

TWILIGHT OF THE DEFENSE INTELLECTUALS?*

MAX PAUL FRIEDMAN

Department of History, American University

Bruce Kuklick, *Blind Oracles: Intellectuals and War from Kennan to Kissinger* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006)

John Lukacs, *George Kennan: A Study of Character* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007)

One month after the peaceful end of the Cuban Missile Crisis, French diplomats accepted a rare invitation to Camp David to observe a top secret “politico-military game” developed by strategists from Harvard, MIT, and the RAND Corporation, simulating confrontations in Germany and Southeast Asia. The French were nonplussed. It began well enough with the familiar blue and red teams of a garden-variety *Kriegsspiel*, Ambassador Hervé Alphand reported to his ministry, using the Prussian term for war games developed in the nineteenth century by Helmuth von Moltke. But then, Alphand continued, the game grew unrecognizable. The players began running probability calculations, writing linear equations, and utilizing “*les ‘computeurs.’*” Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara’s “Whiz Kids” seemed to transform themselves into “veritable electronic machines, who sometimes give the impression of being without souls.” The participants displayed “almost unimaginable levels of theoretical and practical knowledge of the document called ‘Contingency Planning’ that might appear to us to be wearisome and useless,” Alphand wrote. “Affective, sentimental, even historical considerations are not taken into account,” yet the Americans clearly had “extraordinary confidence in their methods and their judgment.” Alphand marked the document *TRES SECRET*, to which a reader

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in the Quai d'Orsay's American Section added the scrawled comment: "*très étrange*."¹

Alphand, a sensitive bibliophile with a taste for history common in the French diplomatic service of the time, recoiled at this glimpse of the cresting influence of American social-scientific methods on US foreign policy. Defense intellectuals with doctoral degrees and consulting contracts were taking credit for the successful resolution of the Missile Crisis while promoting the strategies and rationales that would soon characterize the escalation of the war in Vietnam. With its roots in Taylorist scientific management and Dewey's instrumentalist application of the scientific method to obtain knowledge useful to society, this approach to statecraft diverged greatly from European traditions, creating an American style of defense policy that was different from anything that had come before.

How academics came to reach such heights, and the more important question of whether their influence was as great as they and their critics have argued, is the subject of Bruce Kuklick's wide-ranging study of intellectuals and war after 1945. Taken as a class, their hubris was boundless and their intelligence dazzling, and their advice contributed to the worst US foreign-policy failure of the twentieth century. Or did it? The originality of Bruce Kuklick's argument is not to attack the defense intellectuals for causing a fiasco in Vietnam, but to claim that they were far less important than they or their critics believed. He finds, as Hans Morgenthau maintained, that when intellectuals left the groves of academe for the halls of power, their scholarship risked turning into justifications for the policies of their employers. They did not shape policy, they merely described it in lofty terms.

Kuklick identifies three overlapping groups of scholars, only two of which were truly communities: the RAND Corporation, the Air Force-funded think tank based in Santa Monica that emphasized mathematically oriented approaches to organizational theory, systems analysis, and game theory; and the foreign-policy academics clustered around the Kennedy School of Government and the "May Group" of scholars led by Richard Neustadt and Ernest May at Harvard, with their focus on bureaucratic politics and historically grounded studies of presidential decision-making. The third cluster comprises "individuals who had bases in the university and who achieved the highest positions of influence" (6), including George Kennan, Paul Nitze, Dean Rusk, McGeorge Bundy, Walt Rostow and Henry Kissinger. Collectively, those who reached key decision-making positions were the least interested in putatively scientific methods and held more traditional views of diplomacy informed by an awareness of history. But this is hardly a rule.

¹ Hervé Alphand to Maurice Couve de Murville, 25 Jan. 1963, sous-série Etats-Unis 1952–1963, No. 376, série Amérique, Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, Paris.

Rostow's penchant for developing abstract universal principles and applying them to policy problems shows just how heterogeneous was the thinking of this third group of men.

This is not the first study of the military–intellectual complex,² but it presents a powerfully argued interpretation and original research. The story that emerges from Kuklick's immersion in university archives is of the postwar constriction of the range of acceptable methodologies and opinions. With the establishment of institutes on international affairs at MIT, Harvard, Princeton, Chicago, Columbia, and elsewhere, the study of political theory and the techniques of social science predominated over old-fashioned historical approaches to international affairs. European realism informed and then gave way to technocratic problem-solving. Wilsonian projects, the promotion of supranational institutions as an alternative to international conflict, fell out of favor. The Compton family's Center for Research in World Political Institutions at Princeton, dedicated to the study of international law, shriveled in the shadow of the realist Center for International Studies. Kuklick's account of this particular episode depicts an administrative hijacking, but the Compton Center's fate represents more broadly a path not taken, at least in the United States, where Wilsonian idealism labors under the aura of *naïveté*. Some Europeans, on the other hand, responded to the calamity of World War II by drawing the lesson that they should seek to avoid future conflict by yielding some degree of national sovereignty to supranational bodies, thereby reinvigorating the international functionalist tradition that arguably began not with Wilson but with Immanuel Kant.³ This tradition holds that violent conflict could be abated not so much by the prevalence of high moral standards, but through the creation of institutions that integrate nation-states into larger structures that encourage interdependence. The evolution of functionalism from the interwar ideal to the postwar practical was embodied by the personal trajectory of Jean Monnet, who went from disillusioned high official in the cumbrous League of Nations to proponent of economic integration as a means to eventual political integration.⁴

At RAND the favored technique for developing strategy was to model or predict the behavior of states and foreign leaders in crisis situations. Earlier, the Air Force had employed historians on its operations research teams, but they

² Ron Robin, *The Making of the Cold War Enemy: Culture and Politics in the Military–Intellectual Complex* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

³ Per A. Hammarlund, *Liberal Internationalism and the Decline of the State: The Thought of Richard Cobden, David Mitrany, and Kenichi Ohmae* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Immanuel Kant, *Zum ewigen Frieden. Ein philosophischer Entwurf* (Königsberg: Friedrich Nicolovius, 1795).

⁴ François Duchêne, *Jean Monnet: The First Statesman of Interdependence* (New York: Norton, 1994).

were reluctant to make judgments on the basis of inadequate evidence, and soon gave way to “scholars in the harder social sciences. They were more willing to draw conclusions on the basis of imperfect evidence, a necessary ability when working in the real world under stressful circumstances” (21). This is one of the few instances where Kuklick offers a sympathetic explanation for the triumph of strategic thinkers who were informed not by history but by theorizing and calculation. One could go further and observe that social and political scientists, not historians, and generalists, not specialists, typically predominate among the experts brought into government service, not because historians are not of the real world—their empiricism is often at least as developed as that of the modelers—but because they make few predictive claims and tend to restrict themselves to areas they know about. In a crisis over Cuba, it could be—indeed, it would have been—useful to have the counsel of a historian of Cuba. But if the following week brings a crisis in Laos, that same historian may not have much to offer. A social scientist who makes generalized claims is more likely to be prepared to advise on any occasion. Whether those generalized and predictive claims have value is another question.

Thus many defense intellectuals, Kuklick writes, turned to history only for the most basic, unambiguous, and misleading of lessons. American benevolence was taken for granted. There could be no concessions to totalitarian enemies. War was caused by mismanagement of crises. Under this theory of war as the product of aggression or accident, rather than clashing interests, it was pointless to look for long-standing causes. World War I began because of mistakes and accidents on all sides. Looking at the Pacific war, strategists saw only Pearl Harbor and the problem of surprise attack. They did not see the contest between two industrial behemoths seeking raw materials and markets from the same regions of Asia they had coveted since the turn of the century, when the United States arrived in force with the seizure of the Philippines and the Open Door challenge to spheres of influence in China. They did not trace Japanese empire-building to a militant response to the challenge of the Great Depression, nor did they consider the kind of racial imagery proliferating on both sides that John Dower has blamed for the intensity of the fighting.⁵ This simplification, according to Kuklick, enabled the imposition of general models upon specific situations without regard to context. One might add that it led to the routine overestimation of Soviet power, the overemphasis on Soviet connections of smaller states and movements in the Third World, and the treatment of international relations as a series of transitory and highly dangerous moments of crisis to be managed through astute calculation,

⁵ John W. Dower, *War without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon, 1986).

rather than as the eruptions of deeper, historically rooted contests among states and movements with conflicting core interests.

In their theorizing and study, the defense intellectuals distinguished themselves from Dwight D. Eisenhower, who wins Kuklick's praise for drawing not on scholarship but on his own experience and on conventional ideas of diplomacy (although his secretary of state, John Foster Dulles, seemed at times to draw as much on theological conviction). After his glancing acquaintance with the academy as president of Columbia University, Eisenhower had no interest in "a lot of long-haired professors" advising him on nuclear strategy (51). One reason Eisenhower provided in his farewell address was that the growth of the national security state had implicated so many researchers in government-sponsored projects that universities were losing their role as spaces for independent thought.⁶ Another reason may have been that RAND experts pointed out the weakness of Eisenhower's "New Look," a penny-pinching approach to defense that promised to meet aggression not with expensive conventional armies but with all-out nuclear retaliation. That was a bluff easily called. In the nuclear age, civilian strategists like Bernard Brodie and Alain Enthoven gradually displaced experienced soldiers in war planning. They may have disdained the generals for fighting the last war, but it was not only scholarly allure that gave the academics a platform. As Aaron Wildavsky pointed out in the 1960s, theorizing was essential to gaining knowledge about nuclear weapons policy, because the only alternative to theorizing was experience, and in the case of a nuclear exchange that was what most people hoped to avoid.⁷ Yet what made these oracles blind was precisely their level of abstraction from reality. Defense intellectuals who referred to themselves as belonging to "the nuclear priesthood" were unwittingly acknowledging not only their own hubris but that their ideas were based on a common dogma.⁸ Fundamentally, it was a system based on imposing one's will rather than negotiating with the adversary.

Some historians tried to demonstrate their relevance, if more in a cautionary fashion than as diviners. It was the signal service of Richard Neustadt and Ernest May to show how easily historical analogies could be misused. Yuen Foong Khong has pointed out that politicians and their advisers may use analogies for different aims: heuristically, as testing exercises to help them reach decisions; didactically, to persuade their interlocutors of the wisdom of their decisions; or cosmetically,

⁶ David Engerman, "Rethinking Cold War Universities: Some Recent Histories," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 5 (2003), 80–95.

⁷ Aaron Wildavsky, "Practical Consequences of the Theoretical Study of Defense Policy," *Public Administration Review* 25/1 (March 1965), 90–103.

⁸ Carol Cohn, "Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defense Intellectuals," *Signs* 12/4 (1987), 687–718.

to draw a historical veil of legitimacy across decisions taken for other reasons.⁹ Because analogy as a form of argument can seem as rhetorically powerful as the logic of an algebraic equation, Neustadt and May called for the careful application of analogic reasoning. But an analogy could be found appropriate only long after the crisis had been resolved and analyzed. In the heat of the moment, there was no way to tell whether, say, the Soviet emplacement of nuclear missiles in Cuba was like Sarajevo or Munich.

In popular discourse, because of the way the Kennedy circle played upon the episode for political advantage, the lesson of the Cuban Missile Crisis was the anti-Munich: standing firm in the face of aggression, even at the risk of war, leads the totalitarian power to retreat. Defense intellectuals at the time who knew more of the details concluded that the crisis confirmed the value of “graduated escalation” and “signaling,” for at each stage the Kennedy administration applied only as much military pressure as was necessary to convey American determination and evoke a conciliatory response from the Soviets.

Kuklick criticizes these interpretations for failing to consider the role of Berlin in Moscow’s considerations. But the problem goes further. Neither the conventional, public account, nor the interpretation by specialists emphasizing graduated escalation, assigned enough explanatory weight to the readiness of the Kennedys to make concessions to the Soviet Union to avoid a conflict, and both suffered from a lack of historical context. The promise not to invade Cuba was more substantial than American scholars have acknowledged or Fidel Castro believed at the time, since it came after eighteen months of aggressive military moves including a proxy invasion attempt at the Bay of Pigs and the full-dress rehearsal by tens of thousands of American troops attacking an island dubbed “Ortsac” (Castro spelled backwards). The second concession was the promised withdrawal of the American Jupiter missiles from Turkey that, Khrushchev complained to summer visitors, were aimed right at his *dacha*. The Kennedys insisted that this trade not be made public, both to assuage NATO allies (including Turkey) that might feel abandoned, and to allow for the public appearance of a one-sided victory that they could take to the bank in November’s mid-term elections.¹⁰ Thus a plausible lesson of the Cuban Missile Crisis might have been that a measure of appeasement could go a long way toward avoiding war while taking into account the core interests of all parties and enabling concessions to

⁹ Yuen Foong Khong, *Analogies at War: Korea, Munich, Dien Bien Phu and the Vietnam Decisions of 1965* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

¹⁰ Aleksandr Fursenko and Timothy J. Naftali, “*One Hell of a Gamble*”: *Khrushchev, Castro, and Kennedy, 1958–1964* (New York: Norton, 1997); Philip Nash, *The Other Missiles of October: Eisenhower, Kennedy, and the Jupiters, 1957–1963* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

address their concerns. Instead, two portentous lessons entered the lexicon of foreign-affairs experts: always stand firm against opponents instead of making concessions, and engage in graduated escalation and signaling to achieve success when the right level of force finally persuades the other side to yield. Both of these “lessons” of the missile crisis would be invoked repeatedly in the next conflict to which defense intellectuals applied their expertise, the war in Vietnam.¹¹

Kuklick is ambivalent about the responsibility of the intellectuals—or their theories—for the course of the Vietnam War. Dean Rusk and McGeorge Bundy offered textbook examples of the misapplication of historical analogy. Both invoked the lesson of Munich to support intervention in Vietnam. (In another bit of unfortunate analogical reasoning based on glancing knowledge of the past, the Joint Chiefs of Staff answered the question as to why an American war effort in Vietnam would succeed where the French had failed by pointing out that the French had also tried to build the Panama Canal.)¹² More sophisticated thinkers were not necessarily more adept. Thomas Schelling famously compared “detering the Russians and deterring one’s children” (138). Like the nuclear strategist who claimed he could deter his teenage son from watching too much television by threatening to break the boy’s arm, such comparisons called into question the speaker’s competence in both diplomacy and childrearing.¹³ And like current talk about not wanting to “reward bad behavior” by North Koreans or Iranians, the language of strategy often infantilized opponents, conveying clear assumptions of natural superiority over rivals who were not believed to be capable of assessing their own interests.

Kuklick’s charge is not so much culpability as irrelevance. He questions whether President Lyndon Johnson’s retaliatory strike after the Gulf of Tonkin incident should be understood as a classic case of graduated escalation. Certainly Schelling thought so, declaring it to be “an expressive bit of repartee” that taught North Vietnamese leaders they would be punished for misbehavior (139). The problem is that it was retaliation for a nonevent, so the signal sent to the North Vietnamese could not possibly be received as intended. This was not the triumph of the strategists, Kuklick argues; Johnson wanted to escalate the war, and the strategists merely dressed up his decisions in theoretical garb. One could summarize his dismissive view of the intellectuals’ impact on the war this

¹¹ President George W. Bush similarly invoked the conventional “lesson” of the Cuban Missile Crisis in 2002 when explaining the importance of confronting Saddam Hussein with military force to assure Iraq’s disarmament.

¹² Memorandum for the Chairman, NSC Working Group on Southeast Asia, from L. M. Mustin, JCS Staff with Comments on the draft for Part II, “US Objectives and Stakes in South Vietnam and Southeast Asia,” 10 Nov. 1964, reproduced in *The Pentagon Papers*, Gravel Edition, 5 vols. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971–2), 3: 621–8.

¹³ Cohn, “Sex and Death.”

way: the oracles did not cause the worst failures of US policy in Vietnam, but not for want of trying.

Yet their role may have been more causal. Not only did graduated escalation and flexible response explain Kennedy and Johnson policies in Southeast Asia, the theories also helped persuade both presidents that intervention was essential in a country whose importance lay in its meaning to more powerful foes. Under both doctrines, the United States had to be willing to fight small wars to avoid getting pulled into large ones. Having provided the rationale for intervention, strategic studies then provided the techniques. The Johnson administration spent years applying the “lessons” of the Cuban Missile Crisis on graduated escalation, trying to signal North Vietnam through a series of targeting decisions, intensifications, and bombing pauses. Many years after the war was over, McNamara convened a conference including several North Vietnamese officials to ask them why they had not understood his signals. They had seen no signals, they said, only US insistence on continuing to prosecute a neocolonial war. Not only had McNamara been blinded by social science when he remarked in 1963 that “every quantitative measurement we have shows that we are winning the war,” but he and his entourage had also been convinced by their theories, and to a Johnson fearful of losing his political credibility at home they offered the promise of success.¹⁴

The theory of bureaucratic politics takes a drubbing in this book because as practiced by Neustadt and Graham Allison, it relied too uncritically on interviews with self-serving principals. Kuklick then swings at a straw man: suppose LBJ had remained on his ranch and tried to save a noncommunist South Vietnam from there, without the instruments of the US government—would he have been more successful? “Bureaucracies are imperfect bearers of large purpose, but they are the only instrumentalities we have to will it” (163). This is a weak spot in a vigorously argued case. Scholars using the bureaucratic-politics approach never suggested that leaders would be better off without bureaucracies. They thought they would be more successful with bureaucracies that worked better—or, failing that, with an awareness of the way bureaucracies function.

The iconoclasm subsides with Kissinger, perhaps because so many others have taken a hammer to his image that Kuklick’s skepticism is turned against the critics. Kuklick asks why other defense intellectuals were so hard on Kissinger—Schelling and Neustadt criticized his handling of the war and asked him to resign—since he and Nixon embodied the rational actor RAND strategists believed in, and circumvented the bureaucracy Neustadt had identified as an impediment. That “Nixinger” practiced a kind of realism does not mean that Nixon’s and Kissinger’s

¹⁴ Lloyd C. Gardner, *Pay any Price: Lyndon Johnson and the Wars for Vietnam* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1995).

judgment was sound, their policies wise, or their trampling on the democratic process the kind of bureaucratic reform the Kennedy School had in mind.

Both the scientific and the nonscientific approaches, both McNamara and Kissinger, were discredited by their failure in Vietnam. Defense intellectuals found a new role for themselves, Kuklick writes bitinglly, “conjuring up formulas of expiation” (15). They did not blame McNamara or themselves, they blamed ineffective systems, specifically inappropriate competition among agencies according to the “bureaucratic-politics” theory. Would that it were so, that defense intellectuals generally moved in the 1970s from trying to impose their visions on policy to trying to explain why their failures were not their own. Instead, while some lost access to government, others with comparable training applied their scholarly prestige to the task of formally overestimating Soviet military capabilities, helping to revive the Cold War by the end of the decade. Some members of the Team B Strategic Initiatives Panel that second-guessed the CIA’s modest assessments of Soviet strength and intentions came from the same institutions: Richard Pipes from Harvard, Thomas Wolfe from RAND, Paul Nitze himself.¹⁵ There may have been a wave of personal expiation projects, from McNamara’s public mea culpa to Daniel Ellsberg’s antiwar activism to Kissinger’s rewriting of history, but academics did not stop trying to apply their expertise to the formulation of policy, with outcomes as untoward as those Kuklick describes.

If the argument is to be that knowledge and power are inconsonant, George Kennan could serve as a case in point. He did his best work when he was far from the center of power. When he offered knowledge that was unwelcome, he was eased out. If the brief treatment in *Blind Oracles* leaves one wanting more, turning to John Lukacs’s admiring *George Kennan: A Study of Character* requires first the suspension of disbelief. Not so much because it is a tribute to a departed friend—one can understand the depth of feeling behind such sentences as “I fear that such prose (and wisdom) in the words of an American official we shall not see in the next one thousand years” (93)—but because the problem is more fundamental: how does one prove the effect of character?

The term is commonly understood to mean a collection of enduring virtues or moral qualities. These are not only born but made, according to the Aristotelian tradition, forged through the repetition of ethical acts. Marxists believe economic structures determine character, while others emphasize family relationships. For Lukacs, character as an analytical category is self-evident, requiring neither argument nor evidence, and so he does not explain what he means by the term. He does not try to explore what might have shaped Kennan’s convictions, the experiences that might have led him to his cultural pessimism, his dark

¹⁵ Anne Cahn, *Killing Détente: The Right Attacks the CIA* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1998).

view of human nature and commensurate suspicion of democratic society. Character simply exists, and is causal. Kennan was “inhibited not because of suppressed feelings but because of his character” (9). Harry Truman had a “solid character” which led him to speak sharply to visiting Soviet Foreign Minister V. M. Molotov (66). When Dean Acheson supported linking aid to Greece and Turkey as part of a proposal to stop the spread of global communism—the Truman Doctrine—Kennan thought the commitment to worldwide intervention exceeded America’s national interests. The two men disagreed, Lukacs writes, because “their characters and their provenance were different” (81).

Character may have played a role in Acheson’s willingness to be deceptive for political purposes, making NSC-68, the 1950 document calling for a militant response to a global communist plot, “clearer than the truth.” But the diplomats’ disagreement over US policy was rooted in their diverging interpretations of how to advance the national interest, and that came from their analytical thinking and acquired knowledge, not from an unshakable set of values. If Lukacs has found otherwise, it would be interesting to see the impact of character upon policy demonstrated. To be sure, character is an unusual explanatory factor in contemporary historical writing, but the book is not contemporary historical writing. It is a thoughtful and gracious paean to a friend, “a man whose reputation exists because of his intellectual powers; and yet how many of those qualities sprang from the tenderness of his heart!” (134).

How are we to understand the link between his inner life and his judgments? We read of Kennan’s loneliness, especially in Moscow. Left unexplored is how, for example, his difficulty establishing warm relationships with other people might have affected his thinking about governance, or relations among states. Frank Costigliola has attempted this, linking Kennan’s isolation and his frustrated desire to have his feeling for the Russian people requited to the ferocity of his attack on the Soviet government in the strikingly emotional prose of the Long Telegram.¹⁶ Lukacs, never one to follow methodological trends, would surely rebel at such an analysis of Kennan’s behavior. That does not prevent him from seeing in Kennan “a feminine fineness of spirit” (12), and “a kind of sensitivity so fine as to be somehow feminine—surely feminine rather than masculine” (10). By leaving this observation unexplained, Lukacs places great trust in his reader.

Kuklick and Lukacs sound a note of agreement on the limited causal role of ideas in foreign relations: these reflect, rather than shape, prevailing opinion of the time. Kennan’s Long Telegram and “X Article” in *Foreign Affairs* were

¹⁶ “‘Unceasing Pressure for Penetration’: Gender, Pathology, and Emotion in George Kennan’s Formation of the Cold War,” *Journal of American History* 83/4 (March 1997), 1309–39.

“yet another exposition of what had become obvious,” writes Lukacs. “Thus do ideas move in the history of a democracy” (88). If this were quite so clear, there would be little reason to spend time thinking about Kennan; he would merely be, like Kuklick’s “intellectual middlemen,” a conveyer of conventional wisdom to a literate public. But his ideas had a tangible impact. His call for confrontation of the Soviet Union did not fall into a preexisting consensus but into a debate in which Truman’s hardening line was challenged directly by Henry Wallace, among others, and international functionalists managed to get the US government behind the Baruch Plan for international control of atomic power. Certainly ideas are often in circulation before renowned thinkers formulate them in a compelling way. But, as they circulate, ideas contest other ideas, which is why it is too cynical for scholars to claim that scholars do not matter.

The paradox of George Kennan, who named a policy that made his name, then spent the rest of his life opposing it as put into practice, has sometimes been posed in the form of a riddle: were there two Kennans, or did he change his mind? Was there a Cold Warrior who wanted to challenge the Soviets in Europe, supplanted by a dovish neutralist who wanted both superpowers to disengage? By praising his character, Lukacs may mean to point to the consistency that Kennan always insisted was there: he warned against danger from the Soviet Union just as he warned against the danger of excessive anticommunism. His notion of containment called for cool, targeted responses in American spheres of influence, not a global crusade. His intellect led him to take certain positions, but his character, Lukacs could have argued, allowed him to take those positions whether they were popular or not.

Kennan himself sometimes ascribed actions to character, including national character. As a realist, he argued that traditional Russian security concerns should be taken into account, and that they underlay the transient rhetorical forms of Marxist–Leninist ideology. But he went further into the realm of national psychologizing, with a vividness and passion that led him to overstate the case for an implacable Russian menace. Kuklick offers a different interpretation of these writings that bears upon Kennan’s character. When Kennan resorted to depicting “an evil ideology and mental pathology to explain Russian wrongdoing,” Kuklick writes, he was “prompted by his desire to come up with a line that [influential Navy Secretary James] Forrestal would find acceptable” (40). In other words, he was “opportunistic” (45), stooping to the same obsequiousness and job-seeking that rob Kuklick’s other intellectuals of their independence. A momentary weakness of character as the key to the enigmatic Kennan of 1946? A different study of character, one that could confirm Kuklick’s insinuation that Kennan betrayed his own convictions in the Long Telegram by hyping the Russian menace to win favors from a well-connected hawk, might pry into the genesis of his lifelong struggle against his own legacy.

Kuklick's book contains a recurring debate with himself about the value of history. In looking at the different clusters of intellectuals he certainly finds opprobrium enough to go around, but he is gentler on three antipositivists—Kennan, Morgenthau, and Kissinger—because they eschewed social-scientific pretensions and turned for answers to the study of the past. Yet he cites Nietzsche's pessimistic view that historical knowledge accumulates as an immobilizing burden, dissuading its bearers from undertaking ambitious projects because of their awareness of past failures and the law of unintended consequences. After all the criticism of academic thought in foreign policy, Kuklick finds no alternatives, because less knowledge and less thinking are not likely to bring better outcomes. We are left with "the irony of postwar social science," the fact that greater commitment to government service brings with it a narrowing of the range of political views permitted within the intellectual community (164). Nor do the dissidents give Kuklick cause for hope. Even Ellsberg, a RAND insider who came to hold an unfashionable view of the Vietnam War and used his access to try to stop it, draws a rebuke as a muddled thinker trying to wash his hands.

These bleak conclusions need not lead into a cul-de-sac. Even if history cannot serve as a ready storehouse of useful analogies for the historicists or, to use the language of strategic studies, "data points" to plug into the modelers' machines, an awareness of history can warn against the kind of hubris Neustadt, Kennan, and finally Kuklick find so damaging. He regrets that advisers "never offered advice that transcended the culture" (223). But there were alternatives offered up by critics who, from the outside, provided advice that transcended the culture of policy-making, who revealed and called its fundamental assumptions into question, who recommended steps that might have brought better outcomes or avoided the worst ones. Among them were French officials, including President Charles de Gaulle and his ambassador Hervé Alphand, who drew on the French experience to argue privately and then publicly that history controverted the Americans' self-confident escalation of the war in Vietnam.¹⁷ They were joined by others ranging from establishment figures Walter Lippmann and J. William Fulbright to the neglected Indochina expert Bernard Fall and radical thinkers such as Noam Chomsky.¹⁸ Kuklick indicts academic knowledge as such, although

¹⁷ Fredrik Logevall, *Choosing War: The Lost Chance for Peace and the Escalation of War in Vietnam* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999).

¹⁸ Ronald Steel, *Walter Lippmann and the American Century* (New York: Little, Brown, 1980); Randall Bennett Woods, *J. William Fulbright, Vietnam, and the Search for a Cold War Foreign Policy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998); B. Fall, *The Two Viet-Nams* (New York: Praeger, 1966); N. Chomsky, *American Power and the New Mandarins* (New York: Pantheon, 1969). Hans Morgenthau, H. Stuart Hughes and thousands of other academics signed a petition to the Johnson administration calling for the neutralization of Vietnam to avoid a wider war. "5,000 Scholars Ask a Neutral Vietnam," *New York Times*,

his evidence points to the gatekeeper role of certain inbred scholarly circles. Rather than a screed against giving advice to princes, the answer might lie in broadening the range of advice available to princes. As for the hand-wringing over history, its careful study may not always teach humility—Kissinger is ample proof of that—but taken with Neustadt and May's warning against facile lessons, studying history should convey an appreciation of the endless complexity and unpredictability of events. And that may be argument enough for the discipline's continuing importance to power.

11 July 1964, 1. For a recent overview of alternative traditions in foreign policy see David Mayers, *Dissenting Voices in America's Rise to Power* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).