken in women’s and gender history during the 1970s and 1980s required scholars to do more than just “add women and stir,” international and transnational historians have not been content merely to work non-U.S. archives and actors into the

mix.¹² At the same time that they have been expanding the scope of their research, these scholars—many of our SHAFR colleagues among them—have been engaging, borrowing, and adapting particular theoretical and conceptual innovations in the study of history more broadly. While a comprehensive review of these innovations is beyond the scope of this commentary, I will call attention to three key trends that Bessner and Logevall appear to have overlooked.

The first trend has to do with another “turn” that overlaps with both the international and transnational turns: the postcolonial turn. Since the publication of Edward Said’s *Orientalism* in 1978, the study of empire, colonialism, and decolonization has been transformed.¹³ While many of the particular historical claims advanced by Said in *Orientalism* are problematic, the book nevertheless helped to open up new ways of thinking about the interplay among culture, knowledge, and power in the history of European and American empires. In an article published in 2000, Andrew Rotter noted that U.S. foreign relations specialists had been slower than scholars in other fields to engage with Said and other postcolonial theorists. But he also detected what he described as “Saidism without Said” in the field and presciently suggested that the study of U.S. empire might yet make the postcolonial turn.¹⁴ In the twenty years since, Rotter’s prediction has been validated by a raft of scholarly works. These include new studies on U.S. colonial rule in the Philippines, Puerto Rico, and other territories, as well as military occupations and other instances of “informal” American empire across the Global South. Although these works are diverse in both subject and method, many of them are postcolonial insofar as they seek to connect U.S. military, political, and economic dominion to particular regimes of knowledge about race, culture, science, and governance. They also show the enduring influence of colonial habits of mind, even after formal colonial structures are dismantled.¹⁵ While some of this scholarship appears in Bessner and Logevall’s footnotes, it is surprising that the authors do not mention this shift in the study of U.S. empire, or consider its implications for their argument.

A second notable missing trend is the study of development. In 2000—coincidentally the same year that Rotter’s prescient comments on “Saidism without Said” appeared—Nick Cullather published an equally timely discussion of new approaches to the study of development as a topic in U.S. Foreign Relations. Although the existing social scientific literature on development was enormous, Cullather noted, it was only recently that historians had begun to treat “development as

¹² Joan Scott, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” *The American Historical Review* 91:5 (1986): 1053–1075.

¹³ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

¹⁴ Andrew J. Rotter, “Saidism without Said: Orientalism and U.S. Diplomatic History,” *The American Historical Review* 105:4 (2000): 1205–1217.

¹⁵ See, for example, Mary Renda, *Taking Haiti: Military Occupation and the Culture of U.S. Imperialism, 1915–1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Paul Kramer, *The Blood of Government: Race, Empire the United States and the Philippines* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Alfred W. McCoy, *Policing America’s Empire: The United States, the Philippines, and the Rise of the Surveillance State* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009); David Brody, *Visualizing American Empire: Orientalism and Imperialism in the Philippines* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010); Michael Hunt and Steven Levine, *Arc of Empire: America’s Wars in Asia from the Philippines to Vietnam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012); April Merleaux, *Sugar and Civilization: American Empire and the Cultural Politics of Sweetness* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015); Sarah Miller-Davenport, *Gateway State: Hawai’i and the Cultural Transformation of American Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019); Jennifer Miller, *Cold War Democracy: The United States and Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2019). Several critics have connected the lateness of the postcolonial turn by U.S. Foreign Relations specialists to the endurance of exceptionalism in the study of U.S. Empire; see Amy Kaplan, “‘Left Alone with America’: The Absence of Empire in the Study of American Culture,” in Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease, eds., *Cultures of United States Imperialism* (Durham: Duke University Press 1993), 3–21; and Paul A. Kramer, “Power and Connection: Imperial Histories of the United States in the World,” *American Historical Review* 116:5 (2011): 1348–1391.

history”—that is, to historicize development ideas and practices within specific political, intellectual, and cultural contexts.¹⁶ In the subsequent two decades, Cullather and other scholars have produced a wave of deeply-researched monographs and articles on the participation of the U.S. state, private U.S. organizations, and individual Americans in the larger “Development Century.”¹⁷ Admittedly, not all of these scholars have employed international or transnational methods in their research; for example, several important studies on the history of the idea of modernization were based mainly on research in U.S. archives and focused mostly or exclusively on American institutional contexts. But especially in the past decade, the study of “American development” has become far more international and transnational, with growing numbers of scholars applying area-studies training and knowledge of multiple languages to their work.¹⁸

The third trend which is relevant to evaluating Bessner and Logevall’s claims is yet another “turn”: the rise of global history. In some ways, the meaning of “the global” is even more elusive than the other categories referenced here, as the term is invoked so frequently and attached to such a broad diversity of methods and scales that it appears to defy definition. Nevertheless, Sebastian Conrad argues persuasively that global history can be usefully conceived as an approach that emphasizes “global integration, or structured transformations on a global level.”¹⁹ In recent years, specialists in U.S. foreign relations have authored several studies of this type on topics in the post-1945 period. The decade of the 1970s has emerged as a particularly “global” decade of transformations in currency markets, international trade, and business practices, geopolitical “interdependence,” and human rights. Many of the authors of these global histories are also international and transnational historians, and thus may also be implicated in the putative “decentering” of the United States.²⁰

In calling attention to these trends, I am not suggesting that Bessner and Logevall are somehow obligated to adopt any and every methodological and theoretical fad that has swept through our field in recent years. Instead, my contention is that these three trends are distinctly relevant to assessing Bessner and Logevall’s main claims. Indeed, the work of scholars in all of these three areas challenges Bessner and Logevall’s assumption that causality in history is inevitably a function of relative power, as well as their conviction that any inquiry into post-1945 U.S. foreign relations ought to begin and end with the United States and its “overweening power.” More generally, all three trends highlight the contingent and contextual nature of power, particularly in the realm of international affairs. So while scholars can agree with Bessner and Logevall that “power

¹⁶ Nick Cullather, “Research Note: Development? Its History,” *Diplomatic History* 24:4 (2000): 641-653.

¹⁷ Stephen J., Macekura and Erez Manela, eds., *The Development Century: A Global History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

¹⁸ Nick Cullather, *The Hungry World: America’s Cold War Battle Against Poverty in Asia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010); Nils Gilman, *Mandarins of the Future: Modernization in Cold War America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003); Daniel Immerwahr, *Thinking Small: The United States and the Lure of Community Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015); David Ekbladh, *The Great American Mission: Modernization and the Construction of an American World Order* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009); Amy Offner, *Sorting out the Mixed Economy: The Rise and Fall of Welfare and Developmental States in the Americas*; Nicole Sackley, “Village Models: Etawah, India and the Making and Remaking of Development in the Early Cold War,” *Diplomatic History* 37:4 (September 2013): 749-778; Nicole Sackley, “The Village as Cold War Site: Experts, Development, and the History of Rural Reconstruction,” *Journal of Global History* 6:3 (2011): 481-504.

¹⁹ Sebastian Conrad, *What is Global History?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 62.

²⁰ Niall Ferguson et. al., *The Shock of the Global: The 1970s in Perspective* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011); Daniel Sargent, *A Superpower Transformed: The Remaking of American Foreign Relations in the 1970s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); Barbara Keys, *Reclaiming American Virtue: The Human Rights Revolution of the 1970s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014); Megan Black, *The Global Interior: Mineral Frontiers and American Power* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018); Victor McFarland, *Oil Powers: A History of the U.S.-Saudi Alliance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020).

matters,” it is also clear that placing *power* at the center of one’s analysis is not the same as centering one’s analysis on *the single most powerful actor*.

Power and historical causality are linked, but those linkages cannot be explained merely by tallying up the relative military, administrative, or economic clout of individual actors and seeing who has the biggest overall total. On the contrary, historical outcomes are critically shaped by the myriad ways in which various actors’ coercive capabilities intersect and collide with phenomena such as language, discourse, narrative, and memory; historians must also reckon with the ways in which power is mediated by local politics, institutions, and social practices. This is why international and transnational historians—especially those who have taken the postcolonial, development and/or global turns—devote so much time and energy to the study of the historical and cultural contexts in which actors such as the U.S. state operated, especially in the Global South. In this regard, the international and transnational turns have *enhanced* the abilities of scholars to understand the deployment and effects of U.S. power in foreign contexts.²¹ But Bessner and Logevall do not discuss this crucial feature of the scholarship. Instead, they suggest that “the sheer ability of the United States to shape the character of international systems, processes, and events”—the gravitational pull of their American sun—has been “downplayed” by historians who use international and transnational methods.

To illustrate my criticisms in more concrete fashion, let me turn to the specific historical example that Bessner and Logevall present in the article: the Vietnam War. In their telling, Vietnam War historiography is a prime example of how international and transnational approaches can distort scholarly understanding of power and causality. As Bessner and Logevall correctly point out, the Anglophone scholarship on the Vietnam War produced between the 1970s and the 1990s was heavily U.S.-centric. The preoccupation with U.S. actors, policies and sources was evident in the fierce debates between proponents of an “orthodox” interpretation (who argued that the U.S. intervention in Vietnam was an immoral and hopeless anti-Communist crusade) and the advocates of “revisionism” (who insisted that the conflict was entirely justified and eminently winnable, if only America had not lost its nerve). In this respect, Vietnam War historiography ran in parallel with the orthodoxy-versus-revisionism debate among U.S. foreign relations scholars over the origins of the Cold War. The only difference was that labels in the Vietnam case were reversed, with the critics of U.S. policy in Vietnam donning the mantle of orthodoxy, and the defenders of Washington’s actions cast as the revisionists.

This situation prevailed until the late 1990s, when the historiography of the war began to shift in international and transnational directions. While some scholars tapped recently opened Soviet, Chinese, and Eastern European archives for insights into Communist bloc policies and policymakers, others utilized Vietnamese collections and sources to re-interpret the wartime states and societies of both North and South Vietnam. Logevall and Bessner allow that this work has “produced a more well-rounded picture of the struggle”; and they also note that “none of the recent international and transnational histories deny the centrality of the United States to the war in Vietnam.” Nevertheless, they are still less than sanguine about this scholarship. More specifically, they assert that many of these studies run the risk “attributing too much causal force for the war’s course to local and transnational actors.” To make such an excessive attribution of “causal force” to non-U.S. actors, they argue, would be “ahistorical.”

But what, exactly, is “ahistorical” about arguing for the causal agency of Vietnamese and other non-American actors in the Vietnam War—a war that took place in Vietnam, and one in which Vietnamese did most of the fighting and dying? To evaluate Bessner and Logevall’s argument here, we must first grasp the key features of their preferred U.S.-centered interpretation of the war. For Bessner and Logevall, the idea that the United States was primarily responsible for starting the Vietnam War is virtually a self-evident fact. “Long before American ground troops set foot in Indochina,” they declare, “the United States was *the* principal player in making the struggle what it became” (emphasis in original). In their view, the proof of American responsibility is found in the fact of massive U.S. material support for the French war effort in Indochina

²¹ For an example of a work which convincingly incorporates all three of the turns spotlighted here (postcolonialism, development, and global history) into a new approach to the study of the Cold War, see Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

during 1950–1954, followed by the extensive military and economic aid provided to Ngô Đình Diệm’s South Vietnamese government during 1954–1963. The authors also cite the sheer scale of the U.S. military effort during the 1965–1973 period, noting that “it was Washington that dropped some 8 million tons of bombs” on the countries of Indochina and that “only the United States sprayed some 19 million gallons of defoliants on South Vietnam.” Based on this macro-level accounting of American money, firepower, and violence, they conclude that any scholarship that “gives *equal or near-equal* causal weight for the war’s military, political, economic, and social course to non-American or transnational actors” is flawed.

Of course, Bessner and Logevall are far from the first scholars to assert that the United States was the primary instigator and perpetrator of the Vietnam War. In fact, by advancing this claim, Bessner and Logevall are embracing one of the pillars of the orthodox interpretation, even as they revise or discard other claims that featured prominently in previous orthodox accounts. They acknowledge, for example, that the partition of Vietnam at the 1954 Geneva Conference was “not primarily an American gambit”; they also note that “the United States...did not determine the conflict’s end—after all, it lost the war.” Still, theirs is a fairly straight-up endorsement of the core tenets of Vietnam War orthodoxy—a position in keeping with their previous writings about the war, especially Logevall’s.²²

My objections to this claim are not based on any opposition to Vietnam War orthodoxy *per se*. Nor do I harbor any revisionist desire to exonerate U.S. leaders from responsibility for the horrifying carnage wreaked by the United States in Vietnam. Instead, my reservations have to do with Bessner and Logevall’s discounting of the actual historical contexts in which the United States wielded its enormous power. While the United States may have been the “most powerful” actor in the war as measured by bombs dropped, soldiers deployed, and dollars spent, such a Rankean cost accounting hardly shows that the “causal weight” of U.S. actions was necessarily greater than that of all other actors combined. Moreover, the recent international and transnational scholarship on the war—the work that Bessner and Logevall describe as “ahistorical”—includes a great many deeply researched and richly contextualized accounts which suggest that the relationship between power and historical outcomes in the Vietnam War may have been rather more complicated.

Consider the research on North Vietnam’s war effort, based on work in Soviet, Chinese, and Vietnamese archives. While it is true that the overall scope and scale of Soviet and People’s Republic of China (PRC) aid to Hanoi during the war was smaller in material and economic terms than US aid to South Vietnam, it was still enormous and enormously important. It also began earlier than previously known. As Merle Pribbenow and Christopher Goscha have documented, North Vietnamese junks opened the “Ho Chi Minh Sea Trail” across the South China Sea in 1962 and smuggled thousands of tons of late-model Chinese weapons and materiel to insurgent forces in South Vietnam. These weapons, which included heavy machine guns and anti-aircraft artillery, helped National Liberation Front forces win the Battle of Ap Bac in January 1963. They also enabled Communist leaders to mount a major escalation of the war in the spring of 1964—a full year before President Lyndon Johnson launched Operation Rolling Thunder and ordered the first deployments of U.S. regular combat units to South Vietnam.²³ As hundreds of thousands of American military personnel poured into South Vietnam after 1965, hundreds of thousands of Chinese soldiers entered North Vietnam to crew anti-aircraft batteries and to free People’s Army of Vietnam (PAVN) troops for deployment to the south. Thanks to this Chinese support and to the fighter jets, surface-to-air missiles, radar equipment and other aid delivered by the Soviet Union, North Vietnam eventually constructed one of the

²² Logevall’s adherence to the orthodox view—especially his emphasis on U.S. responsibility for the war and his depiction of Ho Chi Minh as a heroic leader who cornered the market on Vietnamese nationalist legitimacy—is evident in his Pulitzer Prize-winning book, *Embers of War*. For my views on the strengths and weaknesses of this important volume, see “Roundtable: Fredrik Logevall, *Embers of War: The Fall of an Empire and the Making of America’s Vietnam* (New York: Random House, 2012),” *Journal of American Studies* 48:2 (2014).

²³ *Victory in Vietnam: The Official History of the People’s Army of Vietnam, 1954-1975*, Merle Pribbenow, trans. (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2002), 115-116; Christopher Goscha, “The Maritime Nature of the Wars for Vietnam: A Geo-Historical Reflection,” *War & Society* 24:2 (November 2005): 53–92, esp. 73-80.

most sophisticated and deadly air defense systems in the world.²⁴ Meanwhile, the size and capabilities of PAVN forces in South Vietnam expanded enormously after 1965. While Bessner and Logevall's statement that Hanoi's "war-fighting capabilities...could not, and never did come anywhere near America's" is undoubtedly true in an aggregate or global sense, Hanoi's ability to wage war *in Vietnam* was formidable. In January 1968, a force of 17,000 PAVN troops laid siege to the U.S. Marine base at Khe Sanh and subjected it to continuous rocket and artillery fire for 77 days. This formidable display of military power was all the more impressive for taking place against the backdrop of the first wave of the Tet Offensive.

Another of Bessner and Logevall's main claims about Vietnam—that the United States was "*the* principal player" that created the conditions that led to the war in the first place—is called into question by other recent studies of both North and South Vietnam. *Contra* the orthodox view that the United States "invented" the South Vietnamese state, several scholars have marshalled evidence showing that President Ngô Đình Diệm was the key figure in the design and implementation of the nation building programs implemented under the first Republic of Vietnam (1955–1963). Although Diem ultimately failed to realize his communitarian development vision for the RVN—a failure that contributed mightily to his 1963 ouster and assassination—his unexpected initial success in consolidating his authority during the early years of his rule spurred Communist leaders to launch an rural insurgency against him during 1959–1960.²⁵ Although the anti-Diệm rebellion was initially limited in scope, the resumption of war in the south provided an opening for those members of the senior Communist party leadership in Hanoi who advocated armed struggle as a means to reunify the country. In late 1963, the party approved General Secretary Lê Duẩn's proposal for a rapid expansion of the conflict in the south to win "decisive victory" *before* Washington could deploy its own combat forces. As it happened, Lê Duẩn's bid for an early victory was thwarted by Johnson's 1965 intervention in the conflict. Still, the fact that the Vietnamese Party chief made his own choice for a wider war more than a year before the U.S. president did suggests that responsibility for the war cannot be laid exclusively at the feet of American leaders.²⁶

²⁴ Chen Jian, "China's Involvement in the Vietnam War, 1964-1969," *The China Quarterly* 42 (June 1995): 356-387; Ang Cheng Guan, *The Vietnam War from the Other Side: The Vietnamese Communist Perspective* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002); Mari Olsen, *Soviet-Vietnam relations and the role of China, 1949-64: Changing Alliances* (London: Routledge, 2006); Ilya Gaiduk, *The Soviet Union and the Vietnam War* (London: I.R. Dee, 1996).

²⁵ For the view that the United States "invented" South Vietnam, see James M. Carter, *Inventing Vietnam: The United States and State Building, 1954-1968* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008). On Diệm and nation building, see Philip Catton, *Diem's Final Failure: Prelude to America's War in Vietnam* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2002); Edward Miller, *Misalliance: Ngo Dinh Diem, the United States, and the Fate of South Vietnam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013); Matthew Masur, "Exhibiting Signs of Resistance: South Vietnam's Struggle for Legitimacy, 1954-1960," *Diplomatic History* 33:2 (March 2009): Stan Tan, "'Swiddens, Resettlements, Sedentarizations, and Villages': State Formation among the Central Highlanders of Vietnam under the First Republic, 1955-1961," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 1:1-2 (2006): 210-252; Phi Văn Nguyễn, "Les résidus de la guerre : la mobilisation des réfugiés du nord pour un Vietnam non-communist, 1954-1964" (Ph.D. diss., Université de Québec à Montréal, 2015); Geoffrey Stewart, *Vietnam's Lost Revolution: Ngô Đình Diệm's Failure to Build an Independent Nation, 1955-1963* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017). Compared to the work on Diệm's First Republic, the scholarship on Nguyễn Văn Thiệu's Second Republic (1967-1975) is less extensive; however, the work that has been published to date on the Thiệu period reflects the growing interest in development and global history approaches. See Sean Fear, "Saigon Goes Global: South Vietnam's Quest for International Legitimacy in the Age of Détente," *Diplomatic History* 42:3 (2017): 428-455; and Simon Toner, "Imagining Taiwan: The Nixon Administration, the Developmental States, and South Vietnam's Search for Economic Viability, 1969-1975," *Diplomatic History* 41:4 (September 2017): 772-798.

²⁶ Pierre Asselin, *Hanoi's Road to the Vietnam War, 1954-1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), esp. chapter 6. See also Merle Pribbenow, "General Vo Nguyen Giap and the Mysterious Evolution of the Plan for the 1968 Tet Offensive," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 3 (Summer 2008): 1-33; Lien-Hang T. Nguyen, *Hanoi's War: An International History of the War for Peace in Vietnam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012); Martin Grossheim, "'Beat the Revisionists Up!': Politics and Culture in North Vietnam before and during the Vietnam War," *Modern East Asian History* 19 (March 2016): 280-300; and Tuong Vu, *Vietnam's Communist Revolution: The Power and Limits of Ideology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), esp. chapters 4 and 5.

Of all the claims that Bessner and Logevall put forward about Vietnam, the one that may be most at odds with recent scholarship has to do with civil war. Although the authors acknowledge that the Vietnam War “unquestionably pitted Vietnamese against Vietnamese,” they still approvingly cite the 1974 remark of the antiwar activist Daniel Ellsberg that “a war in which one side is entirely financed and equipped and supported by foreigners is not a civil war.” For Ellsberg, as for many orthodox historians, the notion that the Vietnam War may have been a civil war sits uncomfortably with their desire to see it as a war of national liberation—that is, as a conflict in which a united “Vietnamese people,” led by the Vietnamese Communist Party, overcame U.S. imperialist aggression. But for those scholars who use Vietnamese archives and the testimony of ordinary Vietnamese to study the conflict, the civil war aspects of the Vietnam War are all too plain to see. As Christopher Goscha has pointed out in his pathbreaking *Vietnam: A New History*, “there has never been one Vietnam but several remarkably varied ones.” In the era of the First and Second Indochina Wars, Goscha argues, the multiplicity of Vietnams helped give rise to the phenomena of “a savage war of sovereignties”—that is, bitter and recurring clashes among rival Vietnamese groups that overlapped with their conflicts with French and American forces.²⁷ The twin themes of fragmented sovereignty and civil warfare in Modern Vietnamese history have also been explored in compelling fashion by Brett Reilly.²⁸

Ellsberg’s refusal to believe that that a war involving a foreign power could also have been a civil war would strike most scholars of civil wars as strange. David Armitage has pointed out that most civil wars become international conflicts without losing their civil war qualities.²⁹ In addition, the Vietnam War featured countless instances of what the political scientist Stathis Kalyvas has described as “the logic of violence in civil war”: the distinctive and highly localized forms of denunciation and violence associated with civil warfare.³⁰ Bessner and Logevall are aware that these civil warfare dynamics were present in Vietnam, but they do not deem them very important. In a footnote, they agree with Goscha that Vietnam might well have been wracked by civil war even if the United States had not intervened there. But then they declare that “these disputes [among Vietnamese] would have played out locally [in the absence of U.S. intervention] and would have had little effect on the United States or the broader international system.”

This last remark seems telling, insofar as it reveals as key feature of Bessner and Logevall’s thinking about actors and events in the Global South during the post-1945 era. Their argument suggests that the international or global significance of those actors and events should be indexed according to the involvement of the United States. Thus, absent Washington’s intervention, the Vietnam War is reduced to a series of “local disputes” with little or no impact outside the borders of Indochina. The possibility that those “local disputes” might have reflected or shaped broader international or transnational patterns—or broader trends in twentieth century postcolonial, development, or global history—is eclipsed by the paramount importance of the U.S. state, U.S. policymaking elites, and U.S. domestic politics.

By charging scholars of international and transnational history with “downplaying” American actors and American power in their analyses, Bessner and Logevall overlook the myriad and compelling ways in which those scholars are *integrating* the United States and its formidable power into the study of post-1945 foreign relations. It is precisely because these scholars are adopting global and other border-crossing perspectives that they are able to pursue this integrative agenda. But Bessner and

²⁷ Christopher Goscha, *Vietnam: A New History* (New York: Basic Books, 2016), 3, 221-229.

²⁸ Brett Reilly, “The Sovereign States of Vietnam, 1945-1955,” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 11:3-4 (2016): 103-139; and Brett Reilly, “Redefining the Origins of Vietnam’s Civil War: the Cold War Conflict between Phan Bội Châu and Hồ Chí Minh in the 1920s-30s,” Conference Paper presented at the Association of Asian Studies Annual Meeting, March 2017, https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Brett_Reilly2. See also John C. Schaefer, “Ngô Kha, Vietnam’s Civil Wars, and the Need for Forgiveness,” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 13:1 (2018): 1-41.

²⁹ David Armitage, *Civil War: A History in Ideas* (New York: Knopf, 2017), 8.

³⁰ Stathis Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil Wars* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

Logevall seem to prefer an older approach, one in which non-American people, places, cultures, and societies remain in the outer reaches of their imagined U.S.-centric solar system. In their view, the study of American foreign relations needs to return to the orbit in which it has traditionally travelled: a path that circles tightly around the “sun” of American power.

REVIEW BY MICHAEL COTEY MORGAN, UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT CHAPEL HILL

Most manifestos tear down enemies, bulldoze traditions, and demolish superstitions. This is not one of those manifestos. Daniel Bessner and Fredrik Logevall's program is extreme only in its moderation. They want historians to pay more attention to the making of American foreign policy, but emphasize out that it is just one important subject among many. Others might demand revolution. They suggest "rebalancing."

The notion of rebalancing raises important questions about what progress looks like in the writing of history. Many classic works of international history appeared decades before the opening of the Soviet archives. Think of C.V. Wedgwood's *Thirty Years War*, A. J. P. Taylor's *Struggle for Mastery in Europe*, or Pierre Renouvin's *Les Origines immédiates de la guerre*, all of which drew on a multinational array of primary sources in multiple languages and examined events from the perspectives of all the major players.³¹ In the 1990s, historians of American foreign relations adopted these techniques when the archival gold rush empowered them to reexamine longstanding assumptions and draw innovative conclusions. Old approaches brought forth new ideas. Did this count as progress? The answer depends on what you want history to do.

Consider the end of the Cold War. If you want to explain how the Reagan and Bush administrations formulated their policies toward the Soviet Union, you could gather most of your evidence by following the paper trail from College Park to College Station and back (with side trips to Simi Valley). This task could keep diligent historians occupied for years, especially if they—following Bessner and Logevall's program—attended to the role of the CIA, Department of Defense, and Congress in shaping U.S. policy. If your primary interest is American history, this might be enough. After all, neither the diplomats at the *Auswärtiges Amt* nor the apparatchiks in the Kremlin called the shots in Washington. If, however, you wanted to explain how the Cold War itself ended, you would have to consider the policies of the USSR, West Germany, and several other countries besides. Your archival itinerary might start in the U.S., but it could not end there. And you would have to intertwine many national perspectives to tell a single global story. Neither approach is intrinsically superior to the other, but they start from different assumptions and ask different questions. Choosing between international history and the history of U.S. foreign relations is as much a matter of taste as a matter of reason.

Emphasizing their aesthetic and intellectual differences cannot, however, prevent them from overlapping. You might chronicle the drafting of President Ronald Reagan's National Security Decision Directive 32 (NSDD-32), for example, or the genesis of his Strategic Defense Initiative by referring to American documents. But if you wanted to determine the significance of those policies, you would need to put them in their international context. You would need to investigate how Soviet leaders responded to them. You would need non-American sources. Only then could you assess Reagan's role in ending the Cold War. The same pattern applies to most other milestones of U.S. foreign policy, both before and after 1945. To understand the Monroe Doctrine, you have to know something about the Royal Navy, the Congress of Vienna, and British Foreign Secretary George Canning. To understand the Open Door policy, you have to know something about the Qing dynasty, European imperial rivalries, and international trade flows. For these reasons, even scholars who care only about American history, assume the supremacy of American power, and accept the primacy of domestic American politics must go beyond the United States. International history and the domestic history of U.S. foreign relations need each other.

Public policy and public debate need them too. Bessner and Logevall provide a welcome reminder that these kinds of history matter, no matter your political preferences. Some scholars may assume that the study of diplomacy is inherently conservative or the study of social movements innately progressive. As the essay makes clear, however, this assumption is mistaken. Major decisions in the history of American foreign relations, whether the escalation of the Vietnam War in 1965 or the invasion of Iraq in 2003, to name two of the most controversial, demand historians' attention. But attention is not approval. The deeper analysis that Bessner and Logevall propose and the broader synthesis that they envision will help

³¹ C.V. Wedgwood, *The Thirty Years War* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1938); A.J.P. Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe, 1848–1918* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1954); and Pierre Renouvin, *Les Origines immédiates de la guerre (28 juin–4 août 1914)* (Paris: Alfred Costes, 1925).

scholars get beyond tired debates about the essential virtue or self-evident wickedness of American foreign policy. That would be a step toward real understanding—and a sign of real progress.

REVIEW BY CHRISTY THORNTON, JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY

Daniel Bessner and Fredrik Logevall's call to recenter U.S. state actors in foreign relations history has (re)opened an important conversation: what is gained and lost from broadening our perspectives on the role of the United States in the world? In seeking international and transnational influences on U.S. decision-making processes, they argue that what is lost is an understanding of the primacy of U.S. hegemony. Washington called the shots, and often did so, they argue, for parochial domestic reasons, involving electoral maneuverings or bureaucratic intrigue. Standing in the long shadow of the La Pietra debate on transnationalizing U.S. history, Bessner and Logevall fret that we have lost sight of what really mattered: the preponderance of U.S. power.³² If that debate two decades ago sparked Marilyn Young to ask, "where can the historian stand in order to lever the history of the United States off its assumed centrality?," they read Young as arguing that the weight of U.S. power means that no matter where scholars stand, their levers cannot move much.³³ After 1945, the United States was "a global hegemon whose state exerted unprecedented influence on international affairs," and we should write like it.

The call to deeply investigate and understand the sources and nature of U.S. power is one I fundamentally support; it has motivated not only my scholarship but all of my professional and political work. But in their push to recenter U.S. state actors and domestic decision-making processes, Bessner and Logevall reproduce a vision in which the United States emerges in 1945 as a fully formed hegemonic power, already confident of the strategies and tools it will use to rule the world. From that point forward, the United States had the economic might, the military supremacy, and the cultural authority to impose a top-down vision on the world, its multilateral liberalism serving as a mere fig leaf for the projection of its raw power. This has long been the conventional view, shared by not only in the historiography of the United States and its foreign relations but by much of the social science theory that builds from it, in international relations, international political economy, and even some World-Systems analyses. It is a presumption, however, that actually tells us little about how the United States came to develop those tools, how it exercised its power, and how it learned, iteratively and over time, from the results of those exercises. In other words, it is a view that understands hegemony as a kind of given steady-state achievement of consensus, rather than a process of construction and continuous, uneasy maintenance. If we instead want to uncover and understand that process, I would propose a different analytic question: not how can historians re-center the United States, but instead, how did the United States come to *center itself*?

As a scholar of international political economy, I approach these issues through a particular lens: the history of development as a project of U.S. foreign relations. How did United States come to understand that international development, managed through multilateral institutions, would be a useful tool in the U.S. projection of power? Most conventional histories locate the birth of development squarely at the dawn of the Cold War, with Truman's 1949 announcement of his Point IV technical assistance programs. In constructing this argument, scholars for decades used precisely the sources that Bessner and Logevall call for us to return to: the archives of nitty-gritty policy decisions, of partisan political wrangling, of the pronouncements of powerful men pacing the halls of power in Washington. In writing the history of the Bretton Woods conference, for example, where U.S. Treasury officials oversaw the creation of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, historians read such sources to argue that development was of little concern. In the context of "Sterling-Dollar diplomacy"—high-level negotiations between the Great Britain as the declining hegemon and the U.S. as the rising one—scholars argued that "the delegates at Bretton Woods gave little thought to the Fund's potential impact on the less-

³² Contributions to the scholarly debate can be found in Thomas Bender, ed., *Rethinking American History in a Global Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002). For the report of the LaPietra conferences, see "The LaPietra Report: A Report to the Profession," online at <https://www.oah.org/insights/archive/the-lapietra-report-a-report-to-the-profession/>.

³³ Marilyn B. Young, "The Age of Global Power," in *Rethinking American History in a Global Age*, 275.

developed countries.”³⁴ That the conference itself involved 44 countries, nearly half of which were from Latin America, was inconsequential: representatives of countries like Brazil and Mexico were there to “sign in the place for the signature,” as one British Treasury official put it at the time.³⁵

Such a perspective did little to help scholars understand, for example, where the mandate for development came from: why did the United States choose to marshal its newfound economic power through multilateral institutions, like the new International Bank of Reconstruction and Development? Most scholars simply dismissed the institution as an unimportant afterthought, until Eric Helleiner took a broader international view in his groundbreaking *Forgotten Foundations of Bretton Woods*. By reading the archives of U.S. power for encounters with countries assumed to be subordinate and inconsequential, Helleiner in fact found a long history of engagement between U.S. officials and their Latin American counterparts, in particular. Looking beyond the parameters of the traditional great-power historiography, Helleiner was able to demonstrate that U.S. officials were much more concerned with development issues than the previous literature had understood—and that Latin American officials had, in important ways, driven the agenda for development through their repeated and forceful demands. U.S. policymakers, Helleiner found, “had a Latin American audience clearly in mind” when they set out to frame the institutions that would govern the global economy after the war.³⁶ By refusing precisely the “causal hierarchies” that had long marked the literature and to which Bessner and Logevall champion a return, Helleiner produced an innovative new history of the origins of development that helped us understand issues long overlooked by those who simply assumed a top-down notion of U.S. hegemony. My own forthcoming book builds on Helleiner’s analysis to uncover a long history of Mexican organizing for representation in international organizations and redistribution through multilateral institutions, and it traces how those demands shaped the strategies of U.S. policymakers.³⁷ By reading Mexican sources alongside the archives of power in the United States and Great Britain, the book argues that the international development apparatus took the shape it did through an iterative, ongoing process through which the United States rejected, deflected, or coopted the demands made by Latin American actors.

While my own work demonstrates the influence of a country like Mexico on the ways that the United States approached its foreign economic policy, other important new work on the history of U.S.–Latin American economic engagement has additionally demonstrated how transnational encounters have deeply shaped the U.S. state policy processes long understood as purely domestic. Tore Olsson’s recovery of the influence of Mexican agrarian ideas on New Deal rural policymaking, for example, or Amy Offner’s examination of the influence of development programs undertaken in Colombia on the domestic War on Poverty are striking examples of the necessity of transnational scholarship for understanding not only how the United States approached economic policy abroad, but how those approaches changed U.S. policymaking at home.³⁸ This work, of course, builds upon on a formidable literature on the cultural and social history of empire, showing how U.S.

³⁴ Richard Gardner, *Sterling-Dollar Diplomacy: The Origins and the Prospects of Our International Economic Order* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1969), xxi.

³⁵ Christy Thornton, “Voice and Vote for the Weaker Nations: Mexico’s Bretton Woods,” in *Global Perspectives on the Bretton Woods Conference and the Post-War World Order*, G. Scott-Smith and J.S. Rofe eds. (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017), 150.

³⁶ Eric Helleiner, *Forgotten Foundations of Bretton Woods: International Development and the Making of the Postwar Order* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014), 26.

³⁷ Christy Thornton, *Revolution in Development: Mexico and the Governance of the Global Economy* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2020).

³⁸ Tore C. Olsson, *Agrarian Crossings: Reformers and the Remaking of the US and Mexican Countryside* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017); Amy C. Offner, *Sorting Out the Mixed Economy: The Rise and Fall of Welfare and Developmental States in the Americas* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019).

engagement abroad has long shaped domestic approaches to everything from health and education to prisons and policing.³⁹ Drawing from Aimé Césaire’s “boomerang effect of colonization,” this work questions the very dichotomy of foreign/domestic to which Bessner and Logevall want us to return.⁴⁰

In reinforcing such a dichotomy and theorizing “causal hierarchies,” Bessner and Logevall harken back to James Rosenau’s theory of the primacy of the “domestic sources of foreign policy,” first advanced in the 1960s.⁴¹ They thereby conjure a world in which the United States acts, and the rest of the world can merely react. Expressing a skepticism toward the scholarly recovery of heroic but ultimately futile resistance from below—a pursuit perhaps acceptable for area studies scholars, but not for the study of U.S. power—they seem to imply that such resistance is the *only* kind of action available to actors outside the United States. In their theory of international affairs, they consign what happens outside the corridors of power in Washington to the realm of the “effects and limits of American foreign policy,” but argue that focusing on subordinate actors tells us little about “sources and nature of U.S. power.” They therefore conjure domestic *subjects*, which are both empirically sealed off and analytically separable from the foreign *objects* of U.S. policy. In such a world, subordinate actors may have been able to avoid or fight off the imposition of U.S. prerogative in their local context, but even having done so does not—indeed, cannot—alter the practices of U.S. power itself. This is certainly how many of the actors they study might have understood and narrated their own actions; the archival record is rife with what John and Richard Toye called the “arrogant attitudes toward and casual dismissal of the developing countries’ views.”⁴² As Marilyn Young warned elsewhere in the essay that Bessner and Logevall cite, however, hewing too closely to actors’ categories can produce “a rendering of U.S. history that reproduces U.S. ideology.”⁴³ As she warned us, this is a fine line to walk.

Ultimately, a perspective that is attentive to the transnational and multidirectional influences on U.S. policy-making is one that understands hegemony not as a fact, an achieved steady state, but rather as a process characterized by “contention, struggle, and argument,” as William Roseberry argued.⁴⁴ Antonio Gramsci famously insisted that understanding hegemony required not simply understanding the actions of the dominant classes, but also uncovering the actions of the subaltern classes, “their active or passive affiliation to the dominant political formations, their attempts to influence the programmes of these formations in order to press claims of their own, and the consequences of these attempts in determining processes of decomposition, renovation, or neo-formation.”⁴⁵ Using such a perspective to understand global economic governance, as my work does, requires a conception of the U.S. rise to power as structured by what the sociologists Julian Go and George Lawson call the dynamics of “interactive multiplicity,” in which the mechanisms for the projection of U.S. power were

³⁹ See, for example, Gilbert M. Joseph, Catherine Legrand, and Ricardo Salvatore, eds., *Close Encounters of Empire: Writing the Cultural History of U.S.–Latin American Relations* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998); Stuart Schrader, *Badges without Borders: How Global Counterinsurgency Transformed American Policing* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019).

⁴⁰ Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. Joan Pinkham (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000 [1950]), 41.

⁴¹ James N. Rosenau, ed., *Domestic Sources of Foreign Policy* (New York: Free Press, 1967).

⁴² John Toye and Richard Toye, *The UN and Global Political Economy Trade, Finance, and Development* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 13.

⁴³ Young, “The Age of Global Power,” 275.

⁴⁴ William Roseberry, “Hegemony and the Language of Contention,” in Gilbert M. Joseph and Daniel Nugent, eds., *Everyday Forms of State Formation: Revolution and the Negotiation of Rule in Modern Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), 360.

⁴⁵ Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, ed. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 52.

“formed and reformed through interactions with actors assumed to be external to or subordinate to them.”⁴⁶ Paying close attention to these processes requires, then, using the concept of hegemony as Roseberry implored: “not to understand consent but to understand struggle.”⁴⁷ It remains crucial that scholars concerned with investigating the role of the United States in the world uncover this struggle—precisely in order to uncover its complicated, contradictory, and often surprising consequences for the ways the United States centered itself in the postwar world order.

⁴⁶ Julian Go and George Lawson, “For a Global Historical Sociology,” in Go and Lawson, eds., *Global Historical Sociology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 23-28.

⁴⁷ Roseberry, “Hegemony and the Language of Contention,” 360.

RESPONSE BY DANIEL BESSNER, UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON, AND FREDRIK LOGEVALL,
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First, big thanks to Daniel Immerwahr for organizing this roundtable and also to Adom Getachew, Edward Miller, Michael Cotey Morgan, and Christy Thornton for their thoughtful and probing responses to our piece. We have learned a great deal from these scholars, and we're pleased to have the opportunity to reflect on their criticisms.

Let us begin by reiterating what we do *not* argue in our piece. First, we don't assert that domestic history should be the only history that scholars of U.S. foreign relations examine. Quite the contrary. Ours is a call for plurality, in which domestic and international history occupy relatively equal positions in the field. Second, we don't claim that the United States has always achieved what it wanted in the world. Anyone familiar with our individual writings knows we hold no such view. Rather, we maintain that the nation, due to its overwhelming power, has *shaped* the course of global history after 1945 more than other states, groups, and movements have done. This holds whether or not the United States reached its goals. Finally, we don't suggest that domestic processes *always* influenced events more than international and transnational phenomena, merely that they *often* did.

It's heartening to see that most of the reviewers welcome our desire, as Thornton puts it, to "investigate and understand the sources and nature of U.S. power." Nonetheless, we also think that some of the responses mischaracterize and misunderstand the piece and our intentions.

Most importantly, we do not argue, to again borrow Thornton's apt phrasing, that "the United States emerge[d] in 1945 as a fully formed hegemonic power." What we do maintain is that the United States emerged from World War II as the world's preponderant power—it controlled a mammoth military machine, was the globe's financial and industrial center, enjoyed enormous prestige and goodwill, and effectively dominated recently-created international organizations.

But this does not imply that we believe, as Thornton suggests, that in 1945 the United States was "already confident of the strategies and tools it [would] use to rule the world" or that throughout the Cold War U.S. hegemony was in a "steady-state." The practices of American hegemony transformed over time, moving in new and unanticipated directions.

However, the admittedly dynamic nature of U.S. power does not indicate that American hegemony itself was ever truly in question. Though Getachew is surely correct to emphasize that we must problematize American power and "atten[d] to the multiple modalities, rationalities and structures through which it was made," we must simultaneously never overlook the fact that this power remained remarkably stable over time and exerted concrete, and sometimes deadly, effects on the world. No matter how much one problematizes a bomb, it will still kill you.

Thornton is also right to declare that accepting the reality of U.S. hegemony doesn't tell us much "about how the United States came to develop ... [the] tools [of empire], how it exercised its power, and how it learned, iteratively and over time, from the results of those exercises." She suggests that we could best explore these issues by examining U.S. interactions with other world powers in the international sphere. This is sometimes true, but not always. For example, can we best examine the development of the national security state, the military-industrial complex, or the military-intellectual complex—organizations and networks that are crucial to promoting and enacting U.S. hegemony—through an international lens? Can we best analyze why President Lyndon B. Johnson escalated in Vietnam by focusing on the U.S. relationship with other nations? Our assertion in our essay is that, no, to answer these and many other questions historians must center the domestic and immerse themselves in American archival sources, American newspapers, and American oral histories. At the same time, we appreciate that research in international archives can illuminate U.S. decision-making. In the case of Johnson and Vietnam, for instance, foreign archives reveal that allied governments felt certain that in 1964 Johnson viewed all Vietnam options through the lens of his legislative agenda and the upcoming election.

By no means do we maintain that historians should *always* center domestic phenomena. Thornton is undoubtedly correct when she argues, as she does in her forthcoming monograph, “that the international development apparatus took the shape it did through an iterative, ongoing process through which the United States rejected, deflected, or coopted the demands made by Latin American actors.” We don’t claim, and don’t believe, that these sorts of interactions are immaterial; rather, we argue that the centrality of international and transnational phenomena should not be presumed. The best scholarship—like Thornton’s—doesn’t assume their importance, but demonstrates it.

Thornton further finds fault with our article for, she says, presenting foreign actors as “objects” and U.S. actors as “subjects.” For us, this is primarily an empirical matter. There’s a reason that, to borrow a quotation Thornton deploys, John and Richard Toye noted that American archives are filled with “arrogant attitudes toward and casual dismissal of the developing countries’ views”: it’s because U.S. policymakers viewed “Third World” nations primarily in relation to their own concerns—i.e., as objects. We don’t quite see how appreciating this fact “reproduces U.S. ideology” (to borrow the Marilyn Young quotation that Thornton cites) so much as confronts it.

Several of the respondents criticize our supposed reification of the foreign/domestic dichotomy, asserting that recent scholarship demonstrates that this dualistic framing is a construction that doesn’t reflect the complexities of historical “reality.” Well, yes, but the same can be said for all categories of analysis—not only foreign and domestic, but international and transnational as well—each of which necessarily introduces its own conceptual and interpretive narrowness. No historical phenomenon is ever solely “foreign,” “domestic,” “international,” or “transnational.” As scholars, we decide which of these constructed categories we privilege and why we are doing the privileging.

Simply put, it’s not more “accurate,” in either an ontological or epistemological sense, to privilege international and transnational approaches over other interpretive frameworks. Whether or not one deploys these should depend, as Morgan suggests in his response, on the research questions one is trying to answer and the historiographical goal one hopes to achieve.

As Morgan writes, “international history and the domestic history of U.S. foreign relations need each other.” We couldn’t agree more. As we aver in our article, in coming years historians should attempt “to incorporate the insights of a reinvigorated domestic history of American foreign relations with those produced by international and transnational historians. This will enable the writing of scholarly works that encompass a diversity of spatial geographies and provide a fuller account of the making, implementation, effects, and limits of U.S. foreign policy.”

Getachew, for her part, raises an important question when she asks why “the rise of the transnational appears to coincide with the fall of the Soviet Union and the emergence of the United States as the world’s sole global hegemon.” We gesture toward an answer in our essay, but allow us to offer a fuller response here.

Recently, a number of scholars, including Immerwahr, have suggested that a defining feature of the U.S. empire is that it’s “hidden”: from the nation’s founding until the present day, U.S. citizens have repeatedly chosen not to see the genocide, bloodshed, and oppression upon which their nation’s power rests.⁴⁸

From one perspective, the international and transnational turns were the latest instantiations of such “unseeing.” By turning their gaze away from the United States (and especially the U.S. state) at the moment of its imperial ascendancy, scholars who emphasized the causal agency of foreign and nonstate actors *implicitly* absolved the nation of responsibility for the world it created and now dominated. Ironically, then, some historians reinforced the American exceptionalism at which the

⁴⁸ Daniel Immerwahr, *How to Hide an Empire: A History of the Greater United States* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019).

international and transnational turns supposedly took aim, by portraying the United States as the only hegemon in world history that did not direct international affairs—an empire of innocence.

This is not to say that scholars ignored the sometimes-dreadful consequences of U.S. foreign policy on peoples abroad; many, in fact, highlighted these. Still, the general trend to decenter the United States and its state at the zenith of the nation's power had the perverse effect of downplaying the latter at the very moment it was most apparent and should have been most questioned.

Getachew further asks us to explore the “historical condition and context” to which our call to recenter the United States is directed. This is a crucial query that we must answer as individuals. Bessner's interest in exploring the domestic origins of U.S. global supremacy emerged from his coming of age in the 1990s and 2000s, when U.S. foreign policy elites considered themselves to belong to the “indispensable nation” upon which global peace and prosperity relied. This perspective, which he believes was steeped in a chauvinistic and peculiarly *American* reading of international history, compelled the United States to retain its imperial position after the Soviet Union's collapse and helped engender the disastrous interventions in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya. As such, he is interested in analyzing, first, the sources of this *Weltanschauung* (which he maintains can be found primarily, if not solely, in domestic histories), and, second, the development of the domestic institutions and networks that enabled the United States to become and remain the world's prime military and economic power. Bessner thus maintains that recentering the United States will produce the “critical histories of our present” for which Getachew advocates.

Logevall has long been interested in the foreign-domestic nexus in U.S. diplomacy, or what he and Campbell Craig in their book *America's Cold War* refer to as the “intermestic.”⁴⁹ His main current research project is a two-volume “life and times” biography of John F. Kennedy, in which he seeks to contextualize Kennedy's life by situating it within the extraordinary rise of the United States to great-power- and then superpower-status. Kennedy was born mere weeks after U.S. entry in World War I; he died in late 1963, when the nation was arguably at the apex of its international sway. Explicating the domestic and international forces that brought about this unprecedented global ascendancy is a core objective of the project. Both of us are also struck by the decline in recent years of faculty in leading American history departments who list U.S. foreign policy as a main area of specialization, and the (not coincidental) decrease in the number of Ph.D. applicants seeking to do research in the field.

Ultimately, the stories historians choose to tell reflect their own unique desires, concerns, and interests. Nevertheless, as Getachew implies, one must always consider the functions one's scholarship serves in the present moment. Though postmodern critics were correct to assert that historians can never produce a “master narrative” that reflects history *wie es eigentlich gewesen*, it is also true that historical narratives have real effects on the world (as the discord over the *New York Times*' “1619 Project” indicates). In this moment, when the U.S. role in the world is a topic of intense public discussion, it's crucial that historians offer a synthetic narrative that articulates the failures, successes, tragedies, and ironies of post-World War II American foreign policy.

International and transnational approaches, which often illuminate the effects U.S. foreign policy has had abroad (whether harmful or benign), are critical to this project. In fact, we repeatedly underline their historiographical importance in our article, and are therefore mystified by Miller's claim that we “do not clearly explain what the fate of international and transnational history might be under [our] ‘re-centered’ paradigm.” Our argument is simply that international and transnational approaches should be complemented by a renewed emphasis on the domestic.

At the end of his piece, Miller writes that our article promotes an approach “in which non-American people, places, cultures, and societies remain in the outer reaches of [our] imagined U.S.-centric solar system.” Such phrasing suggests that Miller has

⁴⁹ Campbell Craig and Fredrik Logevall, *America's Cold War: The Politics of Insecurity* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009).

mistakenly taken our desire to recenter the United States as an indication of our disinterest in foreign peoples' lives. Nothing could be further from the truth. One of us is himself foreign-born and raised, for starters. Furthermore, we both have explored non-American actors in our own work—Bessner's first book was a biography of an exile from National Socialism, and Logevall from the start of his career has sought to place the history of U.S. foreign relations in its wider international and domestic political context.⁵⁰ Simply put, our view of the past, present, and future of U.S. foreign relations is profoundly informed by scholarship that has demonstrated its deep impact on other countries.

Contrary to Miller's claim, we do not argue that the link between power and causality can "be explained merely by tallying up the relative military, administrative, or economic clout of individual actors and seeing who has the biggest overall total." Nor would we deny that U.S. power is "mediated by local politics, institutions, and social practices," or that international and transnational approaches are vitally important in understanding "the deployment and effects of U.S. power in foreign contexts."

Miller emphasizes that non-U.S. actors had (and have) agency in international affairs. Of course they did (and do). Would any subscriber to H-Diplo disagree? Our point is that in the era of U.S. hegemony this agency was (and is) radically circumscribed. Put another way, scholars of American foreign relations must never allow the trees of local agency to force our gaze away from the forest of U.S. primacy—a primacy that structured world, and often local, politics. This is why we believe, as Miller puts it, that "any inquiry into post-1945 U.S. foreign relations ought to begin and end with the United States and its 'overweening power.'" This power need not be—should not be, must not be—the focus of all works of scholarship, but it seems to us that keeping it in mind is crucial to understanding the nature and limits of the local agency whose importance Miller underlines.

Miller's emphasis on local agency and his discussion of the role North Vietnam played in the war's escalation in the mid-1960s point to important bones of contention among scholars, and reasonable people can arrive at different conclusions about these issues. We disagree with his assessments, as our article makes clear.

Miller makes much of Hanoi's late-1963 decision in favor of a "rapid expansion of the conflict," but no "rapid expansion" occurred in the months thereafter. He speaks of a "major escalation" of the war by Communist leaders in the spring of 1964, but provides no support for this curious claim. And certainly, the tens of thousands of pages of official documentation available on the U.S. side don't support his suggestion that Washington upped its involvement in 1964-1965 in response to major escalatory moves by Hanoi. On the contrary, U.S. officials believed through the spring of 1965 that Hanoi hoped to *avoid* a large-scale war. (We've seen no compelling evidence that they were wrong in this assessment.) Lyndon Johnson and his aides "Americanized" the war in March-April 1965 because they determined that the Saigon government was on the verge of defeat at the hands of the southern insurgency—an insurgency they believed was supported and probably directed by Hanoi, but nevertheless an insurgency. It would have been news to them that North Vietnam had initiated a dramatically stepped-up war to which they needed to retaliate.

Miller dismisses our skepticism that the Second Indochina War was a civil war. That's his prerogative, of course, and we recognize that judgments here depend partially on what one believes constitutes *civil war*. Still, we're confident that most students of the war would agree with our twin claims: first, that there were deep divisions among and between Vietnamese; and second, that, "absent first French and then American military intervention, [it's unlikely] there would have been a decades-long, large-scale, and, especially, globalized, Vietnam War at all."⁵¹

⁵⁰ Daniel Bessner, *Democracy in Exile: Hans Speier and the Rise of the Defense Intellectual* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018); Fredrik Logevall, *Choosing War: The Lost Chance for Peace and the Escalation of War in Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

⁵¹ The analysis of the war by Daniel Ellsberg, who witnessed it up close for many years, is considerably more complex than Miller allows. See Daniel Ellsberg, *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers* (New York: Viking, 2002); idem, *Papers on the*

A final point. In our opinion, it's inaccurate to declare, as Thornton does, that the "conventional view" in the field of international relations (IR) about post-World War II global history is that the United States used "multilateralism ... as a mere fig-leaf for the projection of its raw power." As the recent debates about the historicity of the so-called "liberal international order" indicate, numerous IR scholars insist that U.S. liberalism was a real and deeply felt component of the postwar world order.

In writing this piece we hoped to generate discussion and spark a useful debate about the important and varied work being done in the field commonly known as "U.S. in the World." It would appear we've succeeded. We're grateful to Daniel Immerwahr for taking the initiative to organize this roundtable and to each of the essayists for their contributions. We look forward to continuing the conversation in the future.

War (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1972). Meanwhile, Logevall's *Embers of War*, *pace* Miller, does not depict Hồ Chí Minh as a faultless paragon, or as the only Vietnamese leader after 1945 with nationalist legitimacy. He says of Ngô Đình Diệm that he was an "intelligent and courageous patriot" whose nationalist credentials were "almost as sterling as [Hồ's] own" (xviii-xix; see also 588-92, 656-57).