



BOOKS

How We Got Here

America Between the Wars — From 11/9 to 9/11 — The Misunderstood Years Between the Fall of the Berlin Wall and the Start of the War on Terror
Derek Chollet and James Goldgeier, Public Affairs, 2008, \$27.95, hardcover, 432 pages.

REVIEWED BY JAMES DEHART

The next president of the United States will inherit a number of specific foreign policy challenges, ranging from Afghanistan and Iraq to North Korea. If history is any guide, he'll feel compelled to deal with them not in isolation, but in the context of a reinvented foreign policy doctrine. Perhaps by this time next year, we'll have a new theme that consigns "freedom agenda" and "war on terror" to the bumper-sticker dustbin, alongside "new world order" and "assertive multilateralism."

In their excellent *America Between the Wars — From 11/9 to 9/11 — The Misunderstood Years Between the Fall of the Berlin Wall and the Start of the War on Terror*, authors Derek Chollet and James Goldgeier recount the efforts of three U.S. administrations to articulate (and simplify) a vision for America's role in the post-Cold War world. The period of history they examine is one that defies easy labels. Consider the term "post-

Chollet and Goldgeier persuasively argue that the 1990s were hardly a "holiday from history."



Cold War world," which merely explained what the era wasn't, rather than what it was.

The authors argue that the 1990s were hardly what President George W. Bush called "years of repose, years of sabbatical." On the contrary, it was a decade of crucial debate between — and especially within — the Democratic and Republican foreign policy establishments that shaped their respective responses to 9/11 and continue unabated today. What looked to columnist George Will like a "holiday from history," the authors see as an era of continuity and consequences.

Central to the foreign policy debates of the 1990s was the issue of military force: When should it be used, and how important is it to work through the United Nations? After assembling a "coalition of the willing" to evict Iraqi forces from Kuwait, President George H.W. Bush believed he had found a template for the future, with principles of international conduct enforced by a reinvigorat-

ed Security Council. Yet within a few years, the United States and its NATO allies would bypass the U.N. to evict Serb forces from Kosovo — a precursor, perhaps, to how the current administration would handle the world.

Chollet and Goldgeier, both veterans of the Clinton administration, bring balance and objectivity to their analysis. (Chollet is an adjunct professor at Georgetown University, while Goldgeier teaches at The George Washington University.) They pull no punches in recounting Clinton's early missteps on gays in the military, Somalia and Haiti, which led to the perception that there was a "weak hand on the wheel." And they are more than fair to Newt Gingrich, complimenting his "global and strategic vision" even as he led a band of congressional freshmen whose proudest boast was that they had never before owned a passport.

According to the authors, it was the Republican majority's drift toward isolation, coupled with the early ineptitude of the Clinton administration, which led to the rise of the neoconservatives. While they shared with the "liberal hawks" a concept of America as the "indispensable nation," the neocons saw globalization as "globaloney" and persisted in seeing future threats in terms of one nation invading another, ignoring the significance of non-state actors, like al-Qaida.



The events recounted in this book will be all too familiar to Foreign Service readers. Those looking for fresh details on U.S. diplomacy in, say, the Middle East or the Balkans, won't find them here. But they will find a lucid overview of the forces that have shaped our foreign policy since the end of the Cold War.

As consummate Washington insiders, Chollet and Goldgeier bring particular insight to the confluence of U.S. government decisionmaking and the ideas generated by heavyweights in the think-tanks and policy institutes lying just offshore.

In the end, the authors conclude that it's "folly to try to describe how the United States should approach the world's complexities with one single idea." Maybe so, but one suspects that this won't deter the next administration from trying — yet again.

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Prudence or Promiscuity?

Smart Power: Toward a Prudent Foreign Policy for America

Ted Galen Carpenter, *The Cato Institute*, 2008, \$24.95, hardcover, 258 pages.

REVIEWED BY CHARLES SCHMITZ

Ted Galen Carpenter, vice president for defense and foreign policy studies at the Cato Institute, views

Carpenter takes the reader on a brisk and refreshing excursion through our neuralgic policies around the world.

U.S. foreign policy as massively imprudent. In his view, our willingness to be the world's policeman and social worker has promoted the assertion of imperial powers abroad and at home by the U.S. executive (including all recent incumbents, not just George W. Bush), to the endangerment of our constitutional civil liberties and the federal system.

If our "10 episodes of significant military force in less than two decades [in] places as diverse as Panama, Somalia, Haiti, the Balkans, Southwest Asia and the Persian Gulf" do not suggest to you that the U.S. is lacking in "a well-defined (much less sufficiently discriminating) security strategy," consider Carpenter's assertion that the obligations the U.S. shouldered during the Cold War "reek of obsolescence." Yet we are unwilling even to consider withdrawing our troops from Europe, 17 years after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, or from South Korea, which has "twice the population and an economy 40 times that of its communist North Korean rival."

We make a huge mistake, says Carpenter, in our "casual extension of security commitments" to states not

relevant to our own security needs. We seek to invite into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization the Baltic states, Slovenia and possibly even Ukraine and Georgia, despite recent events there. Having invaded both Afghanistan and Iraq (though Carpenter concedes that the initial operation in the first of those two countries made good sense), we now find ourselves in "an increasingly ill-defined, open-ended nationbuilding mission" that may require new security undertakings to protect our investments.

Smart Power: Toward a Prudent Foreign Policy for America takes the reader on a brisk and refreshing excursion through our neuralgic policies around the world: the Iraq debacle, the so-called "war on terror," Iran, the Middle East, the Korean Peninsula, Taiwan and China, Russia and its neighbors, and the disastrous war on drugs.

Carpenter wants to rock some boats. Of his many points, consider these three: 1) The Islamic terrorist threat is not the functional equivalent of World War III, and we do not need to fund the military as though it is. 2) The supply-side war on drugs in Latin America and Central Asia has cost us billions, made enemies, spawned wide-scale corruption, and still has not reduced our domestic drug problem. 3) The U.S. Constitution was not designed for an imperial nation perpetually at war or preparing for war. Our domestic liberties are in danger from our hyperactivist security policy.

Having argued that the U.S. has not followed a disciplined and thoughtful foreign security policy, Carpenter places the blame directly on "a foreign policy elite" that has not set priorities or established "an analytical framework for assessing strategic choices." His basic prescription for such a framework is to characterize emergent foreign issues as "vital, sec-



ondary, peripheral or irrelevant” to U.S. security. For example, the emergence of obnoxious, left-wing, populist regimes in Latin America is peripheral in Carpenter’s book; and which faction rules Burma (Myanmar), Liberia or Georgia is irrelevant to him.

Even so, he makes the case for thoughtful, experienced and informed engagement in international affairs, with force as only a last, infrequent resort. Yet we know that no analytical framework such as the one he suggests can stand up to the free-for-all fighting among politicians, ethnic groups, business interests, egos, think-tanks and ideologues — the process that produces American foreign policy. One is led to wonder what U.S. diplomacy would be like if a “foreign-policy elite” actually did run things.

If you think that U.S. diplomacy is in good shape, this book should be an eye-opener. And if you think that it can stand improvement, this book ought to be in your toolbox.

Charles Schmitz, a Foreign Service officer from 1964 to 1989, is a former AFSA vice president for State and for retirees. He is the author of Changing the Ways We Do Business in International Relations (United States Institute of Peace, 1997).

Walking the Beat

Ghost: Confessions of a Counterterrorism Agent

Fred Burton, Random House, 2008, \$26, hardcover, 288 pages.

REVIEWED BY DAVID CASAVIS

“The world needs more cops,” Fred Burton observes in *Ghost*:

Burton spares no details about what he terms the “dark world” of terrorism.

Confessions of a Counterterrorism Agent. He sticks with that theme throughout this book about life in the counterterrorism branch of the State Department’s Bureau of Diplomatic Security, covering the period from 1985, when the Montgomery County police officer joined DS, through 1998.

Ghost — a reference to the familiar term for a spy, ‘spook’ — reminds us of the humble origins of the State Department’s efforts to thwart terrorism. Burton, along with another recruit, joined a single outgoing officer as the office’s entire initial staff. They operated out of a tiny office with stacks of paperwork and file folders atop paint-flecked industrial filing cabinets. It was as though “a high school football team set up shop in the basement of the National Archives,” he recalls.

Burton spares no details about what he terms the “dark world” of terrorism, describing the carefully preserved ear of a suicide bomber and taking us through the 1984 kidnapping, torture and murder of William Buckley in Beirut, the 1985 hijacking of the *Achille Lauro*, the 1986 Berlin nightclub bombing, and the 1988 bombing of PanAm 103 over Lockerbie.

Burton explains clearly the bureaucratic interplay within DS, between

that bureau and the rest of the department, and between his office and his counterparts in other agencies. At the same time, the book’s action is cinematic, full of vignettes like one of the DS agent who palmed a detonator in Togo, secreting it out of Africa. That quick action made it possible for Washington to finger the culprits of the Lockerbie bombing.

Pakistan is the scene for two of the book’s most memorable chapters: Burton’s investigation of the 1988 assassination of Pakistan’s President Muhammad Zia ul-Haq and U.S. Ambassador Arnold Raphel; and the pursuit and 1995 arrest of Ramsi Yousef, the mastermind behind the 1993 World Trade Center bombing. After years of dead ends and missed chances, credit for the capture of a truly dangerous terrorist should go to many Department of State personnel (on all levels). Instead, it will come as no surprise to many in the Foreign Service that the FBI took credit for Yousef’s capture, while others who put everything on the line to make that possible didn’t get so much as a letter of commendation.

As he ponders today’s threat matrix, Burton sees too many bureaucratic restrictions, too many manuals to follow and too many bosses to keep happy. He is also concerned over the lack of coordination between agencies. Most disturbing of all is his Cassandra-like warning that events like Pearl Harbor and 9/11 will happen again. But that flows full circle into the book’s theme: The world needs more cops. ■

David Casavis works for the Department of Homeland Security and teaches at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice. He is writing a book about the 1971 murder of Foreign Service staff officer Donald Leahy in Equatorial Guinea.