I want to thank Geir Lundestad, Jeremi Suri, and John Harper for their warm praise, incisive criticisms, and provocative questions. They raise many important issues, not all of which I will be able to comment on here. I will also address some of the points made by Elizabeth Spalding, although I think she has misconstrued and misunderstood many aspects of my book.

Let me begin by stressing that the book is not intended as a narrative history of the Cold War. As the reviewers note, I take several “moments” in the Cold War (1945-48, 1953-54, 1962-65, 1975-80, 1985-90), in order to grapple with its fundamental dynamics. I am essentially interested in three questions: Why did the Cold War begin? Why did it continue for more than four decades? Why did it come to an end? By selecting the five periods, I create a structure, as my commentators correctly note, that prevents me from addressing some important episodes of the Cold War. I suggest, however, that other scholars will see many of the same dynamics at work when they address other periods during the Cold War. What I lose in breadth, I think I gain in depth.

I took the first four periods because I became intellectually engaged with the proliferating evidence that officials in Moscow and Washington often wanted to avoid a Cold War, modulate it, or disengage from it. But not until the late 1980s did policymakers succeed in achieving this goal, or impulse. Why was this the case? What drove the Cold War dynamic? What enabled Reagan and Gorbachev to reverse it and escape from it?
In order to examine these episodes in the Cold War and to interrogate the evidence, I kept in mind several theoretical constructs and historical interpretations. I considered interpretations that highlight the role of power in the international system; those that focus on the influence of ideology; those that dwell on the role of interest groups, public opinion, and political culture; those that underscore the role of allies and clients; and those that stress the influence of particular leaders, of human agency. My aim, however, was not “to apply” these concepts; these very divergent theories, interpretations, and concepts were simply in the back of my mind as I studied the evidence and pondered the dynamics and complexities of each period. Would they help me grasp what was happening? Did they shed insights that would help me grapple with the evidence?

Ultimately, my interpretation integrates these factors, giving greatest stress to the intersection between ideology and the evolution of the configuration of power in the international system. But I weave in other factors, as the evidence suggested, and sometimes those other factors were very important, indeed. I suspect that scholars with very different approaches will read my book and claim that it supports one “theory” or interpretation, or another. Actually, my reading of the evidence suggests complexity, the interrelationship of factors, and the importance of integrating divergent approaches.

I do conclude, as Geir Lundestad points out, that “The Cold War emerged and persisted for four decades because leaders were trapped by their ideas and ideals and beleaguered by the dangers and opportunities that lurked in the international system.” But Lundestad then says that this conclusion is not new; “it is pretty much what all of us who have written about the Cold War have argued.” Well, if “all of us” have been saying the same thing, it would be hard to grasp why there have been such heated controversies about the origins and evolution of the Cold War. Obviously, different scholars have argued very different things. Odd Arne Westad stresses the role of ideology, as do many recent accounts. Marc Trachtenberg focuses on the configuration of power. In his first book on the Cold War, John Gaddis put a heavy stress on the role of political institutions, and in more recent books he has underscored the role of Stalin and other leaders, or ideology. My book is not a rejoinder to any of these accounts. My intention is to examine the sources in view of these many compelling interpretations. I show that the evidence can be understood best if we see the intersection of these variables, but I do not shy away from judging their relative explanatory power.

Lundestad claims that my analysis is abstract when I conclude (452) that “The Cold War lasted as long as it did because of the way in which American and Soviet ideas intersected with evolving conditions in the international system.” Yet most of the preceding hundreds of pages illuminate what this sentence means. In terms of the international system, I stress the importance of postwar social ferment and economic dislocation (and its recurrence in different shapes and forms in the 1970s and 1980s); the configuration of power stemming from Germany’s and Japan’s defeat; and the salience of decolonization and revolutionary nationalism. As Lundestad says, Germany is a key to understanding the origins of the Cold War; but I stress throughout my book, that although Germany remained central to what happened (where my analysis often shares much with scholars like Trachtenberg), the Cold War dynamic was shaped hugely by the decolonization process and the perceptions of fear.
and opportunity that it engendered (so that parts of my book share a lot with Westad). As I see it, my analysis of the international system is far from abstract, but, of course, some scholars will see other factors in the international system, and this should contribute to more scholarly dialogue between theorists and historians.

Both Lundestad and Jeremi Suri suggest that my discussion of ideology and memory is vague. Yet throughout the book, I examine the beliefs of the key leaders, and I also show how memory shaped those beliefs. Suri raises an important point when he says that I do not consider how Cold War events themselves, like the Korean and Vietnam Wars, shaped attitudes. I think he is right to suggest that such matters must be considered, and perhaps I don’t incorporate these sufficiently. I do give much greater weight to the impact of World War II, German aggression, and the Great Depression because I think the evidence points in that direction. In fact, one of the key themes of the book is how the experiences of war and the specter of German power affected every Soviet leader from Stalin to Gorbachev. But my account is not about “flawed belief systems,” as Spalding suggests. My point is not that beliefs were flawed, but that beliefs sometimes led to flawed perceptions. I try to show how this was the case for both Soviet and American leaders. And, yes, these beliefs and memories sometimes generated passion, fear, paranoia, and exhilaration. These beliefs sometimes led to murderous actions and to utopian adventurism. I am fond of the quotation by Norman Cousins, who after talking for hours with Khrushchev, noted: “a man comes to life in his paradoxes.” (Soul of Mankind, 173-74)

Leaders are fascinating to study. Like all of us, they possess contradictory impulses, competing fears, and conflicting hopes. They usually want peace and security, and they define these goals in their own ways. But leaders are not alike, and I try to illuminate their differences. Nobody reading my first chapter should come away thinking that I approach my book with “moral equivalence.” I describe in the first sections of the first chapter of my book—not in my conclusion—all the brutality and fear that Stalin inspired, but I also depict what the German occupation meant for the people of the Soviet Union and for Stalin himself. I also try to explain, as any historian must, why millions and millions of people after World War II were attracted to communism and to state planning, notwithstanding Stalin’s barbarity and the brutality of his system. The historian must also account for the fact that Stalin’s successors, like Khrushchev, while dedicated communists and while “soaked in the blood of their victims” (174), were also inspired by hopes of improving the lot of their people. They sincerely believed in their superior ideals. My task, as John Harper writes, was “not to moralize, but to reveal their motives and explain their actions in their own terms.”

Lundestad raises a profoundly good point when he queries whether I prove the case for human agency. In fact, he incisively highlights the tension in my book about the role of human agency. On the one hand, he points out that I stress that leaders “had choices to make,” that there were lost opportunities, that the Cold War was not predetermined. On the other hand, I also stress that “opportunities are lost when leaders who wield great power are engulfed by circumstance and entrapped by ideology and memory.” He argues, and I suspect that many students of the Cold War would agree, that the conflict “was an over-predetermined phenomenon.”
What I do in my book is wrestle with the role of human agency in relation to the more structural and ideological interpretations. I show how key leaders grappled with conflicting options; how they were torn in different directions. Neither their beliefs, nor their system of governance, nor the configuration of power dictated particular outcomes. In Moscow and Washington, there were people who believed that their nations’ self-interest would be furthered by ongoing cooperation of some sort; and, in fact, Truman and Stalin (as did their successors) pondered the advantages and disadvantages of preserving some forms of collaboration, of avoiding or modulating a Cold War. Leaders did make choices, sometimes agonizing, anguished choices. And the choices they made had significant repercussions, sometimes cutting off possibilities for a relaxation of tensions; possibilities, of course, that would always be renewed at a subsequent time with indeterminate outcomes. Hubert Humphrey, I show, would have made critically different choices than LBJ had he been president rather than vice president in 1965. And the Cold War probably would not have ended as it did if Carter had been re-elected in 1980 or if Andropov had lived, or if Yegor Ligachev, not Gorbachev, had assumed leadership in Moscow.

My point, however, is not to over-emphasize the role of human agency, but to explore the role of leaders in the context of the larger constellation of geopolitical, social, economic, ideological, and political crosscurrents. In this respect, Harper makes the important observation that I wait until the conclusion of the book to highlight some of “the contextual factors that conditioned their policy choices,” for example, the structural decline of the Soviet economy and the role of the communications revolution. Perhaps I should have given more attention to some of these factors in the individual chapters, but I consciously made the choice to focus on them in the conclusion because leaders did not necessarily see the salience of these factors quite as clearly as we can see their importance in retrospect. For example, although all of us now stress the structural weaknesses of the Soviet economy, and although these weaknesses were becoming more apparent in the 1970s, I chose to emphasize them at the end of the book because during the 1970s the inadequacies of the Soviet economy did not stand out quite so starkly in comparison to the problems that were then afflicting the U.S. economy (and most Western economies). Brezhnev, I show, grasped the looming problems and recognized the failure of his system to meet the demands of his people, but he could nonetheless still convey great hopes about the future of communism because he saw that Western economies were staggering under the weight of inflation and unemployment. “Could capitalism survive,” was the headline on the cover of Time in 1975, not Pravda. I made a conscious choice, therefore, to address some of these more fundamental developments in the conclusion.

But I think both Harper and Suri offer constructive criticism when they both say in their different ways that I do not pay enough attention to protest movements and grassroots political developments. Suri notes that if I had chosen 1956 or 1968, my portrait of events might have been different. Although I do wish I had taken more time in the book to illuminate and flesh out the changes in political culture that were occurring, I do not think the basic analysis of the book would be different. After all, I do focus on 1953 (when there was an uprising in East Germany) and allude to key developments during 1983 (when the
anti-nuclear movement reached its zenith). I pondered how such movements and opinion affected decision-making. My conceptual approach did not prevent me from seeing the significance of these matters, but my conclusion (no doubt, arguable) was that in most instances—not all—these movements and political trends were not of decisive importance in explaining what happened. Nonetheless, they were important parts of a mix of factors. In 1953, the uprising in East Germany certainly affected decision-making in Moscow, and in 1989 developments inside Eastern Europe and East Germany certainly affected decision-making in Washington and Moscow. But in 1965, LBJ bombed North Vietnam when there were scant pressures on him to do so; Carter tried tenaciously to stay on track toward détente (or his view of it) regardless of the political groundswell against him; Reagan deployed his Pershing IIs and cruise missiles despite the huge demonstrations. In other words, throughout my book I wrestled with the relative influence of these movements compared to and in relation to the importance of beliefs, perceptions, allied pressures, and changes in the configuration of power. I do wish I had spent more time on these matters because in indirect ways, as Suri suggests, they helped shape the beliefs of the policymakers themselves and narrowed their options. But I am not sure that my overall conclusions would be very different.

A good example of this relates to the mid-1970s. Harper and Suri focus on the absence of an examination of the policies of Nixon and Kissinger. I chose not to focus on Nixon and Kissinger because I was primarily interested in the erosion of détente, and not its origins. They rightly stress that détente was already suffering when Carter came to office, that neocons, Republican conservatives, and Cold War Democrats like Senator Henry Jackson had pummeled Nixon and Kissinger and had forced Ford to abjure from even using the word, "détente". But détente was still far from dead. I think I persuasively show that Brezhnev and Carter both wanted to sustain some form of détente after 1976. Both leaders, for example, resisted pressures to break off the SALT talks. Carter, of course, made some foolish moves, as I portray them, but he defied public opinion on many key foreign policy issues and refused to act just to redress his plummeting popularity. In other words, I do think Brezhnev killed the U.S.-Soviet détente by his wrenching decision to invade Afghanistan in December 1979; although détente was already badly ailing, as Suri and Harper quite correctly emphasize (and which I do not deny in my book), it disappeared from Soviet-American relations only after Soviet troops headed toward Kabul.

Suri and Harper are, of course, right that I do not explain all decisions with the same degree of thoroughness. My account of the Cuban missile crisis is highlighted in chapter three, but abbreviated, and in chapter four I note the Soviet arms build-up but do not dwell on it (except insofar as it shaped U.S. reactions). What I do say about these matters, however, is that Soviet leaders believed many of the same things about bargaining as did U.S. leaders, that is, that they had to negotiate from strength. They felt they were squeezed when they had been weak. Both sides’ belief in strength, of course, nurtured the security dilemma that helped sustain the Cold War.

Therefore, I argue that what was distinctive about Ronald Reagan was his belief that strength, in fact, should be used to negotiate. I write, “He believed in strength. Strength tempered the adversary’s ambitions and tamped down its expectations. But the purpose of
strength was to negotiate.” (464) Spalding, therefore, misrepresents my analysis when she says that I do not consider the role of strength. I did consider it very carefully, but present evidence (debatable, of course) that U.S. military capabilities were not the determining factor shaping Gorbachev’s policies. Nonetheless, I realize that U.S. actions in Afghanistan and elsewhere established part of the overall context in which Gorbachev operated, although I do not think they were the prime motive for his initiatives. In fact, rather than ignoring, as Spalding says I do, the impact of U.S. actions in Afghanistan, I conclude the section on Afghanistan in my book with a conversation between Gorbachev and the Afghan Communist leader Muhammad Najibullah. Americans “were and will remain Americans,” said Gorbachev. Their intention was to weaken the Soviet Union. They hoped, said Gorbachev, to “attain much else [by] exploiting our difficulties.” (414)

As for Gorbachev’s motives, I try to describe these throughout chapter five of my book. Again, Spalding errs when she says that I recast “Gorbachev’s agenda as driven by the supreme goal of ending the Cold War.” She says that Gorbachev’s supreme goal was to revitalize communism at home so that it would also succeed abroad.” Paradoxically, while she misrepresents my view, our conclusions do not differ all that much (except insofar as we probably have very different notions of what Gorbachev meant by revitalizing Communism and succeeding abroad). Be that as it may, readers should know that the following is what I write in my book: “He did not want to retract Soviet power, but he believed the first priority was to refashion communism at home so that it could have a demonstrative appeal elsewhere.” (460) My point throughout is that Gorbachev’s foreign policies were derivative of his domestic concerns, and his approach to domestic matters evolved greatly during his years in office. Moreover, far from being influenced “by the pluralist model of Soviet comparative studies,” as Spalding claims I am, I again say exactly the opposite: “Gorbachev’s achievement was a uniquely personal one, although he was not alone . . . . He was general secretary of a party with a monopoly of power; traditions of deference were ingrained. When he made his fateful decisions . . . . he rarely asked the Politburo for advice or consulted with the Defense Council. . . . In a functioning democracy, Gorbachev might not have been able to make these changes; in fact, he could do so in Soviet Russia only so long as he functioned as general secretary of the party representing the dictatorship of the proletariat.” (461-62)

My portrait of Gorbachev is indeed flattering because I see a man evolving in constructive ways and making wrenching decisions. He saw that the system he inherited and admired was deeply flawed, and he wanted to make it better. What that meant was unclear. I stress that, although he contributed mightily to ending the Cold War, he failed miserably to achieve his domestic goals. But does that mean, as John Harper asks me in his final queries, that the United States won the Cold War? And what have been the consequences of assuming this had been the case?

What I say at the end of my book was that the Cold War was won “by the system that could respond most effectively to people’s wish for a decent living, a peaceful environment, and an opportunity for free expression, religious piety, and individual advancement.” After World War II, I write, “it had been far from certain that democratic capitalism would have the capacity to avoid another depression, sustain the peace, and satisfy the yearnings of...
Asians and Africans for autonomy and self-determination. The Cold War tested the capacity of two alternative systems of governance and political economy to deal with the challenges of a postcolonial and post industrial age.” (465)

What seems certain to me is that Soviet-style communism lost the Cold War; democratic capitalism and social democracy won the Cold War. And U.S. successes were mightily assisted by West European initiatives and triumphs in remodeling their own economies, societies, and political institutions, topics that I pay too little attention to in my book because they fell somewhat beyond its scope. And U.S. successes were also influenced significantly by developments in China in the late 1970s and 1980s. Decisions in Beijing not only complicated strategic and military policy in the Kremlin, but also signaled to the rest of the Third War that the Soviet-command model was a failure and needed to be replaced with something better; what it would be was unclear, and perhaps still is unclear.

In short, then, the battle over systems of governance is certain to continue as long as large parts of humankind are denied the things that matter most to them, including human security, food, shelter, health care, educational opportunity, and the rights to express themselves freely and practice their religion. The overriding lesson of the Cold War is that a system of governance that fails to meet the needs of its citizens and fails to adhere to its own principles and goals will eventually crumble. In that fundamental sense the Cold War was a struggle for “the soul of mankind” and that struggle is not likely to end any time soon.