

A Roundtable on Melvyn P. Leffler, *Safeguarding Democratic Capitalism: U.S. Foreign Policy and National Security, 1920-2015*

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and Melvyn P. Leffler*

Introduction to the Roundtable on Melvyn Leffler, *Safeguarding Democratic Capitalism: U.S. Foreign Policy and National Security, 1920-2015*

Kristin L. Ahlberg

The views expressed in this introduction are my own and not necessarily those of the U.S. Department of State and the United States Government

Some eighteen years after I read *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War*¹ as a graduate student at the University of Nebraska, I was delighted to read Melvyn Leffler's newest work, *Safeguarding Democratic Capitalism: U.S. Foreign Policy and National Security, 1920-2015*. In it, Leffler has selected, and Princeton University Press has published, five decades worth of his writing, ranging from journal articles to book chapters, accompanied by a thought-provoking introduction and individual chapter introductions. Four distinguished historians—experts on national security, gender and human rights; the Cold War and U.S. presidency, and international relations—have written reviews that laud Leffler's intellectual accomplishments, while also posing questions about Leffler's approaches and interpretative lenses.

Gretchen Heefner acknowledges that the volume functions both as an interpretation of twentieth century foreign policy and Leffler's personal intellectual history as he attempts to determine why U.S. policy makers act in the ways that they do. She sees much merit in the volume's construction, notably the introduction and explanatory essays accompanying each chapter, stressing that by including such material, Leffler has produced a useful "teaching text." By admitting his intellectual doubts and acknowledging the times he felt rejection and experienced criticism, Leffler, she asserts, serves as a model for how graduate students and young career professionals can manage and productively channel their disappointment. Returning to the theme of personal history, Heefner argues that the volume is important for what it says about the practice of history from the vantage point of an entire career. Leffler was not timid in advancing his thesis in earlier works and adopted new methods and approaches as his topics and subjects moved through the Cold War and post-Cold War era. Her main criticism of the volume stems from Leffler's failure to comment on alternative intellectual paths he might have taken or on the interpretative frameworks used by other historians.

Kelly Shannon asserts that the volume offers the reader the ability to understand both the "trajectory and importance" of Leffler's evolving scholarship. Leffler's use of the introductory and chapter essays also merit praise from Shannon, especially Leffler's candor in recalling setbacks and disappointments, which underscores the reality that even the luminaries in the field experienced challenges as younger scholars. In assessing the remaining chapters, Shannon notes Leffler's continued, careful use of newly-declassified archival materials before focusing her critique on Leffler's post-Cold War scholarship. Unlike Leffler, Shannon does not detect continuity between the foreign policies of Presidents George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton, as she sees the State Department's organizational changes during the Clinton administration as reflective of a greater prioritization of human rights, the environment, and global women's issues, in a way in which they weren't during the previous administration. At the conclusion of her review, she poses a thoughtful question related to the ability of an individual historian to change the field over time: is change based on a historian's willingness to modify her or his approach throughout a career, or does the field expand and grow because younger historians employ new methodologies and sources?

Leffler's drive to understand the sources of American power, Chester Pach suggests, has characterized his career and his "quest for complexity" both in analyzing U.S. foreign policy and developing empathy for foreign policy makers. Pach, in chronicling Leffler's Cold War writings, reveals that Leffler influenced him as a scholar at the precise time that Pach was revising his dissertation for publication, which echoes a theme Leffler develops in the introduction. Like Heefner and Shannon, Pach accounts for Leffler's intellectual trajectory, stating that Leffler's later writings emphasized human agency, structure, and contingency in terms of how they shaped foreign policy. Here, Pach seems to express his reservations concerning national security as an interpretative framework. Similar to Shannon, he ends his review by pondering what this selection of Leffler's scholarship says about the field, concluding that it illustrates the interplay between past and present and demonstrates the inherent value in analyzing and testing analytical frameworks and refining them when appropriate.

Although Campbell Craig describes the introduction as "lively," he raises important questions about the volume's purpose. Craig, noting the absence of "intellectual fireworks," writes that he had hoped that Leffler would have engaged more with his critics within the volume's pages. In addition, while Craig underscores the importance of the

essays and articles comprising each chapter, noting that they demonstrate how historians are influenced by “events, theories, and even simple vocational circumstances,” he remains somewhat skeptical of printing these writings verbatim from the original versions. Craig’s greatest reservation, however, relates to Leffler’s conceptualization of “realism” and “revisionism.”

Leffler, in his response, engages thoughtfully with his reviewers. He writes that his overarching goal in producing the volume was explaining “how and why” he gravitated to a national security framework and acknowledges that the reviewers grasped this and similar themes. He also respectfully addresses their criticisms. In terms of Heefner’s and Shannon’s statements that he failed, at times, to incorporate “religion, identity, and culture” in his scholarship, Leffler makes a fair claim that he chooses to focus on “why policy makers acted as they did.” While noting Pach’s reservations concerning the national security framework, Leffler argues that the “ambiguity” embodied by the term is its “strength,” as national security is a fluid and dynamic concept. He acknowledges Craig’s disappointment over the absence of “intellectual fireworks,” but Leffler explains that the volume was not meant to rehash old arguments. Instead, he intended it to be reflective of his own intellectual and historiographical journey and the choices and challenges embedded in it. Lastly, he addresses Craig’s unease concerning the terms “revisionism” and “realism,” by reiterating that his approach combined strands of both thus erasing the “artificial binary” between them.

By way of conclusion, several reviewers referenced Leffler’s acknowledgement that he had developed a heightened sense of empathy while serving as a dean at the University of Virginia during the late 1990s. As a result, Leffler was more inclined to be empathetic towards the policy makers he chronicled as they often struggled with agonizing choices. In the introductory essay, Leffler stresses that this also reinforced his belief that “there is no substitute for the written record,” thus underscoring the importance of declassification of official documents to enable other scholars to produce their own sophisticated histories of U.S. decision-making. (26)

Note:

1. Melvyn P. Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992).

Melvyn P. Leffler’s Core Historical Values

Chester J. Pach

For more than four decades, Mel Leffler has been one of the very best historians of U.S. involvement in international affairs, but his career could easily have followed a different trajectory. He applied to law school and to graduate programs in international affairs, but chose to enter the Ph.D. program in history at The Ohio State University for a very practical reason: the offer of admission came with funding. Leffler’s main interest as an undergraduate had been labor history, but David Brody, Ohio State’s specialist in that field, was on leave and then departed for the University of California, Davis. Leffler recalls feeling “adrift” (2), but he found new direction by taking courses from Marvin Zahniser and David Green and reading William Appleman Williams’s *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*.

The growing horrors of the Vietnam War also pushed Leffler toward his new field of study. Leffler began his graduate education in 1966, participated in a few antiwar demonstrations, and searched for answers about how a war he found so appalling could endure longer than he ever

thought possible. Green, as much an activist as a scholar, asked students to give him their draft cards so he could burn them during a campus demonstration. Leffler was “unprepared for Green’s bold assault on my conscience” (3), but he was ready to commit himself to the study of U.S. foreign relations in hopes of understanding the sources of American power. The rest, as they say, is history.

Safeguarding Democratic Capitalism is as much an account of the evolution of Leffler’s career as it is a study of U.S. national security policy during the past century. The book consists of eleven articles that were published between 1972 and 2016. Many helped to define the contours of specific fields or shape the debates about subjects as diverse as Republican foreign policy in the 1920s, the end of the Cold War, and the 9/11 attacks. At least one, “The American Conception of National Security and the Beginnings of the Cold War, 1945–1948” (originally published in 1984 in the *American Historical Review*), is a classic work, familiar to every serious historian who subsequently addressed the Cold War’s origins.

What is new in this volume are Leffler’s reflections on these articles. In an introduction and in brief remarks that precede each essay, Leffler presents these individual works as landmarks in his “intellectual journey” (x) from aspiring graduate student to esteemed senior scholar, from disciple of Williams to leading exponent of the national security framework for understanding U.S. foreign relations. Together they reveal Leffler’s inductive quest for complexity in the analysis of international relations and for empathy in understanding the decisions of U.S. officials.

Leffler’s earliest scholarly publications examined U.S.-European relations during the 1920s. His research on war debts, reparations, and trade and their connections to security issues contributed to a sweeping reinterpretation of U.S. involvement in European affairs in the decade after the First World War. Along with Joan Hoff Wilson, Michael J. Hogan, and Frank Costigliola, Leffler challenged the prevailing view that the United States turned its back on Europe after the Senate rejected the Treaty of Versailles. “I found that isolationism was a myth,” he explains (5). Leffler also concluded that the formulators of U.S. foreign policy, such as President Warren G. Harding, Secretary of State Charles Evans Hughes, and Secretary of the Treasury Andrew Mellon, considered fostering economic stability in Europe important to prosperity at home.

The first three chapters in *Safeguarding Democratic Capitalism* reveal how Leffler challenged the open door thesis that the search for foreign markets dominated U.S. foreign policy. In an article on Republican war debt policy, 1921–1923, Leffler tests Williams’s thesis and finds that many members of cabinet departments, Congress, and the business community were more concerned about low taxes or domestic investment opportunities than overseas markets. Policy emerged from “uneasy compromises between hostile branches of government, which themselves were wracked by a multitude of conflicting pressures and irreconcilable goals” (29–30).

In the second article in the collection, Leffler portrays Herbert Hoover as a pivotal figure whose progressive faith in scientific management and disinterested solutions to complex political problems shaped Republican approaches to international economic and security issues during both the Harding and Coolidge administrations, in which Hoover served as secretary of commerce, and his own term as president. Hoover valued overseas markets, but not enough to make commitments to French or European security that he considered unnecessary or unwise.

This study of Hoover, along with an article entitled “Political Isolationism, Economic Expansionism, or Diplomatic Realism,” led to further criticism of Williams for dwelling on the importance of U.S. economic expansionism while discounting political isolationism and overlooking

American economic nationalism. In these early articles, Leffler grounded his conclusions in extensive archival research and expressed them in the thick description and uninspiring prose of political economy.

After publishing *The Elusive Quest: America's Pursuit of European Stability and French Security, 1919–1933* (1979), Leffler shifted his attention to the origins of the Cold War. A series of articles during the 1980s provided the foundation for his next book, *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration and the Cold War* (1992). Leffler calls “The American Conception of National Security and the Beginnings of the Cold War, 1945–1948” (chapter 4) the “most important article of my career” (15). Drawing on extensive research in military records, he argues in this article that an expansive conception of postwar U.S. security requirements—including a worldwide system of bases, strategic dominance in the Western Hemisphere, and a Eurasian balance of power—arose not from hostile Soviet actions but the putative lessons of World War II.

Leffler’s article was an important influence on my own career, since I was then a young historian who had recently completed a dissertation but not yet finished revising it for publication as *Arming the Free World: The Origins of the United States Military Assistance Program, 1945–1950* (1991). It reinforced my conclusions that the most immediate and important goal of U.S. military aid programs was demonstrating American resolve and reliability, not countering communist challenges. In *Preponderance of Power*, Leffler tempered the boldness of his earlier article, famously arguing that U.S. policymakers were not so much foolish or wise as prudent. Two other articles of lesser magnitude—one about Turkey and U.S. security, the other about the Yalta agreements and their role in widening Cold War divisions—are also included in *Safeguarding Democratic Capitalism* (chapters 5 and 6).

The Cold War ended as Leffler completed his study of its origins, and he shifted his focus, as he explained, to “why its winners prevailed” (21). One of the first results of this new direction was “Victory, the ‘State,’ the ‘West,’ and the Cold War” (chapter 7), an article in which Leffler contested the triumphalism of the 1990s by arguing that victory in the Cold War did not arise from the superiority of free markets over command economies but from the use of state power to ensure that democratic capitalism provided both personal and national security. The idea that the Cold War was a contest between different political economies or, more accurately, two ways of life culminated in Leffler’s superb book, *For the Soul of Mankind: The United States, the Soviet Union, and the Cold War* (2007).

In that book Leffler assesses the importance of individuals, especially Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev, in ending the Cold War. The emphasis in Leffler’s scholarship was shifting once more. “Much of my intellectual energy had been spent writing and thinking about structures, interests, and processes,” he explains. “Now, I was enticed to think more systematically about human agency and contingency” (21). A four-year stint as dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Virginia deepened Leffler’s experience with policymaking. Expecting that historical training would enhance his administrative skills, Leffler found instead that service as a dean made him a better historian. “I learned empathy,” (22) he declares.

The result of that experience was a series of textured studies that probed how structure *and* contingency shaped recent U.S. foreign policy. “Dreams of Freedom, Temptations of Power” (chapter 8) probes the ways that culture, values, and memory affected decisions to use U.S. military power between the fall of the Berlin Wall and the attacks of September 11, 2001. In “9/11 and American Foreign Policy” (chapter 9), Leffler maintains that continuities—including maintaining military superiority and protecting democratic capitalism—rather than changes characterized President George W. Bush’s National Security Strategy Statement of 2002. Even Bush’s willingness to sanction preemptive or preventative military action had precedents in earlier eras.

What was new was how heightened threat perceptions affected calculations of national interest and the willingness to use military power. “Outcomes were contingent; human agents were critical” (22). Leffler may be right that U.S. foreign policy after 9/11 was no revolutionary departure from the past. Still, there seems to be a vast difference between contemplating preemptive or preventative war, as Truman, Eisenhower, and Kennedy did, and taking disastrous action, as Bush did by attacking Iraq.

In the last chapter of the book, Leffler gathers his thinking about national security into an interpretive framework for studying U.S. foreign policy. This version, like a predecessor published twenty-five years earlier, provides a vague definition—that national security is “the defense of core values from external threats” (317)—and offers useful, if obvious, advice: historians should think carefully about threats, interests, and priorities.

In contrast, Leffler’s essay on “Austerity and U.S. Strategy: Lessons of the Past” (chapter 10) may be the hidden gem of this book. To academic historians, it is probably the least known article in *Safeguarding Democratic Capitalism*, as it was a lecture to the Aspen Strategy Group later published in a volume of papers from the Aspen Institute. The essay lacks notes and any explicit discussion of relevant scholarly literature. But it begins with a riveting analysis of how the depression and suicide of James Forrestal, the first secretary of defense, occurred during disputes over military roles, missions, and budgets in the late 1940s, when President Truman set stringent limits on defense spending.

Leffler uses Forrestal’s tribulations to make the provocative argument that austerity more often than abundance encourages creative thinking in national security policy. Probably because the essay was written to be spoken rather than read, the prose is highly engaging. The essay also makes Forrestal a fully human, if tragic, figure, whose wrenching experiences illustrate the difficulties of policy choices. The essay constitutes a telling example of the enormous dividends of what Leffler calls “embracing complexity” in historical analysis.

What do these essays, written over more than forty years, reveal about Leffler’s intellectual journey and, more broadly, the evolution of the field of U.S. international history? First, they illustrate the continuing dialogue between past and present. Leffler decided to study U.S. foreign relations because of his concern about the Vietnam War. The emergence in the mid-1970s of an influential group of neoconservatives who warned that Soviet strategic capabilities posed a clear and present danger to U.S. security encouraged him to examine the origins of the Cold War. Western triumphalism in the 1990s led him

to study why the Cold War ended, and the 9/11 attacks prompted him to analyze change and continuity in U.S. national security policy during the war on terror. Leffler's use of history to understand the contemporary world shows how much the present influences the past we study, the issues we address, the conclusions we find instructive or relevant. Like Leffler, we continue to search, in Henry Steele Commager's felicitous phrase, for a usable past.

Second, Leffler's career shows the value of testing and refining interpretive frameworks for understanding the sources and uses of American power. The open door thesis inspired Leffler's early research, yet he understood its limits once he conducted archival research to explain how Hoover and his Republican colleagues made decisions about reparations, war debts, currency stabilization, and trade in the 1920s. Yet Leffler resisted choosing between alternative approaches to explaining the history of U.S. foreign relations. Decades of mining archives and refining arguments persuaded him that "revisionism and realism were not alternative interpretive frames but complementary" (25) (Some readers will nonetheless continue to think the differences are far more striking than the commonalities). Leffler's embrace of the national security framework arose from a desire to forge a new synthesis from existing interpretive lenses, one that included the three levels of analysis on which international relations scholars rely: the individual, the state, and the international system. The national security paradigm is one of many such frameworks—some of them recent innovations—for the study of U.S. international history.

Finally, while methodological innovation has been essential, some traditional values endure. For Leffler, they are "seeking truth, questing for objectivity" (27). These may be elusive, even impossible goals, but, for Leffler, they have produced a body of scholarship that has deservedly brought accolades and acclaim. We should all be so lucky as to experience an intellectual journey with such rich rewards.

"It's Complicated":

A Review of Melvyn P. Leffler, *Safeguarding Democratic Capitalism: U.S. Foreign Policy and National Security, 1920–2015*

Gretchen Heefner

In a recent opinion piece in *USA Today*, Melvyn P. Leffler weighed in on some of today's most pressing issues. Leffler wrote not about North Korea or Iran, as one might expect from a renowned diplomatic historian, but about taxes. The current administration's plan to cut corporate taxes, Leffler declared, is "crazy." The U.S. government needs more money, not less; programs need to be funded, not starved. "We Americans," Leffler concluded, "need to get a grip on reality."¹

There is actually a link between Leffler's take on taxation and his scholarship on U.S. foreign policy. In fact, the opinion piece would be a fitting final chapter for Leffler's newest book, *Safeguarding Capitalist Democracy*. This volume is a compilation of eleven essays, all previously published, that span his distinguished career. It is really two books in one: it is a sweeping interpretation of twentieth-century American foreign policy, and an intimate reminiscence about the nature and purpose of historical inquiry.

I should note that nowhere in this volume does Leffler actually mention corporate taxes. But his recent opinion article on the subject is indicative of the complexity and sophistication of his approach to the foreign policy, core values, and national security of the United States. Taxes matter because they are an important component of domestic stability, and, as Leffler writes, the "credibility

of the system at home . . . is as important as credibility of commitments abroad" (27). Moreover, the opinion piece emphasizes Leffler's increasing interest in advocacy and in using the tools of history to weigh in on the issues of today.

While the individual essays in *Safeguarding Capitalist Democracy* are worth revisiting on their own merits, the volume is most interesting and fresh when read in one broad sweep. Of particular note are the brief, retrospective explanations at the beginning of each essay (or chapter) and of Leffler's new introduction (titled, appropriately, "Embracing Complexity"). These recent additions transform what could have been merely a string of scholarly essays into a vivid and compelling intellectual journey.

The volume is also a carefully curated teaching text. Leffler frequently signals lessons he has learned and dispenses advice. The introductory essay and chapter openings are filled with morsels of wisdom: how to deal with academic disappointment; the travails of publishing in academic journals; the importance of mining new archival materials; the utility of real-world experience in developing empathy; how to chart a middle road through scholarly disagreements—the list goes on.

Indeed, the real contribution of this volume is what it shows us about the *practice* of history: how and why a historian's perceptions, customs, and interpretations have evolved over a long career. Leffler's trajectory reminds us that history is an iterative and collaborative process, a plodding work of discovery and interpretation that can lead to unexpected results. This review will therefore focus on what is new in the book—the lessons and ideas about history that emerge when *Safeguarding Capitalist Democracy* is read as the sum of its parts.

The volume can be broken roughly into three sections that track Leffler's professional development and intellectual interests. The first three essays (chapters 1–3) represent Leffler's earliest writings on interwar foreign policy. All three are models for graduate students on how to frame an argument, enter into contemporaneous historical conversations, and mobilize evidence to answer a particular question. In each essay Leffler's strategy is similar: he tests prevailing views and charts his own course—usually down the middle.

For example, when Leffler was in graduate school the open door thesis was popular. Leffler was attracted to its interpretive power, but wary of its ubiquity. Chapter 1, "The Origins of Republican Debt Policy, 1921–1923" (originally published in 1972), uses a specific case study—war debt repayment—to test the open door idea. While economics were important, Leffler finds, domestic considerations were even more so when shaping congressional legislation over war debts.

Similarly, in chapter 3, "Political Isolationism, Economic Expansionism, or Diplomatic Realism: American Policy toward Western Europe, 1921–1933," Leffler examines what popular theories of the interwar period (listed in the essay's title) best characterized U.S. policy toward Western Europe in the 1920s. His conclusion: it's complicated. No theory quite captures how pragmatic and opportunistic Republican officials could be.

This intellectual ecumenicalism and quest for nuance only deepens as Leffler moves from concerns with interwar foreign policy to debates about the origins of the Cold War. The three essays of section two (chapters 4–6), all written in the mid-1980s, deal with how and why United States policy shifted so dramatically after World War Two. Here Leffler shows himself a more assertive scholar. Rather than dipping his toe gently into scholarly discussions, he dives into arguments about the origins of the Cold War. Like anyone involved in this particular debate, he took his knocks. His work was alternately labeled revisionist and realist; he was criticized by each side in turn. At points, Leffler admits, the criticism "stung." But it also made his

work stronger. Here, too, is another important lesson about the nature of historical inquiry: good criticism is vital. It sharpens arguments, forces another look at evidence, and demands that we imagine alternate outcomes.

Chapter 6, "Adherence to Agreements," is a pivot point. Although it is also about the Cold War, it is the first time in the volume that Leffler engages directly with questions of contemporary relevance. The reader can see Leffler grapple with broader issues about the impact of history on foreign policy, the power of misplaced ideas, and the importance of constantly reinterpreting what we think we know.

When he wrote this article in 1986, Leffler's immediate concern was how officials in the Reagan administration were using allegations of Soviet noncompliance with arms limitation agreements to scuttle existing treaties and commitments. He sees a precedent for such actions: in the years just after World War II, he argues, everyone was violating international agreements. In the 1940s, the Americans were particularly adept at using Soviet noncompliance as a smokescreen for their own unilateralism. Leffler used "Adherence to Agreements" to warn Reagan-era policymakers about the temptation of a "self-righteous hypocrisy" that endangers compromise and distracts from real national security concerns.

Leffler is even more explicitly prescriptive in chapter 10, "Austerity and U.S. Strategy" (published in 2014). Through four case studies he demonstrates that contrary to expectations, austerity can be quite good for U.S. interests around the world. It leads to creativity and realistic options. It imposes discipline on policymakers who might otherwise be prone to expansive planning. From a practical point of view, it focuses attention on economic health rather than military supremacy, and it cautions against military adventurism. What are the "appropriate lessons to be learned?" Leffler asks at the end of "Austerity." The big one is that the real source of American national security is economic vitality at home, not military power or reach abroad.

Indeed, the final five essays of *Safeguarding Capitalist Democracy*, including "Austerity," all focus on the post-Cold War world and follow the lead of "Adherence to Agreements." If, as Leffler writes, "the mystic chords of memory" run "deep and long" (280), then figuring out how they function, where they lead people astray, and how to correct misinformation, are important. The end of the Cold War seemed to have crystallized Leffler's thinking about the importance of memory and the role of historians in assessing U.S. foreign policy.

Chapter 7, "Victory," is a cautionary tale about how the standard myth of who "won" the Cold War has dangerous implications. The myth lauds free-market capitalism while ignoring—or purposefully erasing—the state. The reality, Leffler argues, is more complicated: the West "won" because its governments created successful democratic capitalist societies. The partnership between state and citizenry was vital to victory, not secondary. More damning, Leffler writes, the erasure of the state has led to hubris and misaligned priorities. As he urges in the introduction, "officials must recognize that full employment, income fairness, educational opportunity, health insurance, and security in old age are the prerequisites for a satisfied citizenry" (27).

It is not much of a leap to imagine where corporate tax cuts fit into this equation. If national security is truly about protecting core values, then those core values must be supported and fostered. As Leffler recounts, this is something that policymakers in the 1920s grappled with when they contemplated World War I debt repayment. When policymakers are unable to maintain a credible system at home, foreign policy becomes meaningless. To that end, Leffler writes that instead of cutting corporate taxes, "[w]e need to spur economic growth by cutting the burden on

workers and middle class Americans, boosting the burden on the wealthy, and stimulating overall demand."

Given that this book is in part an intellectual autobiography, I am disappointed that in revisiting older writings and in crafting his own introduction, Leffler did not take more time to comment on the paths not taken, or the paths since taken by others. In not doing so, he missed a chance to engage with a wider audience of scholars interested in U.S. relations with the rest of the world outside the high politics of Washington, D.C. Chapter 11, "National Security," nods to this potential. Leffler writes that the articulation of core values depends on domestic realities and constituents. As a result, attention to things such as religion, ideology, and culture are important. Indeed, if, as Leffler asserts, individual judgment matters (and from his discussion of George W. Bush in chapter 9, it seems it does) then how individuals arrive at decisions matters as much as the international milieu in which they operate.

I would have liked Leffler to extend the intellectual journey forward a bit and to imagine where and how new scholarship might push his ideas even further. This is not merely a criticism about a few footnotes. It gets to the heart of Leffler's larger query about how historians can, in fact, make their lessons of the past relevant to policymakers and people today. If core values are about preserving the "American way of life," then demonstrating how that way of life is influenced and altered by the operation of U.S. foreign policy might be a way to more firmly engage with an audience outside the ivory tower.

This is, of course, really a quibble with where one could take this material, not with what is here. The volume amply demonstrates how Leffler has always sought more complete and satisfying means of answering the central question of his career: why do U.S. policymakers act the way they do? In the end, his conclusions are about as satisfying as all historically honest ones: it's complicated. Historians have to be comfortable with ambiguity, finding more questions than certainties. But for Leffler this ambiguity does not mean futility. On the contrary, the ultimate point of this volume is that history—or more precisely, the work that historians do—matters: something all the more apparent when it is erased and ignored by the people making decisions. "It is worth remembering the past when contemplating the future," he cautioned back in 1986, when officials seemed unwilling to accurately assess the past. Based on his recent opinion piece about taxes, it is safe to assume Leffler believes this even more today.

Note:

1. Melvyn P. Leffler, "Corporate Tax Cuts Are a Crazy Idea. We Need More Money, Not Less." *USA Today*, 9 October 2017, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2017/10/09/corporate-tax-cuts-crazy-idea-we-need-more-money-not-less-melvyn-leffler-column/729213001/>.

**Review of Melvyn P. Leffler,
*Safeguarding Democratic Capitalism: U.S. Foreign
Policy and National Security, 1920–2015***

Kelly J. Shannon

It is a rare treat to read a book like Melvyn Leffler's *Safeguarding Democratic Capitalism*. The volume not only provides the insights of one of the most preeminent diplomatic historians on some of the most pressing questions in the field, but it also provides a retrospective of Leffler's long and distinguished career. The book therefore should be read on two levels. Regardless of whether readers accept all of Leffler's claims, he is a giant in U.S. foreign relations history, and the field owes much to his exemplary

body of scholarship. *Safeguarding Democratic Capitalism* makes Leffler's significance obvious and offers an exciting window into the evolution of his thinking that we should all find instructive.

This book is neither a monograph nor a comprehensive overview of the history of U.S. foreign policy. Rather, it is a collection of Leffler's wide-ranging journal articles and book chapters published since the early 1970s on various aspects of American policymaking from the 1920s through the post-9/11 period. Although the chapters are organized by the chronology of their subjects, they also appear in roughly chronological order according to original publication date, simultaneously moving the reader through the history of American foreign policy and the history of Leffler himself. The author helpfully provides new introductions to each chapter that explain what he was thinking about at the time he wrote each piece. Many readers no doubt will have read some or all of these essays before, but reading them together allows one truly to grasp the trajectory and importance of Leffler's scholarship as it has evolved over the past several decades.

The most interesting and valuable part of the book may be its introduction. Leffler provides a thoughtful meditation on how and why he came to study U.S. foreign relations history and how the Vietnam War influenced his worldview as a young man. The introduction then walks the reader through Leffler's long and illustrious career, explaining his thought processes and delineating his scholarly influences at each stage. As he explains, he came to see revisionism and realism as complementary and therefore sought to combine both interpretive frameworks in his work. The result, as we know, was some of the most influential and groundbreaking scholarship in the field.

The volume's introduction also details rejected articles and critical reader reports over the years. These passages should provide hope to junior scholars; they prove that even great historians sometimes faced rejection. How Leffler responded to criticism provides a model for others to follow. He recounts how he used these moments as opportunities to learn and improve. "If you have something good, you should stick with it and not get dissuaded by a sequence of rejections," he advises; even "biting critiques" of his work "exerted a tremendous impact on my subsequent research" (11–12, 17). It is unusual that a historian has a chance to provide such an account of his or her own intellectual development. This introduction is therefore invaluable for its glimpse into Leffler's mind. It also does the necessary work of tying the rest of the volume together.

Because of its nature, the volume understandably has no central argument, but some common themes emerge across the chapters that illustrate Leffler's broader analysis of American foreign policy: the importance of having prudent policymakers; the centrality of economic interests in U.S. decision making; and the salience of the concept of national security for both policymakers and historians. While Leffler's interpretations evolved, as did his topical focus and methodology, his appreciation for wise decision making remained consistent. The chapters in this volume make this worldview readily apparent and also show Leffler's relentless pursuit of answers to difficult questions about U.S. policymaking, like why the United States pursued contradictory policies toward Europe during the interwar period, why and how the Cold War began, and what lessons policymakers should learn from the Cold War.

The first three chapters, all published in the 1970s, investigate U.S. policy toward Europe between 1920 and

1933. Collectively, they reveal how Republican policymakers like Herbert Hoover were not isolationist, overly concerned with promoting the Open Door, or ignorant of the true reality of international affairs, as earlier historians had claimed. Instead, according to Leffler, these policymakers were pragmatists who sought "to promote European stability and American self-interest. Their dilemma was to accomplish this foreign policy goal without sacrificing domestic economic and political objectives and without involving the United States in European political and territorial controversies that were considered unrelated to vital American interests" (80).

Today, it is common wisdom that U.S. isolationism after World War I is a myth, but that was not the case at the time Leffler wrote these articles. These chapters demonstrate how Leffler's well-researched and persuasively argued scholarship made a crucial contribution to advancing a

Today, it is common wisdom that U.S. isolationism after World War I is a myth, but that was not the case at the time Leffler wrote these articles. These chapters demonstrate how Leffler's well-researched and persuasively argued scholarship made a crucial contribution to advancing a nuanced understanding of just how engaged Americans were in European affairs during the interwar period.

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Leffler's arguments in these early chapters are well supported but cautiously advanced; the reader can trace his increasing confidence as his claims become bolder over the course of the volume. Its middle section, chapters 4 through 6, examines the early Cold War and moves the reader into 1980s Leffler. These chapters investigate why U.S.

policymakers were so concerned with the Soviet Union after World War II; why they focused attention on Turkey during the early Cold War; and how and why they deployed accusations that the Soviets violated wartime accords such as the Yalta agreements.

Chapter 4 in particular manifests Leffler's burgeoning interest in the concept of national security, a concept that would become a hallmark of his scholarship. Drawing on what were at the time newly declassified U.S. military records, which were underutilized by historians of U.S. foreign relations, Leffler argued that the Truman administration did not believe that a Soviet attack was imminent. Instead, American policymakers feared losing Eurasia because of "economic and political conditions throughout Europe and Asia." Their clear-eyed appraisals of the "prospects of famine, disease, anarchy, and revolution" in the aftermath of the war led them to conclude that "communist parties could exploit the distress" in these nations (140). Thus, based on their careful weighing of the national interest, American policymakers identified key economic and strategic goals—ranging from creating a system of overseas U.S. bases to rebuilding the Western European economy—that would prevent Eurasia from turning to communism. Chapters 5 and 6 advance similar appraisals that U.S. policies during the early Cold War were carefully considered.

The final section of the book contains Leffler's publications since 9/11 and centers on the post-Cold War period. Chapters 7 through 10 examine why the West won the Cold War and the role of the state in that victory; the influence of the fall of the Berlin Wall on the foreign policy approaches of George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush; the continuities between George W. Bush's foreign policy and earlier U.S. policies; and the impact of military budget cuts on U.S. strategy. The volume then ends, appropriately, with the most recent version of Leffler's iconic essay "National Security" from *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations*.¹

These later chapters may be the least familiar to readers, and they contain perhaps the most provocative arguments in the volume. This section is also less archivally grounded

and more impressionistic than his earlier work, which is understandable given the relative paucity of declassified documents from this era. Most of these chapters are characteristically strong, but they did leave me with questions.

Chapter 9, which centers on the Bush administration's September 2002 National Security Strategy Statement, is puzzling. The NSSS alarmed many with its calls for preemptive war, but Leffler asserts that "none of this is really revolutionary. Preemptive military action is not new" (285). He contends that earlier events like Kennedy's blockade of Cuba, Lyndon Johnson's invasion of the Dominican Republic, and the Vietnam War were "preventative in nature," but he does not explain his reasoning to my satisfaction (289). How were these events preventative or preemptive? How were they akin to the NSSS and the resulting Iraq War? Leffler's assertion that "Bush's rhetoric and action have deep roots in the history of American foreign policy" would be more convincing if he had linked Bush's policies to a different type of precedent—U.S. imperialism, for instance, or presidents manufacturing reasons for war (283). Polk's 1846 claim that Mexico had "shed American blood on American soil" and the 1964 Gulf of Tonkin incident come to mind.²

Chapter 8 raises other challenging questions. Leffler argues that George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush's differing understandings of the legacy of the end of the Cold War deeply influenced their approach to foreign policymaking. In a nod to the cultural turn, Leffler seeks to examine "how the discourse of the events of 1989 and the dismantling of the Berlin Wall assumed distinctive meanings and shaped distinctive policies in the United States" (247). He concludes that the elder Bush's and Clinton's understandings of 1989 caused them to adopt prudent and cautious approaches, whereas George W. Bush characterized the end of the Cold War as the triumph of "freedom" to justify his reckless wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Adopting a realist perspective, the author sees the prudence of the 1990s as superior to W's lack of caution.

This chapter is more a study of presidential rhetoric than discourse, however, and Leffler does not exploit the scholarship that utilizes discourse analysis.³ While his assessments of both Bush administrations are persuasive, my own research leads to a different reading of Clinton. Leffler characterizes Clinton's foreign policies as basically the continuation of George H. W. Bush's. While there was undoubtedly some continuity, Leffler misses the distinction between Clinton's approach to foreign policy—including his definition of national security—and his predecessor's.

The Clinton administration attempted to reorient U.S. priorities toward common global concerns and transnational phenomena, ranging from environmental issues to population and development to human rights. That his first secretary of state, Warren Christopher, was a human rights advocate and his second, Madeleine Albright, was a feminist (and the first woman to hold the position) indicated that a policy shift was underway. As administration officials declared repeatedly during Clinton's two terms, they saw issues such as women's rights as very much in the U.S. national interest. Clinton also reorganized the State Department by creating new bureaus under the Office of Global Affairs that were dedicated to issues that did not fit into State's existing regional bureaus: Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor; Narcotics, Terrorism, and Crime; Population, Refugees, and Migration; and Oceans, Environment, and Science.⁴

A more comprehensive examination of the administration's policy statements and actions would reveal that the rapidly changing post-Cold War international system, as well as his own inclinations, caused Clinton to redefine national security in innovative ways that went beyond traditional economic and strategic concerns. Although Leffler recommends reexamining traditional assumptions about national security in the essay that concludes this volume, it seems to me that he does not do so sufficiently when writing about the early post-Cold War era and the transition from the first Bush administration to Clinton's.

These are minor flaws, however, in an excellent and important book. When reading the volume as a retrospective of Leffler's career, one can trace the development of his highly influential methodologies and interpretations, particularly his use of the concept of national security. Seeing Leffler's scholarly evolution laid out in one volume makes his commendable consistency over several decades apparent. This is a strength, but it also raises questions—

which I do not intend as a criticism of Leffler—about how much we individual historians change our interpretations, methodologies, and worldviews over time. Since the start of Leffler's career, the field of U.S. foreign relations history (and even the name of the field) has changed dramatically. The final chapter, "National Security," explains that change, and the difference between this version of the essay and Leffler's 1991 and 2004 versions underscores just how much Leffler himself has changed.

In his 1995 SHAFR presidential address, he criticized the cultural turn and described his skepticism about the utility of applying newer approaches, like gender or linguistic analysis, to diplomatic history.⁵ In the 2016 version of "National Security," Leffler makes room for these methods: "The national security approach . . . should be conceived as perfectly congruent with the new directions of scholarship that dwell on culture, identity, religion, and emotion . . . because they help to illuminate the construction, meaning, and implications of America's core values" (330–31). However, this remarkable expansion in his viewpoint is less explicit in the preceding chapters.

Leffler's approach has transformed a great deal over time, but this volume raises fundamental questions about how the field evolves. How much change in the field is driven by individual historians' evolving interpretations and approaches? How much is driven by new people entering the field and examining history in new ways? How much is driven by new evidence or the redefinition of what constitutes evidence? Leffler's collection of essays shows the soaring heights of an important scholar's career, but it should also prompt us to assess our own scholarly journeys.

Safeguarding Democratic Capitalism is invaluable. It is a delight to read and underscores why Leffler is a titan in the field. His calls for prudent decision making are perhaps more necessary now than ever before. While all historians—and, one can hope, policymakers too—can learn from this volume, it would work particularly well in a graduate seminar and for undergraduates in a diplomatic history or methods course. It offers many things at once: exemplary scholarship on U.S. policy since 1920; a model of how to employ methodologies like economic analysis and national security approaches; a rare behind-the-scenes understanding of a deservedly renowned historian's career; and a prompt for each of us to reflect on how we practice our craft. It is a special kind of book, and I wish more senior

scholars will have the opportunity to publish books like it.

Notes:

1. Melvyn P. Leffler, "National Security," in *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations*, 3rd ed., eds. Frank Costigliola and Michael J. Hogan (Cambridge, UK, 2016), 25–41. See also Michael J. Hogan and Thomas G. Paterson, *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, UK, 2004); and Michael J. Hogan and Thomas G. Paterson, *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations* (Cambridge, UK, 1991).
2. Starting in 2002, John Lewis Gaddis controversially advanced arguments similar to Leffler's about the Bush Doctrine. See John Lewis Gaddis, "A Grand Strategy of Transformation," *Foreign Policy* (November–December 2002); and John Lewis Gaddis, *Surprise, Security, and the American Experience* (Cambridge, MA, 2004).
3. For examples, see Frank Costigliola, "Reading for Meaning," in *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations*, 2nd ed., eds. Hogan and Paterson, 279–303; Frank Costigliola, "Unceasing Pressure for Penetration: Gender, Pathology, and Emotion in George Kennan's Formation of the Cold War," *Journal of American History* 83, no. 4 (March 1997): 1309–39; Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East Since 1945*, updated ed. (Berkeley, CA, 2005); Frank Ninkovich, "Interests and Discourse in Diplomatic History," *Diplomatic History* 13, no. 3 (April 1989): 135–61; Emily S. Rosenberg, "Commentary: The Cold War and the Discourse of National Security," *Diplomatic History* 17, no. 2 (April 1993): 277–84; and Emily S. Rosenberg, "Rescuing Women and Children," *Journal of American History* 89, no. 2 (2002): 456–65.
4. "History of the Department of State During the Clinton Presidency (1993–2001)," U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian, <http://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/ho/pubs/c6059.htm>; Karen Garner, *Gender & Foreign Policy in the Clinton Administration* (Boulder, CO, 2013); and Kelly J. Shannon, *U.S. Foreign Policy and Muslim Women's Human Rights* (Philadelphia, PA, 2017), 125–57.
5. Melvyn P. Leffler, "Presidential Address: New Approaches, Old Interpretations, and Prospective Reconfigurations," *Diplomatic History* 19, no. 2 (March 1995): 173–96.

Review of Melvyn Leffler, *Safeguarding Democratic Capitalism: U.S. Foreign Policy and National Security, 1920–2015*

Campbell Craig

It is a bit unclear what Melvyn Leffler, one of the giants of U.S. Cold War historiography over the past forty years, intends with the present volume. On one hand, it is a straightforward reprint of some of his most important articles and chapters since the 1970s, with a relatively brief introduction outlining his intellectual journey and no new conclusion at all. On the other, there are inklings of a larger aim: to use his previous work as a means of bringing together and illustrating his thinking about Cold War historiography and, in particular, the concept of national security in the history of U.S. foreign policy.

As a compendium of some of his key work the book serves an evident purpose: to provide students of U.S. foreign policy with a useful overview of his writing in one book. It begins with a lively introductory memoir, taking us from his undergraduate days during the Vietnam War (Leffler is refreshingly candid about his ambivalent politics then), through his Ph.D. work, his transition from historian of U.S. foreign policy during the interwar period to Cold War historian, and his critical work on American diplomacy after the Cold War.

I am sure that I am not the only reader who was hoping for a little more in the way of historiographical fireworks. Leffler mentions the critique of his pathbreaking 1984 article on the origins of the Cold War (reprinted in the volume) by established historians such as John Lewis Gaddis,¹ but he does not really delve into the debate; nor has he chosen

to reprint the essay in the first edition of *America and the World* (1995) in which he responds to Michael Hunt's and Bruce Cumings's critique of Cold War "post-revisionism."² Leffler's response to Cumings's attack on mainstream national security scholarship is one of the best and most forceful things he has written, in my opinion, and while he mentions this debate briefly in his introduction (I will return to the point he makes there presently) I was disappointed not to see it featured.

The rest of the book consists of reprints of articles and chapters Leffler has written since the 1970s. Included here are his early works on U.S. policy during the 1920s and '30s, the aforementioned article on the Cold War from the *American Historical Review* (when that journal still accepted pieces on foreign policy), and several pieces on U.S. foreign relations after the Cold War, a topic on which Leffler has been a critic of neoconservative ideology and the disastrous policies of the George W. Bush administration.

To those unfamiliar with Leffler's writing I can recommend all these chapters, in particular the *AHR* article and the 2004 piece on continuity in U.S. foreign policy after 9/11 (though I personally do not agree with the argument here). They provide an interesting "primary document" of Cold War historiography over the past decades; and they show how historians are inevitably affected by events, theories, and even simple vocational circumstances, not just new archival evidence, in their intellectual evolution.

Nevertheless, the purpose of reprinting the chapters verbatim is not clear to me. I would presume that, like me, many scholars interested in this book will already have read most or all of them, and in these days of instant computer access to almost everything it is not as though they would otherwise be unavailable. The chapters were not updated or revised, which is unimportant for the latter work but a bit strange for the early pieces. It is odd to read a footnote referring to "recent work" published more than thirty years ago (see, for example, footnotes 2–4, pp. 119–21). I believe I own all Leffler's books (including a very beat-up copy of *A Preponderance of Power*), and I am happy to have a copy of this one as well, but I would have liked to see more original material and argumentation in it.

As he discusses in the introductory chapter, Leffler has carved out a niche in U.S. Cold War historiography as a practitioner of the "national security approach" to the subject, which in IR parlance is roughly equivalent to realism. His take on U.S. foreign policy, particularly in *Preponderance of Power* but also in his broader, episodic Cold War history, *For the Soul of Mankind*, and his co-authored edited volumes with IR theorist Jeffrey Legro,³ is certainly more critical of American diplomacy than that of some other historians who focus on national security, but it all retains the realist assumption that policymakers in Washington were ultimately concerned with protecting the United States and its core values (i.e., "democratic capitalism") and that their errors stemmed from overreaction, foolishness, and poor judgment rather than ulterior motivations.

Nevertheless, Leffler argues that his relatively critical approach to U.S. national security policy represents, as he says on several occasions, a blend of "revisionism and realism." It is on this point that I find his larger conceptualization unclear. What does he mean by "revisionism"? That term is normally understood in U.S. diplomatic historiography as a Marxian⁴ interpretation that characterizes American actions abroad as expansionist and explains them in terms of the imperatives of U.S. capitalist interests. For revisionists, the stated pursuit of national security serves as a cover for, or at the very least is secondary to, what is really happening, which is the pursuit of markets, labor, resources, hegemony, and the destruction of resistance to capitalism.

But it is clear that for Leffler, it is not this kind of revisionism that complements his realism. As he states

in the book, recounting his conclusions in *Preponderance of Power*, U.S. officials were “not primarily seeking to promote democracy or penetrate foreign markets” (he reiterates this argument in other chapters here and elsewhere). Insofar as capitalism plays a role in U.S. foreign policy, it is a component of what the United States is trying to protect, a core feature of its way of life, not the driving factor behind it.

There is nothing in this position that cannot be classified as 100 percent realist. Realism readily incorporates the idea of protecting core national values, including economic systems. As long as the goal is *protection* of these values in a dangerous world, an aim in which the physical survival of the state is necessary but not sufficient, then realists are happy to sign on.⁵ If something other than national security, however broadly defined, plays a causal role, then one moves away from realism, but Leffler does not make that move.

If one of the goals of the pursuit of national security, the protection of democratic capitalism at home, is not an aim that any revisionist would see as fundamental, then what else about Leffler’s take is revisionist? As far as I can tell, what he might also mean when he labels himself a revisionist is that he offers general criticisms of some aspects of U.S. security policy, most notably its inconsistencies since World War Two and the ongoing fiascos since the end of the Cold War. Why, he asks, has there been no coherent and consistent American strategy of protecting democratic capitalism? And what explains American foreign policy during the last fifteen years or so, with its purposeless and incessant wars and its “ominous overassertion of American power”?

The revisionists would have their own ready answer to these questions, of course, but if one rejects their argument that capitalism is the underlying cause, then a larger explanation becomes trickier. One answer, and the one Leffler seems to prefer, is atheoretical: the inconsistencies and recent disasters of U.S. foreign policy stem from foolish decisions, hubris, good intentions gone awry, the excessive influence of aggressive ideologies such as neoconservatism, and other “unit-level” factors that have to do with actual people making bad choices.

There is nothing wrong with this kind of idiographic explanation as such, but it does further weaken Leffler’s claim that he is a revisionist. The problem with relying on unit-level explanation to solve puzzles like the one above is that it accepts, by definition, that better choices could have been made: people could have made wise rather than foolish decisions, officials could have resisted the temptation of hubris, less militaristic ideologies could have prevailed, and so the poor policymaking Leffler identifies could have been avoided. This is an inescapable problem: either they could have avoided these kinds of mistakes, in which case the policies Leffler criticizes would not have happened and there would be no reason for the other kind of revisionism at all; or they *could not* have avoided these kinds of mistakes, which means that there must be something about U.S. foreign policy, or American politics more generally, that makes officials prone to them.

Revisionists of the original kind can avoid contending with this second possibility by sticking to a Marxian determinist argument that in the end, capitalism is to blame, and the United States is only its agent. During their 1960s heyday many revisionists departed from that position and adopted an overtly anti-American stance, as Leffler himself relates in his account of his undergraduate days, but that was more about the Vietnam War and fashionable radicalism than the logic of Marxian revisionism.

Realists, however, cannot avoid contending with it. States are not supposed to pursue policies that damage their own security. If they do, realists must identify something that explains the adoption of those policies

without undermining the larger assumption that security is the primary goal of all states—without, in other words, undermining realism.

There is an explanation that many realists, from George Kennan to John Mearsheimer, have resorted to in order to deal with this problem. Maybe, as Kennan lamented more times than can be counted (and as Fredrik Logevall and I argue in our book, *America’s Cold War*⁶), there is something about U.S. domestic politics that accounts for America’s inconsistent and overreactive foreign policy, and its incentivizing of threat inflation and fear-mongering. As this interpretation is not evident in the book under review or in others of his works I have read, I am pretty sure that Leffler does not accept this argument. But he does not provide an alternative conceptual explanation that explains the problems he identifies. Perhaps the explanation is that American officials have simply made many foolish decisions. That is fine, and certainly true, but it is neither a revisionist explanation, nor, really, a realist one either.

Notes:

1. See the forum on Leffler’s article in *American Historical Review* 89 (April 1984), with a comment from John Lewis Gaddis and Leffler’s reply.
2. See Michael Hogan, ed., *America in the World: The Historiography of American Foreign Relations since 1941* (Cambridge, UK, 1995), especially chaps. 2, 3 and 5.
3. See their introduction, “Navigating the Unknown,” in Melvyn P. Leffler and Jeffrey W. Legro, eds., *In Uncertain Times: American Foreign Policy After the Berlin Wall and 9/11* (Ithaca, NY, 2011). Also see Leffler and Legro, eds., *To Lead the World: American Strategy after the Bush Doctrine* (New York, 2008).
4. By “Marxian” I mean a scholarly approach that regards capitalist economic interests as primary in explaining politics. Many U.S. foreign relations revisionists were not themselves Marxists, but did employ a Marxian analytic framework. For a recent example from an IR theorist who is certainly not a Marxist, see Christopher Layne, *The Peace of Illusions* (Ithaca, NY, 2006). Thanks to Fred Logevall for comments on this matter.
5. The classic realist text here is Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge, UK, 1981). Also see Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness* (New York, 1944) and, for the perspective of a realist policymaker, Dwight Eisenhower, *The White House Years: Waging Peace, 1956–1961* (New York, 1965). For an argument that the United States may have to decide between its core economic interests and its continued domination of the contemporary international political order (and that it should choose the latter), see Nuno Monteiro, *Theory of Unipolar Politics* (Cambridge, UK, 2014).
6. Campbell Craig and Fredrik Logevall, *America’s Cold War: The Politics of Insecurity* (Cambridge, MA, 2009).

Author’s Response

Melvyn P. Leffler

I want to thank Andy Johns for organizing this roundtable. I would also like to express my appreciation to Princeton University Press for affording me the opportunity to publish this rather unusual book of essays.

I appreciate the succinct and expert ways in which Gretchen Heefner, Kelly Shannon, and Chester Pach summarize the aims of the book. As they note, I try to do several things. First, I try to provide answers to some of the most perplexing questions in twentieth-century American foreign policy. Why, for example, did the Republicans in the 1920s reject collective security commitments as well as a hegemonic role for the United States in the international political economy? Why did the Cold War occur? Why did the United States win the Cold War? Did 9/11 transform U.S. foreign policy? Is budgetary austerity bad for the conduct of U.S. foreign policy? Second, I seek to interrogate and reflect

on the evolution of my own thinking about U.S. foreign policy. Third, I try to underscore some lessons that might be extrapolated from studying the past and illuminate the importance of those insights for understanding the present. That is precisely what I tried to do in the op-ed piece that Heefner so kindly mentions at the beginning of her commentary.

It is very rewarding to read such positive comments about the volume. The reviewers note that it contains some familiar essays, but they also highlight some of the contributions that appeared in relatively obscure collections, especially the essay entitled "Victory: The 'State,' the West, and the Cold War" and the lecture I gave on "Austerity and U.S. Strategy." At the same time, they raise some important questions about my writings and the evolution of my thinking.

Kelly Shannon asks whether there is a central argument to the book. The answer is yes: I try to underscore how and why I gravitated toward a "national security" interpretation, one that integrates and synthesizes elements of revisionism and realism, embraces complexity, and highlights the importance of preserving core values from external threats. Shannon also focuses on some of the chapters that deal with post-Cold War U.S. foreign policy. She suggests that I exaggerate the continuities between George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton and correctly notes that Clinton tried to reorient the country toward more global and transnational concerns, such as protecting the environment and safeguarding human rights.

I would still claim, however, that the continuities dwarf the discontinuities. The new global and transnational issues (and the organizational changes that accompanied them) did not supplant traditional economic and strategic concerns. Nor did they absorb anywhere near the time or command anywhere near the resources that were bestowed on traditional issues like the development of the military budget, the configuration of forces, initiatives related to counter-proliferation, the making of trade policy, the identification of terrorist threats, and decisions about whether or not to intervene in places like Somalia, Bosnia, Kosovo, and Iraq. And despite all the talk, the Clinton administration's record in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia belied the rhetorical tropes about human rights.

Although Shannon is right to stress my emphasis on the continuity of policy after 9/11, I do not overlook the precedents in the long history of U.S. imperialism. I write (285–86) that when Theodore Roosevelt "justified intervention in the Caribbean and Central America, it was explicitly a preemptive form of intervention," one that Samuel Flagg Bemis long ago labeled as "protective imperialism." I agree with her: the roots of preemption are long and deep.

Shannon and Gretchen Heefner make the larger point—a good one—that I do not sufficiently engage "with the world outside of high politics." Although in recent years I have woven issues of religion, identity, and culture into my thinking as I have grappled with the concept of core values, these matters have not constituted dominant themes in my writings. Heefner notes the reason: my central focus has always been on why policymakers acted as they did. Consequently, I have grappled with the role of emotions and memory, especially as they affected threat perception. For example, in explaining the differences between policy after World War I and after World War II, in

interpreting the origins of the Cold War, and in analyzing the reactions to 9/11 by the George W. Bush administration, I stress the role of fear and of threat perception more than most authors.

As Chester Pach so rightly says, my focus has been on integrating human agency, structure, and contingency. This effort, he correctly writes, encouraged me "to forge a new synthesis from existing interpretive lenses, one that included as well the three levels of analysis on which international relations scholars rely—the individual, the state, and the international system." Like other smart commentators over the years, Pach seems to have his reservations about this approach. It is "vague," he writes, but it "offers useful, if obvious advice."

I appreciate this observation. In my introductory comments to the chapter on "national security," I acknowledge that the definition is vague, but I argue that its very ambiguity is its strength: "As understood by U.S. officials," I write, "national security was a dynamic, changing concept, responding to the evolution of threat abroad and the definition of core values at home. Core values themselves were elusive, forcing historians and scholars of international relations to discover and analyze precisely what interests, ideals, or values policymakers most wanted to defend. Similarly, external threats existed in the eyes of beholders; different observers perceived danger in dramatically different ways." And I point out that the

"intensity of perceived threats might drastically influence the means embraced to pursue new (or old) goals." This framework, I conclude, "integrates external and internal developments and obligates analysts to illuminate how national security itself is a constructed concept" (317–18). The point I wish to reiterate here is that "national security" is not an interpretation of American foreign policy; rather, it offers a framework for studying the policymaking process.

Campbell Craig's comments are of a different nature. He says the goals of the book are not clear. He writes that there is only a "brief" introduction and no conclusion. He does not mention that there is a preface to the book that specifically states the objectives of the volume. The introduction, moreover, is not "brief"; it is twenty-seven pages. He disregards the new prefatory comments to each chapter that seek to contextualize each article or essay. And although there is no "new" conclusion, most readers of the preface, introduction, and contextualizing notes will readily understand why the essay on "national security" serves as an apt conclusion.

Craig is disappointed that there are not more "historiographical fireworks." He misses the point of the book. The volume is not intended to re-wage old historiographical controversies. It seeks to do something different. It is intended to interrogate and reflect on my own historiographical journey. That is why the chapters are not updated. I battle here with my own uncertainties, changing impulses, conflicting evidence, and intellectual challenges, and I struggle to explain why I made the choices I did at particular times in my career. Over the years I have done enough arguing with friends and foes, much of which is chronicled in the introduction; at this point it seemed more rewarding to reflect on the battles I have fought within my own mind.

Craig complains that I call myself a "revisionist." Here again, he is mistaken. My book explains how revisionism

shaped my thinking, but I explicitly write that “as I reassessed where I positioned myself in the interpretive wars about the origins of the Cold War, I realized that, unknowingly, I was marrying revisionism and realism” (19). And a few pages later, I write that “in my evolving thinking, revisionism and realism were not alternative interpretive frames, but complementary” (25).

Craig seems perplexed that I think revisionism remains an important ingredient of my approach, although not its defining character. He does not seem to realize that, according to the Wisconsin revisionists, the concern for the “system” was the driving force behind American foreign policy. Policymakers believed that industrial transformation and overproduction generated economic turmoil, social unrest, and political ferment that threatened the fundamentals of the American system of democratic capitalism.

In the preface to the twenty-fifth-anniversary edition of *The New Empire*, Walter LaFeber succinctly states that “the main thesis is that U.S. policymakers’ great fear of domestic violence and radicalism, emerging out of the depression, drove them to the conclusion that imperialism was preferable to domestic reform (and economic redistribution) as a device to quell the danger” (xxv, xxix [1988]). They were “not economically motivated in the pocketbook sense,” emphasizes William A. Williams in his iconic text, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*. “Wanting democracy and social peace,” he explains, “they argued that economic depression threatened those objectives, and concluded that overseas economic expansion provided a primary means of ending that danger” (30 [rev. ed., 1962]).

I share with these revisionists the view that the desire to preserve the fundamentals of democratic capitalism at home shaped American foreign policy. Where I came to disagree with them was in my assessment of the threat. I came to assign less importance to the domestic economic sources—overproduction—than to the external threats emanating from autarchy, aggression, and terrorism. I explain this at considerable length in the introduction to the book. But while embracing elements of “realism,” based on perceptions of external threat, I still believed, as did the revisionists, that safeguarding democratic capitalism was the overriding goal—hence the title of the book.

In another way I am much like the revisionists. Like them, I do not see public opinion as the determinative factor in shaping foreign policy, which is the point that Craig most wants to argue. Like the revisionists, I consider public opinion part of a complex mix. This is evident in several of the chapters in my book that deal with war debts, Herbert Hoover, and 9/11. Like the revisionists, I see ideas, economic impulses, values, and perceptions as more important in most though not all circumstances. Here again I am inclined to agree with Walter LaFeber in *The New Empire*: “U.S. policymakers were pushed and pulled not by public opinion or Congress but by their own sophisticated worldviews” (xix [1988]).

Craig seems to think that revisionism “is a Marxian interpretation,” although he then qualifies this in his footnote, correctly stating that “many U.S. foreign relations revisionists were not themselves Marxists.” But by equating revisionism with Marxism (in this roundtable), he minimizes the provocative, tantalizing, and eclectic mix of ideas, beliefs, ideals, perceptions, and, most importantly, economic interests, that constituted the core of Wisconsin revisionism. Policy, wrote Williams on page two of the 1962 edition of *Tragedy*, “was not caused by purposeful malice, callous indifference, or ruthless and predatory exploitation. American leaders were not evil men. They did not conceive and execute some dreadful conspiracy. Nor were they treacherous hypocrites. They believed deeply in the ideals they proclaimed and their rhetoric as applied to the United States had substantial relation to the facts.”

Revisionism, in fact, inspired me to think and rethink the roles of ideas, values, institutions, economic interests, and perceptions in the making of American foreign policy. Revisionism, as I recount in my introduction, impelled me to look at evidence closely; and the evidence, as I read it, encouraged me to abandon the artificial binary between realism and revisionism.

I want to thank my commentators for forcing me yet again to reflect on these matters. Writing history, however arduous (along with extrapolating meaningful lessons, however elusive), seems more important today, when the future of our way of life appears imperiled by threats from within as well as beyond our borders than it has ever been.