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Introduction by Robert Jervis

**Bartholomew H. Sparrow. *The Strategist: Brent Scowcroft and the Call of National Security*.** New York: PublicAffairs, 2015. ISBN: 9781586489632 (hardcover, \$37.50/CDN\$46.99).

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## Introduction by Robert Jervis, Columbia University

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Our reviewers are in agreement that Brent Scowcroft, whose career culminated in his serving as the National Security Advisor to presidents Gerald Ford and George H.W. Bush, deserves a full-length biography, and that he has received it from Bartholomew Sparrow. Charles Edel calls the book a “comprehensive, sympathetic, and insightful biography;” Peter Harris calls it “a formidable work of history and an impressive work of political science;” Daniel Sargent finds the book to be “superb” with “unimpeachable scholarship;” and James Graham Wilson notes that while Scowcroft is often seen as the epitome of an efficient staffer, “Sparrow makes a sustained and convincing case that Scowcroft stood, and stands, on his own.” All also agree that the book’s length is largely justified, in part because the details of Scowcroft’s life are worth bringing out and partly because Sparrow provides rich context that not only makes Scowcroft’s behavior intelligible, but provides a history of much of American foreign policy in the administrations in which Scowcroft served.

Sparrow, like many students of American foreign policy, admires Scowcroft for his tireless national service, his maturity and caution, and, above all, the conception of duty that drove him to construct and oversee a foreign policy process that brought out the conflicting views of key administration officials, and to present presidents with the information and options he needed to make his choices. All this, the reviewers note, was made possible by Scowcroft’s remarkable personality: strong and resilient, not easily cowed, but with remarkably little ego. As a result, he earned the respect, and indeed the affection, of almost all those he supervised or reported to. As Wilson notes, “one has to be impressed by someone who has spent the past fifty years in Washington and only really ticked off two people: White House Chief of Staff Bob Haldeman and Vice President Richard Cheney.”

The major question the reviewers raise is whether the book’s title is appropriate. Was Scowcroft really a strategist? Sparrow says that Scowcroft is “a strategist with a small *s*,” and Edel notes that “such a phrase raises more questions than it answers,” but he and the other reviewers view raising the question as being in itself valuable. What does it mean to be a strategist, with either a lowercase or a capital *S*? How much vision is required to earn this honorific, and how much is needed for national policy? Where do ethics come in? Harris notes that in Sparrow’s accurate portrayal, Scowcroft “is a realist but he most certainly is *not* a man who lacks principles.”

All our reviewers, while agreeing that Scowcroft was an admirable figure in both political and personal terms, find that Sparrow, although not entirely uncritical, has perhaps fallen into the common biographer’s trap of not having sufficient distance from his subject to raise uncomfortable questions. Harris points to the 1975 *Mayaguez* incident, where Sparrow is somewhat critical, but notes that in general his attention to context and circumstances can lead him to being too quick to ratify Scowcroft’s judgments, and Sargent faults Sparrow for not probing sufficiently the extent to which Scowcroft’s intense focus on the Cold War’s Soviet-American rivalry blinded him to many other realities of world politics.

The reviewers also would have liked more discussion of Scowcroft’s personal life, and in particular the hardship caused by the fact that his wife, to whom he was extraordinarily attached, suffered agoraphobia and physical illnesses and the perhaps related fact that Scowcroft apparently had few friends other than his work colleagues. Harris then asks a question that we often fail to ask about our political leaders: “In the final analysis, can Scowcroft be said to have flourished as a human being?” But if Sparrow is correct — and there is every reason to believe that he is — Scowcroft was not prone to either introspection or to raising fundamental

questions about national policies. But whether he was a staffer, a strategist, or a Strategist, Scowcroft played a major role in the Cold War, and the reviewers agree that he finally has a biography that is worthy of him.

### Participants:

**Bartholomew Sparrow** is a Professor of Government at the University of Texas at Austin, where he studies and teaches American political development. He is also the author of *The Insular Cases and the Emergence of Empire* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006), *Uncertain Guardians: The News Media as a Political Institution* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), and *From the Outside In: World War II and the American State* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), as well as the co-author or co-editor of three other books. He received his Ph.D. in Political Science from the University of Chicago.

**Robert Jervis** is Adlai E. Stevenson Professor of International Politics at Columbia University. His most recent book is *Why Intelligence Fails: Lessons from the Iranian Revolution and the Iraq War* (Cornell University Press, 2010). He was President of the American Political Science Association in 2000-01 and has received career achievement awards from the International Society of Political Psychology and ISA's Security Studies Section and honorary degrees from the University of Venice and Oberlin College. In 2006 he received the National Academy of Science's tri-annual award for behavioral sciences contributions to avoiding nuclear war.

**Charles Edel** is an Assistant Professor at the U.S. Naval War College and the author of *Nation Builder: John Quincy Adams and the Grand Strategy of the Republic* (Harvard University Press, 2014). Currently on leave, he is serving in the Office of Policy Planning in the State Department as a Council on Foreign Relations International Affairs Fellow.

**Peter Harris** is currently a Visiting Lecturer in Politics at Earlham College. In Fall 2015, he will begin as Assistant Professor in Political Science at Colorado State University. His scholarship has appeared in several peer-reviewed journals and he regularly contributes to the online edition of *The National Interest*.

**Daniel Sargent** is Assistant Professor of history at the University of California, Berkeley. He received his BA from Christ's College, Cambridge in 2001 and his PhD from Harvard University in 2008. He has held fellowships at the Olin Institute for Strategic Studies at Harvard University and at International Security Studies at Yale University. He is the author of *A Superpower Transformed: The Remaking of American Foreign Relations in the 1970s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015) and a co-editor of *The Shock of the Global: The 1970s in Perspective* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010). He is now working on two book-length projects: a history of international economic governance in the modern era and a study on the uses of history and historical thinking in U.S. foreign policy.

**James Graham Wilson** is a Historian at the Department of State, where he compiles volumes for the *Foreign Relations of the United States*. He is the author of *The Triumph of Improvisation: Gorbachev's Adaptability, Reagan's Engagement, and the End of the Cold War* (Cornell University Press, 2014). The views expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of State or the U.S. Government.

**Review by Charles Edel, U.S. Naval War College**

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By age, by experience, and by the general prudence and wisdom of his judgments, Brent Scowcroft has entered the pantheon of America's elder statesmen. Along with fellow National Security Advisors Henry Kissinger and Zbigniew Brzezinski, Scowcroft now stands revered as a senior wise man of U.S. foreign and defense policy. But if Kissinger and Brzezinski were respected, and indeed often feared, for their powerful intellects, pugnacious attitudes, and sharp-elbowed approach to bureaucratic politics, Scowcroft was a different policy animal altogether. In Bartholomew Sparrow's comprehensive, sympathetic, and insightful biography *The Strategist: Brent Scowcroft and the Call of National Security*, the Scowcroft that emerges rose to power, and to a large degree, exercised power by acting as the quintessential staff man.

The book follows Scowcroft's life and is organized in five parts: Scowcroft's background as an air force officer, his emergence as a senior policymaker in the Nixon and Ford administrations, his time spent in international consulting and as chairman of several key national security commissions during the Carter and Regan years, his tenure as National Security Advisor to President George H.W. Bush between 1989 and 1993, and his transition into senior statesman role. With so much to cover, Sparrow devotes the most space to Scowcroft's years in the Bush White House, giving those four years nearly 230 pages out of a 550+ page biography.

Tracing the arc of Scowcroft's life and extraordinary career, Sparrow argues that over the last forty years "no other official or analyst has consistently had such a profound impact on the national security policy of the United States" (xii). The author, a political scientist at the University of Texas at Austin, develops this claim by framing Scowcroft's life as "a history of US national and security policy in the post-World War II era. (xvi). If the book falls short of achieving that larger goal, it does much to advance the significance of Scowcroft's achievements and legacy. And as Sparrow's book highlights, Scowcroft was intimately involved in many of the major diplomatic events of the latter half of the Cold War and post-Cold War world, including the opening of diplomatic relations with China, the American withdrawal from South Vietnam, the détente era and the management of the nuclear arms race, the Iran-Contra scandal, the reunification of Germany and the end of the Cold War, the 1991 Persian Gulf War, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the debate surrounding the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003.

In light of Scowcroft's role in these momentous events, Sparrow writes that Scowcroft is "a strategist with a small s" (xi). While such a phrase raises more questions than it answers, his book implicitly asks the intriguing questions of what it means to be a strategist, and how an individual becomes one. In Sparrow's rendering, a strategist—small s or otherwise—need not necessarily be a visionary. But, one has to have a capacity to identify clear political objectives, analyze the available, often contradictory evidence, recognize the uncertainty inherent in dynamic interactive environments, and plot a course forward. Likening this complex process to a game of chance and anticipating the criticism that Scowcroft was more implementer than visionary, Sparrow writes that a "strategist may not alter the nature of the game by formulating sweeping new theories of political change or grand summaries of the course of history—but he plays the game set before him, using the pieces available, with insight, skill, and occasional brilliance. He recognizes the moving parts in a complex situation, sees how the pieces fit together, and devises the most appropriate response" (xii). Added to this is an ability to produce concrete results, as a strategist "without access to the levers of power and the ability to wield them skillfully is merely an armchair theorist" (xii). As Sparrow suggests, one need not act as a game-changer to be valuable. Given the ill-formed and occasionally novel problems Scowcroft confronted, it is a great skill to be able to correctly diagnose threats and recommend appropriate responses.

Given such a framework, the evolution of Scowcroft's career takes on a coherent shape. For, as Sparrow explains, Scowcroft "was a policy implementer and a bureaucratic operator—a 'fixer'—before he became a strategist" (105). Sparrow tracks this growth over the course of Scowcroft's remarkable career, sketching his boyhood roots in Mormon Utah, his cadet years at West Point, his short-lived career as an air force pilot, his time spent pursuing a doctorate in international relations at Columbia University, and his tenure as an instructor at West Point and later the Air Force Academy. These early years are captured particularly well, and depict the subtle but persistent influence that the military had on Scowcroft's conception of the world and America's place in it.

But it is in Scowcroft's rise within the Air Force that Sparrow identifies the qualities of mind and habit—order, discipline, level-headedness, and non-excitability—that most distinguished Scowcroft as a rising staff officer. From a tour at the Pentagon, Scowcroft's career took on a meteoric trajectory as he was successively placed in the Nixon White House as Military Assistant to the President, chosen as Henry Kissinger's deputy National Security Advisor, and appointed as President Ford's National Security Advisor. After a brief tenure as an international consultant and chairman of key national security commissions, Scowcroft took on the role for which he is most well-known, National Security Advisor to President George H.W. Bush, when the two oversaw the end of the Cold War, the U.S. response to Tiananmen Square, and the 1991 Persian Gulf War.

If, at its most basic, strategy requires both conceptualization and implementation, Scowcroft's background made him perhaps the most talented implementer of national security over the past forty years. His military experience in administration, management, and planning, combined with an academic background that made him as comfortable as his civilian counterparts in the world of theory and ideas, produced a highly confident and capable individual who knew how to get things done. Combined with his personal humility, this ability to work the process in a deliberate, if not overbearing manner, marked him as the consummate professional staffer. Sparrow adeptly underscores this point, highlighting the mentors who taught a young Scowcroft that the best administrator was "thoroughly competent...curious and broad-minded, and...in control of his ego" (39). Scowcroft learned from his mentors that an "ability to divorce his own ego from his professional performance" would make him more bureaucratically effective and "as an extension of the official personality of the executive he serves" (51). These skills gave Scowcroft the ability to survive the Nixon White House, where he often seemed the only individual capable of dealing with and earning the respect of the equally brilliant and volcanic Kissinger. Indicative of Scowcroft's ability to keep up with Kissinger intellectually, provide him with the necessary bureaucratic backstopping, and take his outbursts in stride, is the fact that Scowcroft not only succeeded Kissinger as Ford's National Security Advisor, he also served as his best man when Kissinger remarried in 1974.

It was Scowcroft's temperament, even-keeled and non self-aggrandizing, combined with his evident skill in managing the bureaucratic process that made him successful in a variety of roles. And, it was in the first Bush White House in his reprise role as National Security Advisor that Scowcroft's abilities, influence, and legacy ultimately culminated. This was the reason, after all, that the President chose Scowcroft for the role. "His reputation," Bush reflected, "was such that there could be no doubt he was the perfect honest broker I wanted. He would not try to run over the heads of cabinet members, or cut them off from contact with the president, yet I also knew he would give me his own experienced views on whatever problem might arise. In selecting him, I would also send a signal to my cabinet and to outside observers that the NSC's function was

to be critical in the decision-making process.”<sup>1</sup> This was congenial to Scowcroft who understood his role as twofold: making “the policy process work efficiently by providing the president with appropriate options for and perspectives on US foreign policy” and, ultimately, advising the president on what he believed the best course of action” (269).

As many observers have noted, a president gets the National Security Council, and the decision-making process, that he deserves—and that best serves his needs. Scowcroft’s low-key style and organizational efficiency were perfectly suited for George H. W. Bush, as both placed a premium on “clearly defined administrative procedures” (371). As the historian Jeffrey A. Engel has noted, Bush “cultivated as many varied opinions as possible. He routinely asked aides to debate the merits of their conflicting positions in his presences, hoping that a front-row seat for these ‘scheduled train wrecks’ as they were called in the West Wing, would allow him to appreciate not only the conclusions his deputies reached but their thought processes as well.”<sup>2</sup> One could probably add that this allowed the President to hear the full range of his options and to think creatively about things he had not yet thought of. What’s more, such an approach allowed for greater buy-in from his team, and, ultimately, the country. Scowcroft’s conception of his role as honest-broker and chief advisor to the President allowed Bush to hear the varied opinions of his advisors before reaching his own conclusions.

And, for the most part, Bush and Scowcroft’s conclusions were in almost complete harmony. Not only was Scowcroft Bush’s “close and constant confidant” he was also, in Bush’s words, “the closest friend in all things” (271). The two men were similar. They were from the same generation, and believed in service and self-discipline. By temperament and experience, both were pragmatists who believed in the utility of managing process more than the benefits of conceiving sweeping visions. And, significantly, both were sufficiently self-confident that they disdained tooting their own horns. This was as much a national philosophy as it was a personal one.

During Bush’s presidency, this shared philosophy shaped their vision for dealing with the America’s role in the world. Both trusted in America’s leading role and prized stability in world affairs. They believed in standing up to aggression, and thought that force, when employed, should be done decisively. Because both understood the need to place limits on what American power could accomplish, they both saw international institutions and quiet diplomacy as force multipliers for their own actions. Decisive actions were sometimes required, as the administration’s response to Saddam Hussein’s 1990 invasion of Kuwait implied, but they were more likely to be achieved by collective action, persuading others to cooperate, refusing to gloat over their achievements, and giving credit to others. As the Cold War gave birth to a new era, this was an administration that prized stability over rhetorical grand standing, and tempered its self-assurance and assertiveness with healthy amounts of skepticism and caution. As Bush declared in the speech that kicked off his presidential campaign, “I am a practical man. I like what’s real. I’m not much for the airy and abstract; I

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<sup>1</sup> George Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999), 19.

<sup>2</sup> See Jeffrey A. Engel’s insightful concluding essay in his edited *China Diary of George H.W. Bush: The Making of a Global President* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 403.

like what works. I am not a mystic, and I do not yearn to lead a crusade; my ambitions are perhaps less dramatic, but they are no less profound.”<sup>3</sup>

Such caution meant that while the United States publicly condemned China’s bloody crackdown of democracy protests in Tiananmen Square in June 1989, Scowcroft counseled the President to avoid rupturing ties with China. It also meant that while America organized and led the drive to oust Saddam Hussein from Kuwait, Scowcroft was much more hesitant about pushing towards Baghdad, removing Saddam from power, and creating a dangerously destabilized Iraq that presented a regional power vacuum. Given the contemporary and subsequent critique of this decision, Sparrow is at his very best when discussing Scowcroft’s judgment, weighing the benefits of halting the invasion after 100 hours against the long-term implications of leaving Saddam in power. Nor does he spare Scowcroft the critique that he was overly deferential to field commanders, callous to the human costs of abandoning the Kurds and Shi’a in Iraq, and insufficiently attentive to the issues surrounding war termination. While this is a largely admiring biography, and at times the list of superlatives attached to Scowcroft’s wisdom can grow a bit long, when discussing substance, Sparrow does not hesitate to critically evaluate Scowcroft’s decisions and judge what other actions Scowcroft might reasonably have advocated.

While no one would accuse Sparrow of writing too short of a book—indeed, weighing in at 564 pages, the narrative at times becomes more digressive than usefully contextual—there are several ideas and passages that would have benefited from closer attention. First among these is an examination of Scowcroft’s survival abilities. He walked away from an airplane crash as a second lieutenant. While tearing apart much of the officer corps, Vietnam barely left a mark on Scowcroft. The trauma the Nixon White House scarred most everyone who worked there—and sent a fair number of them to jail. Yet, Scowcroft, almost uniquely, emerged with his professional reputation enhanced, and “escaped being tarnished by the Watergate scandal” (101). What was it about Scowcroft, an understated, yet by no means ineffective, policymaker that allowed such resilience? What allowed him to skate past personal, professional, and national traumas seemingly unscathed?

Another area that would have benefited from further analysis is Sparrow’s discussion of Scowcroft’s beliefs. Sparrow notes the influence of Scowcroft’s faith on his beliefs and positions, and indeed devotes much space to explaining his Mormon ancestors. But, other than stating that Scowcroft is “a man of great faith” who believes in “God’s plan,” the book lacks discussion of what Scowcroft believes, how it might have been influenced by his faith, and how that might have affected his actions (563). Given the relative absence of this theme throughout the biography, it seems a somewhat curious note on which to conclude the book.

Finally, throughout the text, and given the book’s very title, there is an implicit question of what, exactly, being a strategist requires? Surely, it’s something more than being merely a fixer. Strategy, and strategists, require vision, temperament, and follow-through. Sparrow leaves no doubt that strategy requires the ability to operationalize a vision and the temperament to do so effectively. But, strategy is as much about

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<sup>3</sup> George H.W. Bush, announcement speech, October 12, 1987. A transcript of the speech may be found at, <http://www.c-span.org/video/?3133-1/bush-announcement>.

conceptualizing large ends as it is about ensuring optimal use of the means available.<sup>4</sup> While Sparrow does note the times that Scowcroft “moved the goalposts,” one wishes to hear a more detailed discussion about Scowcroft’s conceptualization of the world (561). Sparrow concludes that Scowcroft’s core values of “realism, internationalism, nationalism, and a fundamental optimism” have informed Scowcroft’s life and career (xvii). Those, however, are values that are often in tension with each other. It would have been quite interesting to hear Sparrow’s thoughts on what occurred when these impulses came in direct competition with each other. In this light, *America and the World*, a series of conversations between Zbigniew Brzezinski and Brent Scowcroft, moderated by the Washington Post’s David Ignatius and published in book-length form in 2008, gets curiously light treatment.<sup>5</sup> The work, which contains much of Scowcroft’s reflected consideration on America’s role in the world, the direction he sees history moving in, and what the nation should realistically aspire to accomplish, receives just a page and a half of Sparrow’s consideration.

These are indeed light criticisms of an admirable work of biography and history. The Scowcroft that emerges from the pages of Sparrow’s work is a pragmatic, prudent, and a much needed voice of wisdom. That Sparrow’s portrayal of Scowcroft is admiring should not be a criticism of this very good book. Indeed, Scowcroft’s steady hand made him an exceptionally competent policymaker, regardless of whether it elevated him to being a strategist with a capital ‘S.’

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<sup>4</sup> Charles N. Edel, *Nation Builder: John Quincy Adams and the Grand Strategy of the Republic* (New York: Harvard University Press, 2014), 5; Hal Brands, *What Good is Grand Strategy? Power and Purpose in American Statecraft from Harry S. Truman to George W. Bush* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2014), 3.

<sup>5</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski and Brent Scowcroft, *America and the World: Conversations on the Future of American Foreign Policy* (New York: Basic Books, 2008).

Review by Peter Harris, Earlham College

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Bartholomew Sparrow's *The Strategist* is a polished work of history but it is also unmistakably a work of political science. As a biography of Brent Scowcroft, one of the most accomplished U.S. statesmen of recent times, the book gives an overview of U.S. foreign relations since the mid-Cold War era, from the Vietnam War to the Ronald Reagan years to the 2003 invasion of Iraq and its aftermath. But as a piece of political science, *The Strategist* provides a critical analysis of the Washington foreign policy bureaucracy during this period—its inner workings, dominant personalities, organizational strengths and, perhaps most importantly, its sometime flaws. Of particular focus are the National Security Council and the related office of National Security Advisor—the role with which Brent Scowcroft is most closely associated, having held it under two presidents—but Sparrow's contribution is much broader than just an exposition of how the national security apparatus operates. Instead, it is a comprehensive take on executive branch decision-making and the complex relationship that exists between the White House, the wider U.S. political system, and the international environment.

Sparrow spent nearly a decade researching and writing this book (xviii, 574), a production period the length of which evinces a studied dedication to getting his subject exactly 'right.' He is nothing if not meticulous. This is true from the outset of book, where Sparrow draws upon a wide range of sources—public records, histories, encyclopedias, interviews and personnel records—to detail not only Scowcroft's upbringing and early adult life but also the lives and livelihoods of Scowcroft's forebears going back to his Mormon pioneer great-grandparents. Not content with a mere overview of Scowcroft's family history, Sparrow instead offers an intensely researched account of life among Mormons in the American west during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—including details of the annual number of Mormon westward migrants, Mormon customs and traditions, and more. Even though it is appropriately concise, this introductory section not only serves its intended purpose—presumably, to contextualize Scowcroft as somebody born into a world of devoted communitarians, prudent businesspeople and ambitious (even if fiercely modest) strivers—but it also sets the tone of the book as a well-researched and thoughtfully put together volume; the sense is conveyed that everything in this book has been deliberately included, that every line of text has been studiously scrutinized before being spared from excision.

This commitment to the careful exposition of relevant background information continues throughout. Consider, for example, Sparrow's treatment of Scowcroft's appointment as military assistant to President Richard Nixon, the first of Scowcroft's appointments in the executive branch bureaucracy. The reader is treated to literally pages of context: the origin of the office under LBJ, the inventory of military assets dedicated to presidential use during the Nixon years, staffing and budgetary information (61-70, 75), and vignettes of how Scowcroft put his own unique mark on the role (72-73). Scowcroft held the position of White House military adviser for just 18 months and it would be tempting for a biographer to overlook the importance of the experience. But Sparrow refuses to give short shrift to such formative periods in Scowcroft's career. Instead, he drills down into Scowcroft's nascent relationship with Nixon—it was characteristically (for Scowcroft) workmanlike, despite the President's well-known eccentricities and personality flaws—and goes into detail about the diligence with which Scowcroft discharged his responsibilities. Again, the deliberateness of Sparrow's prose and organization is evident: this is a book about Scowcroft's habits and sensibilities as much as it is a book about his policy achievements.

Or consider Sparrow's retelling of the fall of Saigon. An entire chapter (131-155) is devoted to outlining the various considerations and policy options that faced the Ford administration during this fraught episode in

U.S. history, and to tracing the bureaucratic energies required to organize the evacuation of the imperiled South Vietnamese capital. Attention is given to Scowcroft's role, to be sure, but also to the role of other key actors such as President Gerald Ford, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff George Brown, and the U.S. Ambassador to South Vietnam Graham Martin. Extensive archival research, canvassing of the secondary historical literature and interviews with Scowcroft himself allow Sparrow to piece together an intricate portrait of operation from multiple perspectives. Much to his credit, Sparrow manages not to lose the drama and animation of the occasion under the vast amount of detail that he marshals to describe the events as they occurred in Washington and on the ground in Saigon.<sup>1</sup>

The fall of Saigon has become one of the most iconic moments in the history of U.S. foreign relations, but other major episodes of Scowcroft's career will be markedly less well known to members of the general public and scholarly audiences alike. Here, Sparrow's dedication to developing the backdrop to Scowcroft's pursuits becomes doubly important. Take, for example, his treatment of the Scowcroft Commission into the deployment of America's arsenal of intercontinental nuclear missiles under President Ronald Reagan (219-243). In order to enable the reader to understand the skill and the investment of time and energy that it took for Scowcroft to discharge his responsibilities as the chairman of Reagan's Commission on Strategic Forces, Sparrow is assiduous in his coverage of the period: the crux of the problem facing the United States in the early 1980s (essentially, how to secure the U.S. nuclear deterrent against a Soviet first-strike); the state of executive-legislative branch relations; the budgetary situation; the competing strategic rationales for the various proposals under consideration; and the personal relationships at play. Without such primers, it would be impossible for the reader to accept Sparrow's argument that Scowcroft truly did possess uncommon talent as a bureaucrat, diplomat and 'fixer.'

In short, whatever historical event is being dealt with—be it the Vietnam War, strategic missile deployment, the Tower Commission in the wake of the Iran-Contra scandal, the invasion of Panama, or the fall of the Berlin Wall—*The Strategist* can be relied upon to provide the reader with a well-researched, well-referenced, and detailed historical narrative of the event in question as well as a specific analysis of Brent Scowcroft's role in the spectacle. Seemingly every nugget of information is cross-referenced with other biographies, autobiographies and memoirs, academic studies, newspaper reports, archival documents, and testimony from the many interviewees quizzed by Sparrow in service of this project: James Baker, Zbigniew Brzezinski, George H.W. Bush, Dick Cheney, Leslie Gelb, Henry Kissinger, Colin Powell, Condoleezza Rice and, of course, Scowcroft himself, to name but a handful of the hundred or so whose oral recollections were sought during the preparation of this monograph (572). The lasting impression is that no stone was left unturned in the pursuit of knowledge about what happened, when, why, how, and by whom.

As well as giving a competent outline of the history in question, however, Sparrow's disciplinary training allows him to proffer an eminent *understanding* of what Scowcroft and his colleagues were able to achieve in office. At every juncture, Sparrow recognizes the structural and strategic constraints that existed for the

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<sup>1</sup> Testament to the readability of the prose, perhaps, is the fact that an excerpt of this chapter recently was reprinted in the online edition of *The New Republic* on the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of Saigon's fall. See Bartholomew Sparrow, "Inside America's Massive, Messy Evacuation from Saigon," *The New Republic*, 29 April 2015, <http://www.newrepublic.com/article/121668/fall-saigon-anniversary-how-us-managed-its-vietnam-failure> (accessed 12 May 2015).

political actors under investigation. He knows that politics is the art of the possible; that prevailing institutions, personalities, strategic cultures, and coalitions of interests serve to delineate the realm of practicability for those in charge. *Context* is what allows good men—and Sparrow clearly believes that Scowcroft and most of those around him were good men—to do bad things; how intelligent people can behave in ways that appear misguided, wrongheaded or even callous.

Understanding context is thus essential for drawing useful lessons from history. And there are many lessons to be drawn from the career of Brent Scowcroft. Indeed, none of Scowcroft's major stints as a public servant were without blemish, and so understanding and explaining the blunders, oversights and shortcomings of the various administrations of which Scowcroft formed part—some of which were hugely costly, in human terms—is a critical task for Sparrow in *The Strategist*. For example, why did the U.S. sink so much blood and treasure into Vietnam? Why did the U.S. fail to support the October 1989 attempted coup against the drug-trafficking dictator of Panama, Manuel Noriega, which resulted in the (perhaps avoidable) deaths of several key U.S. sympathizers? And why did Scowcroft argue against rendering meaningful military assistance to the embattled Shi'a opposition to Saddam Hussein in the wake of the 1990-1991 Gulf War, only for the Shi'a to be butchered by Saddam and his helicopter gunships?

Sparrow takes care to address these and similar questions for all of the major foreign policy decisions to which Scowcroft was party. Often, the actions of government officials are vindicated in Sparrow's telling. But sometimes they are not. Usually, there is a structural or strategic explanation for why apparent missteps were made. At other times, individuals are to blame; other courses of action could have and should have been pursued (as in the case of the failed coup in Panama). Still other tragedies are portrayed as just that—*tragic* in a literary sense; unavoidable products of political circumstances, lamentably beyond the control of mere mortals. While Sparrow is no apologist for Scowcroft, then, he certainly is motivated by a biographer's need to empathize with his subject and a political scientist's will to explain—what, together, might be described as *Verstehen*. In this sense, *The Strategist* is both critical of and charitable to Scowcroft and his various colleagues in officialdom.

On this point, it warrants emphasizing that *The Strategist* is a traditional work of political science in the sense that it largely refrains from making normative judgments about the pros and cons of particular decisions, actions or outcomes. To be sure, there are instances of explicit and implicit editorializing: Sparrow's studied judgement that the Ford administration misled the public over the *Mayaguez* incident (167), for example,<sup>2</sup> or his implicit criticism of Condoleezza Rice for not being more assertive and discerning as National Security Advisor—and, indeed, for not resigning over the mishandling of preparations for the 2003 invasion of Iraq (537). But by and large, Sparrow elucidates for the reader the political forces that likely shaped the policy process under investigation, allowing others to draw conclusions about right and wrong, proper and improper, moral and immoral; he is dispassionate even as he avoids being overly clinical.

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<sup>2</sup> In May 1975, fighters loyal to the newly installed Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia seized a U.S. merchant container ship—the SS *Mayaguez*—and took its crew hostage. The Ford Administration, keen to demonstrate resolve and decisiveness, sanctioned a concerted military effort to rescue the hostages. Several dozen U.S. servicemen were killed—some at the hands of the Khmer Rouge; others when their transport helicopters malfunctioned and crashed. The crew of the *Mayaguez* was eventually released by the Khmer Rouge after three days.

Sparrow has taken explicit steps to tie this project into the discipline of political science in other ways, too—namely, by promoting the use of biography as a viable research method for studying political phenomena. Elsewhere, Sparrow writes that biography can have a valuable role to play in the social-scientific enterprise by helping to discover the true role of agency in a discipline that is sometimes too preoccupied with structure; by unearthing new data in service of generalizable claims about politics and politicians; by facilitating implicit comparative studies about how others would have acted in similar circumstances; and by comparing the organizational structure and performance of actors in particular settings (in this case, presidencies) across time.<sup>3</sup> Sparrow showcases all of this in *The Strategist*. Again, the point is that biographies need not be solely concerned with an individual's life, but may also be detailed portraits of political context. And, to be sure, a recurring feature of *The Strategist* is a 'taking stock' and critical evaluation of the national security policy-making apparatus at various points during Scowcroft's long career: after Vietnam, after Iran-Contra, during and after the Second Iraq War, for example. Some organizational styles and structures are condemned as inefficient, while others are held to be superior in terms of the quality of the policies that they allow for. All in all, while biography is unlikely to become an instantly popular medium for conducting political science research, *The Strategist* at least helps to lead by example and make the case that biography can have a home in a methodologically 'big-tent' discipline. It is easy to imagine slices of the book's contents appearing in dedicated political science journals just as some of its material previously has appeared in the history journal, *Diplomatic History*.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to those working on the executive branch, *The Strategist* will be of particular interest to scholars of International Relations and students of U.S. foreign policy. The book is written with keen appreciation for international theory—realism, to be sure, but also the intricacies of how diplomacy takes place, the role of 'face' and prestige in international politics, the logic of strategic deterrence, and so forth. Sparrow describes Scowcroft as basically a realist (indeed, as "realism's practitioner"):<sup>5</sup> somebody who champions the national interest and believes that aloof statesmen—more often than not, occupants of the executive branch—should be entrusted to safeguard the wellbeing of the country without hindrance from parochial, short-sighted members of the legislature, the media, civil society, and even the general public.<sup>6</sup> Yet Scowcroft is not the typical realist: he appreciates the importance of multilateral coalitions and what would today be called 'soft power,' for example. And while he holds that deterrence—including nuclear deterrence—is the best way to foster stability between potential adversaries, he also believes that international trade and adroit diplomacy can be the agents of lasting peace.

In fact, one of the major understated contributions of *The Strategist* is to flesh out some of the ethical foundations of realism as a foreign policy creed. Too often cast as the 'bad guy' of international relations

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<sup>3</sup> Bartholomew Sparrow, "Political Science and Biography: What We Can Learn from the Study of the Life of a US National Security Advisor," paper presented at the Western Political Science Association annual meeting, Portland OR, March 22-24, 2012.

<sup>4</sup> Sparrow, "Realism's Practitioner: Brent Scowcroft and the Making of the New World Order, 1989-1993," *Diplomatic History* 34, no. 1 (2010): 141-175.

<sup>5</sup> Sparrow, "Realism's Practitioner."

<sup>6</sup> Even so, Scowcroft does seem to have seen the fate of American business as somewhat synonymous with the interests of the nation as a whole.

theories—a literally Machiavellian way of thinking about the world—realism properly understood is actually firmly rooted in a powerful (even if somewhat loose) morality. Chief among realism’s preoccupations is a concern for civic duty. There can be few better exemplars of this than Brent Scowcroft, a man who recognized that his role as a foreign policy-maker was to serve the American people through fidelity to their elected chief executive. Scowcroft placed the interests of his country first not for any ignoble reason but because he was a patriot and because it was his duty to do so. Like other realists, Scowcroft can also be considered a humanist and a humanitarian in the sense that he prioritizes material human needs—not least of all the need for physical security—over self-indulgency. Scowcroft, therefore, is a realist but he most certainly is *not* a man who lacks principles. On the contrary, *The Strategist* elucidates that, in some ways, practitioners of realism are among the most moral and ethical statesmen that there are: dutiful, sober, patriotic and single-minded in their pursuit of betterment for those whom they are charged with representing.

Above all else, the overriding goal of Scowcroft was to preserve the blood and treasure of the American people—the people to whom he owed his public service career. The same is likely true of other realists. To be faithful to any other cause—internationalism, religious ideals, or the secular religion of universal human rights—would, for Scowcroft, be to stray from the properly constituted bounds of his office; an unforgivable act of arrogance, dangerous to Americans and to others around the world. Thus, for all his willingness to use force to achieve foreign policy objectives, Scowcroft was most concerned with sparing his countrymen from the horrors of all-consuming war. After all, Scowcroft and his contemporaries—men like Henry Kissinger and George H.W. Bush—came of age against the terrible backdrop of World War II and knew first-hand just how awful, debasing and dehumanizing war could be.<sup>7</sup> Scowcroft’s concern for balance and stability in world politics should not be read as a cold conservative’s predilection for the status quo, but as evidence of his passionate desire to avoid war, and the infliction of misery and death upon his country. For realists like Scowcroft, an international-level balance of power is a necessary prerequisite for human flourishing and advancement at the domestic-level. In a world out of balance, it is simply not possible to have economic development, social harmony, and the unfettered pursuit of happiness by individuals. While Sparrow certainly does not make any attempt to sell realism as a creed—indeed, it is doubtful that Sparrow sees himself as a realist—*The Strategist* does at least help the reader to understand how and why a statesman like Scowcroft would feel conscience- and duty-bound to implement a broadly realist foreign policy.

Like all ambitious projects, *The Strategist* is not without flaws. One weakness is that the book can perhaps be too generous in its description of Scowcroft as a true strategist of any great significance. For strategy involves immense forward-planning and its successful implementation requires great power and influence, yet Scowcroft’s career—at least as it is described in this book—was just as much (if not more) concerned with crisis management than it was with organizing for the future. According to the political scientist William Riker, the defining feature of strategy (what he terms “heresthetic,” or “the art of political manipulation”) is the manufacturing of environmental conditions that will, in the future, produce preferred outcomes.<sup>8</sup> Strategy is about stacking the deck, not simply playing the hand that has been dealt. Yet in *The Strategist*, Scowcroft and others are usually to be found making the best of a given situation. Rarely does Scowcroft

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<sup>7</sup> Realism as a clearly defined academic enterprise also took shape in the post-World War II era. See Nicolas Guilhot, “The Realist Gambit: Postwar American Political Science and the Birth of IR Theory,” *International Political Sociology* 2, no. 4 (2008): 281-304.

<sup>8</sup> William H. Riker, *The Art of Political Manipulation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986).

manage to actually put in place the building blocks of a desired future (unless, that is, his various organizational reforms can be considered in this light). To be sure, there are some bona fide strategists discussed in this book—Nixon and Kissinger, for example, particularly with regards to their opening to China—but Scowcroft himself is not often described as being given the opportunity to devise and implement much in the way of truly meaningful strategy of his own. This is not to doubt that Scowcroft was a strategic thinker (he certainly appears to have been a gifted intellectual) but rather to question the extent to which Scowcroft was, empirically speaking, actually responsible for crafting far-sighted and wide-ranging grand strategy. He comes across more of a ‘fixer’ of others’ strategic design than a visionary in his own right.<sup>9</sup>

Less seriously—and much more a matter of taste—more could have been said about the personal ramifications of Scowcroft’s extraordinary career and his Herculean work habits. For the truth is that Scowcroft was not super-human, and to work such punishing hours for so long—Sparrow describes marathon sessions in the office, peppered only with brief visits home and short naps during the day—must have taken an enormous toll on Scowcroft as a person and on his family life. Sparrow mentions that Scowcroft’s beloved wife, Jackie, was overcome by agoraphobia and physical illness during the early years of Scowcroft’s time in the White House (187-188). While undeveloped, this personal sadness at least hints at some grave human costs borne out of Scowcroft’s apparent indefatigability and relentless dedication to duty. Scowcroft is described as having few hobbies or interests outside of politics and current events, and almost all of his friends appear to be work colleagues (often his superiors). Is it really admirable to devote oneself to public service at the expense of family and personal wellbeing? Did not other duties go unfulfilled even as Scowcroft fulfilled (and likely exceeded) his duty to his country? In the final analysis, can Scowcroft be said to have flourished as a human being? More discussion on these points—the ‘dark sides’ of Scowcroft’s selflessness—would have added an interesting parallel narrative to the compelling primary focus on Scowcroft’s public deeds.

These potential grounds for criticism do not, however, detract from the overall contribution of the book. *The Strategist* remains a formidable work of history and an impressive work of political science. It sheds new light on the life and times of an underappreciated figure in recent U.S. history and has the potential to break new ground regarding how political scientists conduct and disseminate their research. And most importantly of all, perhaps, it is a thoroughly good read.

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<sup>9</sup> There is also the prior question of whether grand strategy is even possible given the complex domestic and international constraints that statesmen must contend with. Sparrow clearly thinks so, but there are other bright minds who disagree. A defense of grand strategy as something that actually happens in the real world of international politics would have been a welcome addition to this book. See Thomas Meaney and Stephen Wertheim, “Grand Flattery: The Yale Grand Strategy Seminar,” *The Nation*, 28 May 2012, <http://www.thenation.com/article/167807/grand-flattery-yale-grand-strategy-seminar> (accessed 13 May 2015).

**Review by Daniel J. Sargent, University of California, Berkeley**

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Wise men recurrently graced twentieth-century U.S. foreign relations. Canonical precursors like Elihu Root notwithstanding, the 1940s were the heyday of the wise man, a figure who was as devoted to the American national interest as he was disinterested in private profit, as internationalist in his instincts as he was adept in the implementation of foreign policy. Dean Acheson, Averill Harriman, Robert Lovett, and John McCloy exemplified the type: privileged and successful lawyers and bankers, they turned late to public service and diplomacy, offering discrete and effective service to presidents irrespective of party identification.

If the archetypal wise man was a creation of the 1940s, Vietnam broke the mold. The nation's foreign policy elite divided over the war; some even broke with the presidency, the institutional locus, around which the wise men had always rallied. The nation's foreign policy elite became more heterodox, more open to erstwhile outsiders (including women), but also more porous to partisan and ideological agendas. The think tanks boomed. The mid-century tradition of apolitical and disinterested service to the nation's foreign policy withered. Bipartisan figures such as Secretary of Defense Robert Gates recalled only fleetingly the wisdom and integrity of an earlier time.

The wise men withered, but they did not vanish. Some endured, none wiser or more disinterested than General Brent Scowcroft, who served two presidents as national security adviser, one as military assistant, and at least two others as an informal counselor. A decision-maker whose humility belies his historical significance, Scowcroft has at last received the coverage he deserves, in the form of Bartholomew Sparrow's excellent and exhaustive *The Strategist*. The book itself is superb. Across 561 pages of text (not including notes), Sparrow offers unimpeachable scholarship. The book draws upon an array of sources, of which the most unique are Scowcroft's personal papers and the interviews that Sparrow has conducted with Scowcroft and roughly a hundred of Scowcroft's contemporaries. The text's size may be off-putting to non-specialist readers, but Sparrow's clear, elegant writing permits easy progress through it.

Shrewdly, Sparrow adopts a variable focus, breezing through Scowcroft's background and early life and devoting almost half of his text to the four years that Scowcroft served as national security adviser to President George H.W. Bush. Emphatically, this is a political (or policy) biography, not a journey through its subject's interior life. (Scowcroft's cherished wife Jackie remains as distant to Sparrow's readers as she was to Scowcroft's colleagues.) Focused on the policy arena, *The Strategist* offers both a landmark account of Scowcroft's career and a significant interpretation of U.S. foreign relations especially during the pivotal George H.W. Bush administration. Stressing above all the importance of bureaucratic processes, Sparrow's interpretation will engage and inform historians.

This review will, however, focus not on the events that Sparrow's book traverses but on the riddle that his title encapsulates, namely the problem of strategy. What is it? How is it fabricated? And what can we learn from Brent Scowcroft's career about how to make and implement it?

Scowcroft, Sparrow argues, was a "strategist par excellence" (xii) but not a grand theorizer or interpreter of world events. Scowcroft's brilliance as policymaker, as Sparrow has it, resided in the rigor of his analysis, the prudence of his objectives, and the thoroughness of his procedure. Sparrow's definition of effective strategy, it follows, prioritizes method over creativity and implementation over design. "The strategist," Sparrow explains, "plays the game before him, using the pieces available" (xii). This suggests a more modest role for the

strategist than the one Henry Kissinger, still a political scientist, envisaged when he wrote: “there are two kinds of realists: those who use facts and those who create them.”<sup>1</sup> Scowcroft represents the first camp, the operators; Kissinger valorized and aspired to join the creators. “The West,” Kissinger continued, “needs nothing so much as men able to create their own reality.”<sup>2</sup> A subtle tension between two models of statesmanship—the strategist as operator and the strategist as creator—runs through Sparrow’s book. Sympathetic as Sparrow is to his protagonist, the book mostly endorses Scowcroft’s cautious realism but, to Sparrow’s credit, also recognizes its limits.

In government, Scowcroft became a consummate operator. Serving under Kissinger at the National Security Council (NSC), Scowcroft excelled not as an innovator but as an implementor: “he was better at reacting to and evaluating ideas than he was at dreaming them up” (84). Under President Ford, with whom he struck a close bond, Scowcroft excelled as a troubleshooter. With his elevation to the role of national security adviser, Scowcroft made important reforms to the NSC, contracting the staff but expanding the scope for debate among the foreign policy principals. With his reappointment as national security adviser under President George H.W. Bush, Scowcroft again proved himself a master of process. Caution remained his watchword, but Scowcroft ensured that foreign policy be open to internal debate. The result was a careful foreign policy, which was, Sparrow argues, what circumstances required. Bush and Scowcroft’s disinclination to dance upon the ruins of a crumbling Soviet Empire or take a principled stand over Chinese human rights in the aftermath of Tiananmen Square ensured that Washington preserved amicable, effective relations with its major rivals at a time of geopolitical tumult. The paucity of unforced errors on the (first) Bush administration’s part contrasts, rather strikingly, with the records of predecessors and successors alike.

Yet Scowcroft’s disdain for the conceptual, which President Bush shared, left the administration unable to articulate a rationale for American foreign policy as the the Cold War order crumbled. The administration was “never able to present the American public and the rest of the world with a picture of what a post-Cold War international system might look like” (484). Scowcroft concocted the phrase “New World Order” but struggled to fill it with content. After abandoning the New World Order, he and Bush invoked the “resumption of history,” as if the Cold War had put ordinary historical processes in the deep freeze for a half-century. This was no more edifying.

For all its diplomatic acumen, then, the Bush administration “failed to develop a grand vision commensurate with its potential” (487). When a grand vision for maintaining U.S. military preeminence—the Defense Planning Guidance—emerged from the Office of the Secretary of Defense in 1992, Scowcroft opposed it and would, Sparrow argues, have likely quashed it had Bush been reelected. Brent Scowcroft had little time for grand visions. Rather than critique Scowcroft’s disdain for integrative strategic concepts, as others have done, Sparrow marshals a subtle defense of Scowcroft’s pragmatic, inductive realism. By including within *The Strategist* a final section on the George W. Bush administration, a section that serves as an analytical foil, Sparrow demonstrates, quite effectively, how seductive and dangerously misleading grand strategic visions can be.

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<sup>1</sup> Kissinger, *The Troubled Partnership: A Re-appraisal of the Atlantic Alliance* (Anchor Books, 1966), p. 249.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

The point nonetheless prompts a question: was Scowcroft, for much of his career, beholden to a strategic concept that was as much a conceptual creation as the neoconservative vision, namely Cold War anti-Communism? Until 1991, at least, the Cold War was for Scowcroft a holistic worldview and a conceptual framework for policy. Sparrow quotes Scowcroft on this point, at a number of junctures. The Cold War, Scowcroft reflected in its aftermath, “dominated everything we did” (548). Challenges unrelated to the Soviet-American struggle were mere “pinpricks” (548). Having centered his worldview on the Cold War, the USSR’s demise was for Scowcroft a paradigmatic rupture. “My notion about the world,” he explained in 1991, “did not really include a world without a US-Soviet confrontation” (450). Strikingly, Scowcroft compared the significance of the USSR’s collapse to the discovery of the New World (487)—an overblown analogy that suggests how powerfully Cold War binaries had shaped Scowcroft’s conception of world politics.

Sparrow acknowledges that received bipolar assumptions led Scowcroft and the Bush administration astray on occasion. In an incisive case study on Afghanistan, Sparrow explains how Scowcroft and Bush’s unwillingness “to deviate from their Cold War strategies” led them to eschew engagement with Afghanistan’s Soviet-backed government, with results that facilitated the rise of the Taliban. But how did Brent Scowcroft come to inhabit such a rigid Cold War outlook? Sparrow’s biographical method suggests that experience was important: like George H.W. Bush (and many others), Scowcroft built his career in the Cold War national security state; it propelled his professional ascent and, presumably, shaped his worldview.

Still, experience alone may not suffice to explain why the Cold War defined Scowcroft’s outlook. No less than the neoconservative concept that Scowcroft repudiated, the anti-Soviet containment concept that Scowcroft favored was an ideological production. The point is not to disparage containment or to propose an equivalence; one strategic outlook engendered much responsible policy choices, the other more reckless misadventure. Rather, formulating foreign policy within a strategic concept requires projecting upon world politics frameworks of interpretation that impart coherence to events and guide the formulation of policy. Strategy, in this sense, is a heuristic device that mediates between circumstances and choice; arguably, it is not so different from historical interpretation, requiring the kind of creative conceptualization that Scowcroft eschewed. Kissinger put it like this: “I think of myself as a historian...I have tried to understand the forces that are at work.”<sup>3</sup> Of course, one need not create strategy in order to inhabit it. For most of its policymakers, Cold War containment was a derivative discourse, a framework more received than constructed.

When Scowcroft and others apprehended the world of the 1970s and 1980s as an arena of unremitting Cold War, they did not channel reality but rather interpreted it. Policymakers might have comprehended world events differently, perhaps highlighting North-South confrontation or globalization among the overarching challenges of their times. Alternative frameworks may or may not have been preferable; the point is not to adjudge, only to emphasize that all strategy-making entails intellectual imposition.

To return to the book’s title, then, this reviewer remains skeptical that even the best of strategists can be so practical, so precisely attuned to the objective realities of world events as Scowcroft appears to be throughout Sparrow’s presentation. To the extent that making strategy entails the interpretation of events and patterns, all strategists to some extent inhabit their own realities. Eschewing intellectual originality, Scowcroft did not create so much as he borrowed, from a Cold War worldview that pervaded the national security bureaucracy

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<sup>3</sup> US Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976*, Vol. 38 (Washington, D.C.: US GPO), no. 46.

from the late 1940s until 1990/1991. Until the USSR's demise, Scowcroft barely seems to have questioned the rectitude of his own assumptions about the bipolar essence of world politics and the centrality of anti-Soviet containment among the tasks facing U.S. foreign policy.

While Scowcroft's integrity, ethics, and service should inspire those who aspire to enter the public arena, as Sparrow rightly argues, his legacy as a strategist may warrant further reflection. After all, even those decision-makers who prefer action and implementation to contemplation and reflection remain the captives of concepts. Sparrow has produced a policy history, not an intellectual history, but it is to the book's great credit that it prompts sustained reflection on the nature of strategy. This reviewer is perhaps more skeptical than Sparrow that Scowcroft was an exemplary, even less *the* exemplary strategist of his times, but it is to *The Strategist's* great considerable credit that it permits serious reflection, sustained engagement, and even substantive disagreement. A peerless biography of a remarkable -- and remarkably-positioned -- life, Sparrow's brilliantly-executed book breaks new ground and deserves a broad readership.

**Review by James Graham Wilson, Office of the Historian, U.S. Department of State**

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**B**rent Scowcroft earned a Ph.D. in International Relations from Columbia University in 1967 and retired from the U.S. Air Force in 1975 with the rank of Lieutenant General. During the Reagan administration, the once and future National Security Advisor chaired one key presidential commission and served on another. He has received an honorary knighthood from Queen Elizabeth II and is universally regarded as a modest, kind, and generous individual. Suffice it to say: he probably does not frown over what people call him.

Yet the table of contents of Bartholomew Sparrow's *The Strategist: Brent Scowcroft and the Call of National Security*, which includes chapter titles "Soldier-Scholar," "The Fixer," "An Independent Voice," "Elder Statesman," and "The Strategist," may have caused him to smile. For many years, to regular watchers of the *PBS Newshour* and subscribers to *Foreign Affairs*, he came across as an alter ego to National Security Advisor and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger or President George H. W. Bush. "Enlightened realism," as Sparrow calls Scowcroft's approach to the world, had been the gist of then-governor George W. Bush's foreign policy platform during the 2000 presidential campaign (557). In 2003, Scowcroft raised the hackles of former colleagues when he wrote an op-ed questioning the drumbeat calling for war with Iraq. Most observers at the time presumed that Scowcroft was following orders to deliver the White House the message: phone home.

Sparrow makes a sustained and convincing case that Scowcroft stood, and stands, on his own. He was finishing up at West Point just as World War II was ending; a 1949 crash landing, which he miraculously survived, led him to reconsider a career as fighter pilot. Intelligence, acumen, and people skills compensated for time in combat. During the Korean War, Scowcroft was at Columbia studying under William T.R. Fox, a disciple of Hans Morgenthau. He went on to teach history at West Point under the mentorship of the legendary Col. George 'Abe' Lincoln, who took a demotion after World War II so that he could focus on what he regarded as the most critical task for the U.S. officer corps: teaching the next generation of American soldiers. In 1964, Scowcroft became a staff assistant to Major General Richard Yudin in the USAF's Directorate of Doctrine, Concepts, and Objectives. "One of his assignments," Sparrow writes, "was to determine the optimal balance in the United States' nuclear arsenal between the number and type of Strategic Air Command bombers and the number and configuration of intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs)" (49).

That must have been a high-octane exercise in strategic thinking. "Not only did Scowcroft have the motivation, stamina, and discipline to put in grueling hours," Sparrow goes on to say, "but he had an immense amount of what we would now identify as 'emotional intelligence'" (83). This quality came in handy when, in 1971, he became military assistant to President Richard Nixon. In that position, Scowcroft oversaw the operation of presidential vehicles in air, on land, and at sea. This responsibility meant plotting the course of the *Sequoia* (the former presidential yacht, once the Honey Fitz) on an evening cruise along the Potomac. It also entailed planning for the event of nuclear attack on the nation's capital. In 1973, Scowcroft was promoted to deputy national security advisor. Since his new boss, Henry Kissinger, spent much of his time either at the State Department or traveling, as Sparrow emphasizes here, Scowcroft served as the *de facto* national security advisor well before he took over that job in November 1975.

In these roles and throughout his career, Scowcroft reacted with skepticism when he heard simplistic answers to complex problems. 'Enlightened realism' did not mean that the United States should ignore human rights violations in other countries; it meant that hectoring countries publicly would provide fewer results that

engaging them through quiet diplomacy. There was nothing perilous about warm personal relations between Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev and American presidents, moreover, so long as the latter remained clear-eyed about the underlying dynamics of the Cold War. For instance, a key rationale for large nuclear arsenals was the imbalance between Warsaw Pact and NATO conventional forces. Scowcroft, who was skeptical about President Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) as well as his dream of getting rid of nuclear weapons, urged large reductions in Soviet conventional forces. The truly stabilizing outcome, he thought, would be to move away from land-based Multiple Independently Targetable Reentry Vehicles (MIRVs) to a force structure based on single-warhead missiles spread across the country.

The very dismal science of nuclear strategy, a topic on which Scowcroft excelled, tended not to whip up crowds on the campaign trail. Indeed, discussion of whether 'to build the Midgetman' must have perplexed the average voter in the 1988 presidential election. One reason Scowcroft was not known as a public strategist is that he did little to cultivate that image. Sparrow accentuates the point that George Kennan became the quintessential American strategist by writing prodigiously during the second half of this life -- even though he had no role in the crafting of U.S. strategy in the years following 1953. In contrast to Henry Kissinger and Zbigniew Brzezinski, who wrote big books and never shied from making broad pronouncements, Scowcroft kept his views close. (At age ninety, he is working on a memoir in which he will also elaborate on his overall worldview.)

Unlike Kennan and Kissinger, Scowcroft never allowed himself to be exasperated by the democratic process. He did not sulk, after the 1976 and 1992 elections -- even though he could not quite comprehend how Gerald Ford and then George Bush had lost. Nor did Scowcroft exasperate others over the course of his career. His superiors always liked and respected him; so did his subordinates, who turned into protégés and include Condoleezza Rice, Stephen Hadley, and Dr. Robert M. Gates (whose blurb appears alongside that of H. W. Brands, John Mearsheimer, Robert Jervis, John Deutch, and Melvyn Leffler). Leslie Gelb, who covered him for the *New York Times*, identifies Scowcroft as "the best national security advisor he had ever worked with" (490). One has to be impressed by someone who has spent the past fifty years in Washington and only really ticked off two people: White House Chief of Staff Bob Haldeman and Vice President Richard Cheney.

Occasionally, Sparrow's approbations become repetitive. "Most of the credit for the Scowcroft Commission's success goes to its chairman," he writes on page 240 (of 564); and, "Scowcroft was great," according to member Donald Rumsfeld. When asked to serve on other commissions, Scowcroft "invariably and unselfishly agreed to participate," because he "had liked dealing with diverse challenges and difficult puzzles that involved significant issues," and because of his "extraordinary dedication to public service" (244). The description of the Scowcroft Group, quoted verbatim from its website, is also not particularly enlightening: "clients are industry leaders in the telecommunications, insurance, aeronautics, energy, and financial products sectors; foreign direct investors in the electronics, utilities, energy, and food industries; and investors in the fixed income, equity, and commodities markets around the world" (499).

I wonder if Sparrow might have elaborated a bit more about Scowcroft's relationship with President George H. W. Bush. In pages 270-272, he gives an overview of their association, which began in 1973. In 1989, however, they were best friends -- just as Bush had been best friends with Secretary of State James Baker for two decades; it happened rather abruptly. And, I remain puzzled by the incident during the 1992 campaign where Bush fell behind in the polls. "Scowcroft didn't have a relationship with Bush's campaign advisers," Sparrow writes, "except when on behalf of the president he had to ask Baker to leave his position as secretary

of state to take over the reelection campaign. Bush couldn't ask his friend directly -- he'd then be conceding he needed Jim's help" (493). Of course he needed Baker's help. Just as he did in the 1980 Republican primary and the 1988 general election. Why does Scowcroft, "the Strategist," have to be the messenger?

It is worth exploring relations between Scowcroft, Bush, and Baker to understand better how and why the national security process functioned so much more smoothly during the period 1989-1992 than in previous (and succeeding) administrations. That endeavor may be more important than sorting out tactics from strategies, since no amount of planning can make up for a dysfunctional team. As Sparrow demonstrates, the ethos and judgment of Brent Scowcroft -- perhaps, in the end, even more so than his strategies -- allowed him to serve his country for so long and with such distinction.

**Author's Response by Bartholomew Sparrow, The University of Texas at Austin**

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I am grateful to the four reviewers for their extended and thoughtful comments on what is not a short book. And I thank Robert Jervis for introducing this discussion and the editors at H-Diplo for hosting and organizing this roundtable.

The reviewers' strongly positive responses to *The Strategist* are gratifying. Even more gratifying is the fact that they appreciated what I sought to accomplish. For Brent Scowcroft to have "entered the pantheon of America's elder statesmen," as Charles Edel writes, was precisely my intention. I wanted to inform readers of what Edel summarizes (see above) as Scowcroft's "remarkable career," his "qualities of mind and habit—order, discipline, level-headedness, and non-excitability," his central role as an "honest broker" under George H.W. Bush, and his consummate professionalism

I wanted to show that General Scowcroft was one of the United States' foremost wise men, as Daniel Sargent recognizes, notwithstanding Scowcroft's low public profile and personal modesty. Vietnam may have "broke[n] the mold" of wise men dating from the 1940s, but Scowcroft, Sargent notes, was one of the rare few who continued the "mid-century tradition."<sup>1</sup>

I wanted to make it clear that Scowcroft "stood, and stands on his own," as James Graham Wilson observes. Scowcroft resisted "simplistic answers to complex problem." He "excelled" in the "very dismal science of nuclear strategy." And he "never allowed himself to be exasperated by the democratic process," Wilson remarks, "[u]nlike [George] Kennan and [Henry] Kissinger."

To establish Scowcroft's significance as a presidential adviser and wise man demanded that the book be accurate and thorough, as Peter Harris and Sargent confirm. To this end, the biography used archival collections, oral histories, secondary sources, and other materials (e.g., encyclopedias, documentaries) supplemented with interviews (some in-person, others by telephone). The interviews gave me a sense of Scowcroft's own recollections and those of persons working with him. They helped to clarify what the issues and choices were for Scowcroft at any one time and, with the other research, provided a foundation for my analysis and interpretation of Scowcroft's actions, since memoranda, official reports, and other documents rarely speak for themselves and since secondary sources may sometimes be incongruent or inconsistent. So whether it was the changes in the Social Sciences Department at West Point in the late 1940s, the 'pause' in U.S.-Soviet relations at the beginning of first Bush administration, or U.S.-China relations before and after the Tiananmen Square massacre, I wanted the book to be as precise as possible in its descriptions and explanations of the situations Scowcroft confronted.

I also wanted to be fair in my analyses and interpretations, as Sargent and Harris appreciate. So while I am empathetic and try to be objective, at times I am critical of Scowcroft, as with the Bush administration's handling of the Panama coup attempt in October 1989, its policies vis-à-vis Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1990-1991, and its relationships with the Pakistan and Afghanistan governments from 1989 to 1992. Scowcroft was candid about where he made mistakes, such as the break-up of Yugoslavia and misreading the signs of Iraq's impending invasion of Kuwait in the days before August 2, 1990. But not always: he was

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Isaacson and Evan Thomas, *The Wise Men: Six Friends and the World They Made: Acheson, Bohlen, Harriman, Kennan, Lovett, McCloy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986).

protective of the Nixon administration's Vietnam policy and defended other actions and policies by the Nixon, Ford, and first Bush administration.

*The Strategist* is also in large part a work of political science, as Harris emphasizes. The book reveals the role that individual agency plays in the national security policy of the United States and in international relations more generally. Furthermore, because Scowcroft's career spans five presidential administrations and six separate terms of office,<sup>2</sup> it allows for a comparative study of the presidency and, in particular, of the departments and agencies of the executive branch. It showcases the role biography can play in the advancement of social science—here, as applied to “a critical analysis of the Washington foreign policy bureaucracy,” centered on the national security adviser, the National Security Council (NSC) staff, and the NSC process more generally (i.e., the means by which policies are decided in terms of both personnel appointments and how the interagency process is organized).

Because of Scowcroft's many roles and responsibilities over the course of his career, the book's account of bureaucratic politics includes descriptions and analyses of many different organizations and interagency arrangements—some permanent, some temporary—among them the White House Military Office (68-78), the President's Commission on Strategic Forces, popularly known as the Scowcroft Commission (220-243), the President's Special Review Board, known as the Tower Commission (244-261), and the intelligence community (120-30, 513-15, 518-21). In other words, I wanted to highlight the importance of the structure of decision-making (what Harris refers to as the “context”). The specifics of who participates in meetings and where decisions are made not only set the decision agenda, but predispose how effectively policy is be executed and implemented.

Further consistent with political science, as Harris notes, the book refrains from normative judgments. But it implicitly makes judgments in some instances, as when the Ford administration misled the press and the public on the number of Americans who lost their lives in the recovery of the *Mayaguez* and rescue of its crew (167). Or, when the George W. Bush administration decided to attack Iraq in 2003, even though there were no weapons of mass destruction nor any hard link established between Saddam Hussein's secular regime and Al Qaeda, and when it mishandled the invasion and occupation of Iraq—all because of the breakdown of the NSC process (531-540).

Finally, I wanted the book to make the world of national security policymaking intelligible. But in order to engage readers and pique their interest in the life of Brent Scowcroft, I needed to clearly explain the many institutions and intellectual constructs of U.S. foreign policy and the Cold War: realism; deterrence; the Strategic Arms Limitations Talks (SALT I and II) and Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START I and II); the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE); the emergence of international economic institutions (such as the Group of Seven or 'G7'); and neoconservatism, among others. It also meant introducing significant people and explaining events as accurately and concisely as I could. It is satisfying, then, to find that the reviewers, who are all accomplished scholars and talented writers, regard my efforts as having succeeded—particularly because many of the issues Scowcroft confronted and much of what he

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<sup>2</sup> This number counts Nixon's second term shared with Ford as one term, and both terms of the Reagan and George W. Bush presidencies.

achieved might seem to be obscure, abstruse, or highly complex. And I am thankful to my editor and others at the press for their assistance.

The reviewers bring up two issues that warrant further discussion. One concerns topics I could have discussed more fully but chose not to. Edel wonders why the book concludes with a (too) brief discussion of Scowcroft's faith. Harris asks about the costs that Scowcroft's work ethic and sense of duty exacted on his personal life, and both Harris and Sargent note that Scowcroft's wife plays little role in the book. Wilson remarks that the description of the Scowcroft Group's clients is unhelpful, and questions how Scowcroft and George H. W. Bush became such close friends. In some of these instances, I did not have sufficient evidence for constructing a fuller account; in others (and they are not necessarily mutually exclusive), I thought that further discussion would be counterproductive.

On the influence of Mormonism and overall impact of religion on Scowcroft, I deliberately trod lightly. Because we do not know exactly how and when either genetics and/or socialization shape individual lives--much less how the two interact--I did not want to make any definite claims about the impact of nature and/or nurture on Scowcroft. Clearly, however, heredity and family upbringing play crucial roles in forming people's personalities and shaping their subsequent decisions--just as do contemporaneous influences from bosses, peers, staff, the news media, and the larger political climate, both domestic and international. Quoting the late Marianne Eagleburger--the wife of Scowcroft's colleague and friend, former Secretary of State Larry Eagleburger--on Scowcroft's acceptance of things as they are and accedence to "God's plan" (563) allowed me to come full circle: to quietly draw a parallel between Scowcroft's remarkable character and extraordinary career, on the one hand, and the dedication to higher purpose and willpower shown by his great-grandparents (3-8) and to the staunch faith, extraordinary efforts, and considerable achievements of Richard Ballantyne (5-6), especially, on the other hand. (Ballantyne was the founder of the Mormon Sunday school system and a member of the Seventy, Brigham Young's inner council.)

Neither did I have much evidence bearing on Brent Scowcroft's relationship with his wife, Jackie (28-31, 35, 187-245, 425-426, 508-509). Neither Scowcroft nor his daughter nor other family members (understandably) said much about Jackie in my interviews, and I did not press them. Since it is hard for an outsider to gauge what a marriage is actually like in the best of circumstances--it is often hard even for the children--and since I had no correspondence or diaries to consult, it did not make sense to write much. I suspect that Harris is spot-on, though: that Scowcroft's extraordinary dedication to public service exacted its tolls. All the same, Scowcroft's near-singular focus on national security, his self-discipline, and his selflessness define who he is and who he has been, and I have no doubt Jackie accepted their respective roles. This is an area where a fuller account may be possible down the road.

To have postponed writing the biography would have had its advantages, then. A later biography could use more declassified documents, could have access to Scowcroft's personal records, could include additional interviews, could incorporate more recent historical research, and could benefit from more international sources. My choice, though, was to write about Scowcroft's life and career while I was able to interview him and his colleagues, friends, and significant acquaintances--many of them his contemporaries. Had I waited until Scowcroft passed away, I would have almost certainly not been able to learn of Scowcroft's and his colleagues' own thoughts first hand. For all of the advantages of waiting, I would have not found out how Scowcroft and those he worked with perceived the leading issues of the day, how they regarded each other, and how they viewed others within the U.S. government, in Congress, among organized interests, in the media, or overseas. Furthermore, I would have been handicapped in my efforts to establish the exact roles

Scowcroft had in making national security policy in the 1970s, 1980s, and early 1990s given his subdued presence in the archives and low profile in secondary sources. I would probably also have been unable to learn nearly so much about Scowcroft's childhood in Utah, his cadet years at West Point, and his Air Force career. Indicatively, eight of my interviewees have already passed away since 2009, when I first began interviewing others than Scowcroft.

The matter of insufficient evidence also dictated the brevity of my discussion of the Scowcroft Group's clients. Since privately held consulting firms can keep the names of their clients confidential, I had little to work with aside from what I could glean from public sources, a handful of interviews, and limited personal correspondence. Rather than embark on the investigative research of this hidden and very real part of Washington, D.C., and U.S. foreign policy and invest in the additional effort a more extensive discussion would have entailed, I decided to simply provide a brief overview, which would at least allow me to suggest how closely connected business, political, and military affairs can sometimes be (497-501, 505-506; also see 107-111, 560). My choice was made easier by virtue of the fact that Scowcroft's success as a consultant is predicated on his previous government service and own personality (both which I discuss). In addition, he began consulting relatively late in his career. Meanwhile, the Scowcroft Group is an ongoing business that is only partly tied to strategy and U.S. national security. So I decided to leave a fuller examination of the world of international business consulting to others to study.

A similar logic holds with my discussion of the relationships between Bush and Scowcroft, Bush and Baker, and Baker and Scowcroft, since I was not privy to their one-on-one meetings or personal conversations in the White House, at Camp David or Kennebunkport, or on board Air Force One. I simply tried to render these relationships as intelligibly as I could (266-268, 270-273), not unlike how I handled Scowcroft's relationship with Kissinger (81-90): I interviewed the principals, asked their colleagues, close advisers, and staff how they related to each other, spoke to other officials in the White House and government, talked to reporters and newscasters, and interviewed other people in close to Scowcroft. I also looked at transcripts of telephone conversations and memoranda of conversations. In addition, I consulted Bush and Scowcroft's joint memoirs, the memoirs of Secretary of State James A. Baker, Director of Intelligence (and later, Secretary of Defense) Robert M. Gates, and other members of the Bush administration, and biographies of George H. W. Bush.<sup>3</sup>

Wilson's question nevertheless remains: how did Bush and Scowcroft "rather abruptly" become such close friends? My indirect explanation (aside from what each said about the other and what others said about their friendship) is that Bush and Scowcroft were the same age, had complementary careers, had similar values, and

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<sup>3</sup> See George Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed* (New York: Knopf, 1995); James A. Baker, III, *The Politics of Diplomacy: Revolution, War, and Peace, 1989-1992* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1995); Colin Powell, *My American Journey: An Autobiography* (New York: Random House, 1995); Philip Zelikow and Condoleezza Rice, *Germany Unified and Europe Transformed: A Study in Statecraft* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995); Robert Hutchings, *American Diplomacy and the End of the Cold War: An Insider's Account of U.S. Policy in Europe, 1989-1992* (Washington, D.C.: The Woodrow Wilson Center Press; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997); Robert M. Gates, *From the Shadows* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996). Herbert S. Parmet, *George Bush: Life of a Lone Star Yankee* (New York: Scribner, 1997); John Robert Greene, *The Presidency of George Bush* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2000); Timothy Naftali, *George H. W. Bush* (New York: Times Books, 2007). Also see David Schmitz, *Brent Scowcroft: Internationalism and Post-Vietnam War American Foreign Policy* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2011).

shared similar worldviews. The circumstantial evidence is that the two men first got to know each other when Bush was U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, head of the Republican National Committee, U.S. Liaison to China, and Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) in 1976-1977. They became better acquainted during the Reagan administration (suggestively, Scowcroft was having dinner with Bush in the Vice President's mansion during the Reykjavik summit in early October 1986 [294]).

Yet neither an indirect explanation of their compatibility nor an argument based circumstantial evidence explains why they so quickly became such fast friends. Friendships can sometimes flourish rapidly in the right conditions, to be sure, but I think their joint interest in intelligence may have also played a crucial role. Not only had Bush been DCI, but intelligence was one of the few issue areas in which Bush as vice president took active part. Scowcroft, meanwhile, had been involved in intelligence throughout his Air Force career, and as national security advisor one of his responsibilities was to oversee covert actions. But without good information on their shared intelligence work or on the extent to which they collaborated--if at all--on 'Iraq-gate' (215-16), the Iran-contra affair (256, 260), or possibly other actions, I did not investigate exactly how their relationship developed.<sup>4</sup>

Another major issue the reviewers raise is of Scowcroft as a 'strategist.' Edel refers to Scowcroft as a "quintessential staff man," an "implementer," and an "exceptionally competent policymaker," rather than a conceptual thinker. Harris questions whether Scowcroft himself initiated meaningful strategy: Was he able to "stack the deck"? Was he a visionary? Sargent observes that Scowcroft appears to have been beholden to "Cold War anti-Communism" and also questions whether he was a grand theorist, one capable of creating his own facts. Wilson suggests Scowcroft's "ethos and judgment" were more important than his strategies.

I consider Scowcroft to be a strategist for several reasons. One is that throughout his career he has initiated solutions, whether as a teacher at West Point, staff officer at the Pentagon, or National Security Advisor under presidents Ford and Bush. This strategic vision was evident with his response to the threats to the intelligence community in 1974 and 1975, for example, where he was instrumental in reorganizing how covert operations were to be administered and, at same time, protecting the powers of the president and national security advisor (120-130). His creativity was manifest with his leadership of the Scowcroft commission, to give another example, when Scowcroft, together with James Woolsey and Rep. Les Aspin, came up with the solution to proceed with the MX in the Minuteman silos and, at the same time, introduce the smaller, single-warhead missile (the 'Midgetman') and reinstate U.S.-Soviet strategic weapons negotiations. It would have been very easy and perfectly understandable had he expended less effort and passed the buck back to the Reagan White House, since President Reagan and his advisers did not ask Scowcroft to serve in their administration in an official capacity.

His strategic vision was again evident in the Bush administration's response to President Mikhail Gorbachev's overtures to the United States and Western Europe, *glasnost*, and *perestroika*. He and the Bush administration were able to reduce the threat posed by nuclear and conventional weapons and simultaneously advance the United States and Europe's security and promote political liberalization and economic reform in the former

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<sup>4</sup> Examples of work that looks at political relationships include Robert Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Power* (New York: Harper, 2007); Nicholas Thompson, *The Hawk and the Dove: Paul Nitze, George Kennan, and the History of the Cold War* (New York: Henry Holt, 2009); Charles E. Neu, *Colonel House: A Biography of Woodrow Wilson's Silent Partner* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

Eastern Bloc. Because of his capacity at taking initiative, Scowcroft has been able to alter the intellectual architecture by which the Bush administration, U.S. government, media, American public, and the leaders and populations of other states understood and experienced international relations.<sup>5</sup>

Scowcroft, then, was able to change the facts on the ground. But he usually did so subtly, as with German reunification where neither the Soviet Union, nor France, nor the United Kingdom wanted the Federal Republic Germany and German Democratic Republic to reunite, fearing the economic, political, and potential military strength of a unified Germany. Gradually, however, President Bush, Baker, Scowcroft and their top aides were able to nudge the Soviet Union and their chief NATO allies to go along. Scowcroft also 'stacked the deck' by persuading President Bush, others in the White House, and people across the government, in Washington, and throughout the United States on the decision to have Iraq leave Kuwait—and to be removed by force if need be. He was able to persuade the President and others in the White House of the necessity for the removal of Iraq, even though most Pentagon leaders, most members of the Democrat-controlled House and Senate, and much of the public had no appetite for foreign military intervention by the United States after the scars from the Vietnam War (394-400). During the buildup to the Gulf War in late 1990, he and others in the White House were able to shape the tone and content of the national and local news on the possibility of the deployment of the U.S. military against Iraq and Saddam Hussein. Later, Scowcroft helped to convince a majority in the Senate (a House majority was not an issue) to authorize the use of force against Iraq.

On other occasions, Scowcroft changed the basic facts quietly or even secretly, as with his meetings with Chinese officials in July 1989 and December 1989, after the Tiananmen Square massacre. These meetings helped prepare the way for the smoother U.S.-China relations and arguably made Deng Xiaoping and China's turn to capitalism more feasible and helped secure the presence of U.S. companies in China's newly opened economy. To this end, he was able to persuade a necessary third of the Senate to vote against the override of President Bush's veto of the Pelosi Bill (which would have changed the terms by which Chinese students could attend U.S. colleges and universities [363]). In short, he was able to modify the conceptualization and structure of international relations during George H. W. Bush's term in office.

This ability to restructure U.S. national security policy extended to the capacity to adapt and reorganize the NSC process for the larger purposes of statecraft. Scowcroft accordingly created new decisionmaking bodies and introduced new policymaking processes during the Ford administration and throughout Bush's term in office. An implementer or staff member, no matter how brilliant, would not normally be expected to design and reconfigure bureaucratic processes and interagency configurations. He or she would not have the *nous* to repurpose existing bureaucratic procedures, create new organizations, and establish new interagency processes for the sake of realizing longer-term, overarching goals. Much of the time, Scowcroft himself was the one helping to decide, or himself deciding, what exactly was to be implemented and staffed out.

The instances of Scowcroft altering the reality of U.S. national security and influencing the contours of the international system may not be on the same scale as the formation of the United Nations, World Bank, and NATO, but these latter examples point just how rarely American presidents, secretaries of state, or other leaders are able to redefine the logic and institutions of U.S. foreign engagement. Not only does it take the

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<sup>5</sup> See Hal Brands, *What Good Is Grand Strategy? Power and Purpose in American Statecraft from Harry S. Truman to George W. Bush*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014), 3.

right international circumstances and favorable domestic conditions, it demands a great deal effort within the U.S. government, within policy communities and the media, and with foreign governments. If a strategist in the fullest sense—with an uppercase ‘S’—involves grand vision in combination with the ability to turn innovative ideas into new or reconfigured international institutions and changed behaviors, moments such the rise of the United States as a great power at the end of the nineteenth century and the windows opened by the two world wars are uncommon. Rare, too, is someone capable of being a strategist for more than a brief period.

Because of Scowcroft’s own understanding of the ideological, geopolitical, military, economic, and historical foundations of the Cold War, he was by no means captive to the Cold-War containment doctrine. In fact, he had internalized the containment doctrine through his own studies of Russian history, Soviet communism, and nuclear warfare, and from what he learned as a military attaché in Yugoslavia, teaching at West Point and the Air Force Academy, and working under one of the leading defense intellectuals in the Pentagon, Major General Richard Yudin. It was because he had mastered the intellectual basis for and the institutional components of containment that he could critically assist with orchestrating the reunification of Germany and coaxing the dissolution of the Soviet empire. By virtue of his understanding of what the risks of the Cold War were, he was able to work with President Bush and Secretary Baker to unwind the tensions between the superpowers.

His familiarity with the ideas, institutions, and organizations of the Cold War allowed him to improvise and thrive as an Air Force officer and political adviser. ‘Realism,’ like ‘containment’ or ‘deterrence,’ does not itself prescribe how the doctrine is to be applied, considering the many influences and contingent factors bearing on a crisis or any one issue. The history of the Vietnam War, the introduction and decline of détente, and the Ford administration’s handling of the killing of two U.S. military officers in the Korean demilitarized zone (204-208), for instance, may all have been ultimately grounded in the Cold War rivalry, but each could have prompted different decisions and proceeded in different directions. And those with their own grasp of the Soviet Union, their own understanding of the dynamics and components of the international system of states, their own knowledge of the federal bureaucracy, and their own appreciation of congressional politics and the media were the best positioned to preserve Americans’ ‘blood and treasure.’

Neither was Scowcroft merely reactive or protective of the status quo. His vision extended to expanding markets for American firms (which he has essentially continued to do with his consulting business since 1994) and, more broadly, to realizing ‘global public goods’ (556). This proactive and positive dimension to his policymaking also liberated him from the strictures of ‘Cold War containment,’ per his abiding interest in the United Nations and other international institutions, his support for establishing bilateral and multilateral agreements for the purpose of stabilizing international relations, and his interest in U.S.-China ties (a less progressive realist might simply view U.S.-China relations in terms of another Cold War). In China, Eastern Europe, Russia, North America, and elsewhere, he welcomed opportunities for growing American treasure.<sup>6</sup> His preferences may be consistent with long-term goals of saving American lives and retaining taxpayers’ dollars, but they also reflect his understanding of win-win situations—i.e., of ‘positive-sum games’ in the

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<sup>6</sup> Scowcroft also wanted to change the basis of whose ‘blood’ would be spilled, per his introduction to his edited volume on voluntary military service,<sup>6</sup> where he questioned the all-volunteer army and hinted he wanted to return to the draft (Brent Scowcroft, ed. *Military Service in the United States*. The American Assembly, Columbia University [Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1982]).

language of the public choice literature—where the United States was capable of being an initiator or catalyst. Scowcroft has had larger ambitions than what Harris describes as his “overriding goal to preserve the blood and treasure of the American people.”

All the same, Scowcroft’s first instinct was concern about the possible drawbacks to any potential action and to preserve the advantages of the status quo (555, 562), one that historians of the Bush administration have appropriately described as adhering to the principle, ‘First, do no harm.’ Evidence of this caution—an absence of “creative conceptualization” in Sargent’s words—is consistent with Scowcroft’s introduction and then retraction of the “New World Order” following the Cold War and with the Bush administration’s more general failure to present a coherent or nested set of principles by which to explain how the United States and the world should proceed in a world without the Soviet empire, with a capitalist and an authoritarian China, and with serious population pressures and accompanying environmental threats.<sup>7</sup> It hard to imagine Scowcroft publicly recommending that the United Nations Security Council be revised with a different group of permanent members so that Germany, India, and Brazil, say, could also be permanent members, or insisting that the United States lead in the formation of a rigorous international regime for tackling climate change. For him to do so would require that he be more outspoken and likely make him to face strong pushback from domestic and international sources. Yet throughout his career, Scowcroft has retained his remarkable influence by advising discreetly and dissenting quietly--by not burning bridges.

Had President Bush been reelected, however, it is possible that he, Scowcroft, and Baker (or another secretary of state) might have come up with a vision of a new post-Cold War world. Even if Scowcroft had been stunned by the end of the Cold War and momentarily thrown off stride, as he recognizes, his subsequent advice to presidents George W. Bush and Obama, analysis in *America and the World*, op-eds, speeches, remarks in interviews, and other comments make it clear that he could have been a partner in the construction of a new U.S. strategic vision in replace of Cold-War anti-communism. Scowcroft and the administration had a very short period in which to conceive, publicize, and implement a new global strategy (484-488).

In short, I wanted the biography to bring attention to the many aspects of being a ‘strategist’ and to direct readers’ focus to the importance of the NSC process, to the significance of teamwork and coordination in policymaking and implementation--strategy is almost never made by one person alone, even a U.S. president—to the interplay among strategic factors, and, of course, to Scowcroft himself. Conversely, we might be wary of being seduced by bold actions and the splash of favorable public relations, and, accordingly, be cautious about destroying existing institutions and regimes. Nixon’s and Kissinger’s acclaimed opening to the People’s Republic of China did not help the United States in Indochina, for example, it did not help to reduce the threat of nuclear warfare or U.S.-Soviet confrontation in the late 1970s and the early and mid-1980s, and it did not promote political liberalization and economic reform in China in the 1970s and 1980s.

I further wanted to show that making national security policy calls for having overall objectives or set of objectives, and taking the various actions, assembling the appropriate alliances, and building the domestic coalitions that are able to realize those objectives. Strategic national security policy is absolutely about

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<sup>7</sup> See Henry A. Kissinger, “National Security Study Memorandum 200: Implications of Worldwide Population Growth for U.S. Security and Overseas Interests,” December 10, 1974. [http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf\\_docs/PCAAB500.pdf](http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PCAAB500.pdf), declassified 7/3/89, accessed July 9, 2015.

choosing among and reconciling possibly irreconcilable objectives; rarely are competing principles *not* in conflict (per Edel's comment about the inconsistency of Scowcroft's realism, nationalism, internationalism, and optimism). Here is where Scowcroft was unusually proficient at keeping his eye on the chief objectives of the presidents of the United States, and then finding ways to integrate and prioritize among the various goals—all, while anticipating how current actions might impact future responses.

A few other points. Edel asks how it was that Scowcroft emerged “seemingly unscathed” from Vietnam, Watergate, and other crises that brought down many others from the Nixon and Ford administrations. The answer lies in Scowcroft's combination of personal qualities and professional attributes: the seriousness with which he dedicated himself to serving the president and safeguarding U.S. interests; his congenial personality and lack of self-promotion; his appeal to reason and ability to reach out to officials across the government and to members of Congress from both parties; his careful and respectful handling of the media; his integrity and moral compass; and the fact he almost never badmouthed others and thus rarely provoked animosity from his colleagues or opponents—even from those he has at times strongly opposed, such as former Secretary of State George Shultz, the neoconservative writer and columnist Bill Kristol and the neoconservative lawyer and former deputy national security advisor Elliott Abrams; none would speak ill of him (554). As the book points out in the opening anecdote of Scowcroft's dissent in 2002 against attacking Iraq, he can be outspoken. Such occasions are the exception, though. Almost never did others have reason criticize him, much less request his resignation.

I did not write more about *America and the World*,<sup>8</sup> which “gets curiously light treatment,” Edel writes, for several reasons: I summarized several of the book's main points (548-549); Scowcroft's analyses in *America and the World* often duplicated positions he had already articulated in an official capacity or had previously published in op-eds (496, 548); and I did not want to dedicate much space to a subject readers could readily discover for themselves. More generally, I might note that I did not have enough space to cover all topics as comprehensively as some might wish—and that sometimes I wished—given the extraordinary record of Scowcroft's actions and accomplishments, especially as security advisor. I did not discuss the Cyprus crisis of 1974, for instance, the Lebanon crisis of 1975-1976, or the conflict between Kissinger and U.S. Ambassador Frank Carlucci over U.S.-Portugal policy in 1976, except in relation to U.S.-Angola policy (195-198).<sup>9</sup> I could have dedicated more space to Scowcroft's parents and his childhood or written more about the U.S. foreign policy during the Bush administration (e.g., U.S.-Japan relations), for that matter. Instead, I chose to write about some people and certain events more thoroughly and to emphasize the significance of the NSC process.

Harris notes that Scowcroft's career points to the ethics of international realists, a point not made explicitly in *The Strategist*. But it is clearly implied with respect to the credibility and effectiveness of individual policymakers. So, too, with the international reputations of states and their heads of government. It also has a potentially great impact on the ‘soft power’ of states. The ethics of realism is even more relevant at present in view of the hostility that the United States engenders from much of the world and the fact that U.S. presidents have the ability to project military force—manned or unmanned—almost anywhere in the world,

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<sup>8</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski and Brent Scowcroft, *America and the World* (New York: Basic Books, 2008).

<sup>9</sup> See Bernardino Gomes and Tiago Moreira de Sá, *Carlucci Versus Kissinger: The U.S. and the Portuguese Revolution*, trans. Susana Serra Pereira (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011).

where the technology of present-day warfare may put less American blood at risk, but simultaneously makes the shedding of others' blood easier.

It is because of Scowcroft's command of the abstractions of the Cold War and of the theory and history of international relations that I respectfully disagree with Sargent's distinction between 'intellectual history' (which he writes *The Strategist* is not) and 'policy history' (which he writes it is). Rather, the biography reveals the great importance of the intellectual structure of the Cold War: how policymakers, members of Congress, and foreign correspondents understood communism and Soviet motives; how White House, Department of Defense, and other experts conceived of the nuclear arms race and strategic deterrence; how U.S. presidents, secretaries of state, and other advisers perceived of states' international reputations and credibility; and how they interpreted acts of violence--whether as 'terrorism' or not, for example, or whether as 'domestic' (i.e., civil strife) or 'international' (impinging on other states and significantly affecting U.S. interests). The seamlessness between intellectual constructs, or intellectually informed actions, and U.S. policy was especially apparent for Scowcroft who, as noted above, held his own positions on Soviet communism, the Cold-War strategic balance, the importance of United States' leadership, U.S.-European relations, and other 'soft structures' or informal institutions that define and direct policy choices. A cerebral man, he did not "disdain the conceptual," as Sargent has it; what he disdained were ideas ungrounded in and disarticulated from the realities of statecraft and international relations (such as the 'zero-nukes' campaign of universal nuclear disarmament [549-550]).

As for why Scowcroft had to ask Baker in mid-1992 to return to the White House to manage the president's foundering reelection campaign (493) as Wilson asks, my answer is that Bush and Baker were so competitive that the President was embarrassed at having to go back to his close friend and admit that he was dependent on Baker for his political success. So he had Scowcroft do it for him. It is very possible, though, that Scowcroft preempted the President and volunteered to ask Baker to return to manage the reelection campaign. It would have been wholly in character for him to have done so.