A Different Iraq War Story on the 10th Anniversary: The Memory of World War II in the Run-up to the Invasion
By John Worsencroft (Temple University)

George Wilson was only 16 years old when he ran off to join the Army in 1940. He participated in the D-Day invasion of Normandy and later the Battle of the Bulge, where he was taken prisoner and held until the fall of Berlin in 1945. Like so many veterans of World War II, Wilson waited decades before talking about his experiences. His personal story of service, sacrifice, and obligation to country became caught in the tidal wave of oral histories, popular and academic books, documentaries, movies, and TV series during the 1990s—the war’s 50th Anniversary “memory boom,” as one scholar called it. Yet Wilson became much more famous for his wartime actions in 2003 than for his bravery decades earlier. In March of that year, as the United States was engaged in a global “war on terror” and poised to open a new front in Iraq, George Wilson mounted a symbolic protest against the French government. Angered at France’s refusal to support the invasion of Iraq, Wilson went to its embassy in Washington, D.C. and returned his medal to the country he helped liberate long ago.

The popular memory of World War II—a recurrent memory in American discourse often evoked in moments of turmoil—served as a crucial subtext within which Americans debated whether to invade Iraq in 2002 and 2003. As Emily S. Rosenberg and other scholars have argued, public memory is an ongoing social construction, drawing on multiple and mutable memory traditions, involving the participation of governments, private institutions, lobbying groups, the media, and ordinary people. Moreover, public memory not only contributes to how we view the past; it also helps to shape the present. The memory of World War II, rejuvenated, recast, and retold repeatedly in American culture during the 1990s and the early 2000s, fundamentally framed how politicians, members of the media, and ordinary Americans interpreted both 9/11, and later, the run-up to the Iraq War. Americans are often driven by their belief in the universality of their ideals, values, and institutions, especially in times of conflict. Like so many times in the past, however, as Americans recalled the memory of World War II to gird themselves for war in Iraq, they confronted the limits of those beliefs.

Other scholars have written ably and amply on the World War II cultural memory boom of the 1990s, so I will not recount that story here. Instead, I will briefly point out that contrary to the proclamations of President George W. Bush, his administration, and several people in the media, the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, changed much but not everything. The attacks certainly did not stem the tide of remembering the “greatest generation” at the dawn of the 21st century. For example, the popular HBO miniseries Band of Brothers began airing on September 9, 2001, and continued to be aired, as scheduled, in the weeks after 9/11. Jerry Bruckheimer’s World War II epic romance, Pearl Harbor, hit the big screen in May prior to the attacks, but it was re-released in December 2001, with much fanfare, as part of a commemorative box set for the 60-year Anniversary of Pearl Harbor. If anything, 9/11 added fuel to the memory boom. Scholars have been attuned to the pervasiveness of World War II in pop culture, but one could include pop history as a vector of memory. Although an army of professional and amateur oral historians (what did you do in the good war, grandpa?) had been collecting personal narratives from World War II in earnest throughout the 1990s, the largest attempt to collect these stories, the Library of Congress Veteran’s History Project, did not go public until 2002. In fact, the overwhelming majority of the 50,000-plus World War II oral histories accessioned into the collection were conducted after September 11, 2001. From the “history wars” of the 1990s to the “war on terror” in the 2000s, capturing, reliving, and retelling the story of World War II figured prominently in people’s imaginations.

Memory scholars describe a process of remembering and forgetting in the creation of memory. As Rosenberg writes, “What becomes preserved as memory of the past cannot replicate the past but can only select and structure its remains” through remembering and forgetting. For George W. Bush, and those in his administration, the memory of World War II worked on two interrelated levels. First, the “good war” provided a pre-packaged set of tropes that Bush could draw upon to articulate his post-9/11 Manichean worldview. It is no coincidence that Bush labeled Iraq, Iran, and North Korea as an “axis of evil” in his 2002 State of the Union Address. Bush called upon the memory of the World War II Axis to aggregate the present evils of the world into an unholy alliance, while simultaneously forgetting the dissonance in that parallel—chiefly, that Iran and Iraq were mortal enemies, not allies. During a press conference in March 2002, a reporter asked the President if he was worried that the war on terror might lead to another Vietnam. The President responded, “Hutch [Ron
Hutchinson], let me tell you something, I believe this war is more akin to World War II than it is to Vietnam. This is a war in which we fight for the liberties and freedom of our country.”(4) World War II, in Bush’s estimation, was a war fought over universal ideals, and he saw the war on terror in the same light.

As the possibility of war with Iraq began seeping into American discourse in early 2002, the memory of World War II served a second purpose: it allowed Bush and his supporters to equate “containment”—the US’s policy toward Iraq since the First Gulf War and more broadly for much of the preceding Cold War—to the specter of “appeasement.” In an interview with European reporters in May 2002, Bush made his thoughts clear on containing Iraq: “I’m a patient man. I’m a deliberate man. But the word ‘contain’ doesn’t work if someone’s got the capacity to deliver a weapon of mass destruction. How can you contain someone when they’ve got the ability to blackmail or launch a weapon?”(5) Bush was not the only one who saw war with Iraq in this way. The historian Victor Davis Hanson railed against appeasers in the National Review, claiming that, “In some ways in our war against the terrorists we are like the democracies of the late 1930s.”(6) In August 2002, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld was more blunt as he called upon the lessons of the 1930s: “Think of all the countries that said, well, we don’t have enough evidence…. Mein Kampf had been written. Hitler had indicated what he intended to do. Maybe he won’t attack us. Maybe he won’t do this or that. Well, there were millions dead because of the miscalculations.”(7) The new muscular foreign policy of the “Bush Doctrine” required direct, even unilateral, action against a global enemy. The World War II-era ghost of “appeasement” became a blunt object to wield against critics.

The invocation of World War II was more than just transparent domestic propaganda, though, and the belief in the universality of American ideals often constrained the President and his administration. As Bush turned to Europe for support, he felt compelled to call upon old alliances forged in World War II. Even in Berlin, the President deployed the phantom of the war Germany had lost in a speech he delivered to the Reichstag. He cast the war on terror as a war against the “new totalitarian threat.” Although he uttered the oft-repeated line that “September 11th, 2001 cut a deep dividing line in our history,” in the same breath he quickly returned to World War II: “[it was] a change of eras as sharp as Pearl Harbor.” Asked by a German reporter about Iraq and Saddam Hussein, Bush responded, “[The regime is] a threat to Germany, it’s a threat to America, it’s a threat to civilization itself.”(8) After a lukewarm reception from the German people, President Bush sought refuge on the beaches of Normandy, France, where he delivered a Memorial Day speech—a first for a sitting president.(9) Normandy was an evocative choice for a president struggling to find willing partners in an ever-broadening war on terrorism. He began the speech with references to the moral clarity of wars in America’s past, “Our wars have won for us every hour that we live in freedom.” He told the audience that after the Civil War, America’s wars were fought far from home and for just ends. “In all those victories,” he stated, “American soldiers came to liberate, not to conquer.” Finally, he reminded his European audience of the debt they had incurred from America’s sacrifice. “Here, where we stand today, the new world came back to liberate the old. A bond was formed of shared trial and shared victory…. Our security is still bound up together in a transatlantic alliance, with soldiers in many uniforms defending the world from terrorists at this very hour.” Using the backdrop of more than 9,000 American graves, the President had come to collect on the price of freedom. Despite the high rhetoric, though, most Europeans were unmoved by this assessment of history, and neither France nor Germany would join the “coalition of the willing” in Iraq.

The memory of World War II was a vital framework as Americans grappled with understanding the world after 9/11. Yet, even as the year 2002 waned and the rhetoric shifted away from veiled threats like those in the “axis of evil” speech toward more “concrete” rationales for war—UN resolutions, WMD’s, regime change—representations of World War II persisted. It was within this context that George Wilson staged his protest. A few days before the war started, the 80-year-old vet from Easton, Pennsylvania, wearing a Purple Heart Society windbreaker adorned with medals he earned in his youth, marched up to the French embassy gates. Being media savvy, Wilson made sure to contact a film producer friend, Lou Reda, with whom he had worked a few years earlier on a World War II documentary for the History Channel. Reda, a fellow World War II veteran himself, made sure to tip off the press. At the gates, Wilson told the gathering of reporters, “I did my share, my part, to liberate [France] from Hitler, and this is the way that they repay me.” Embassy officials, obviously uncomfortable with the reporters and cameras, refused to take back his medal. One official implored Wilson, “Keep it for the French people.” Wilson was unequivocal, saying “I can’t honor it anymore. To me, it’s a joke.” Angry at France’s supposed betrayal over Iraq, he expressed his belief that the men buried at Normandy would be turning over in their graves, and concluded that, “[President Jacques] Chirac is old enough to remember what we did on his behalf against Hitler.” Wilson then took off his rainbow colored medal, given to him by the French government on the 50th Anniversary of the invasion of Normandy, and laid it at the gates of the embassy.

Today, the conventional wisdom on the run-up to Iraq is that it was Vietnam all over again; indeed, many who were opposed to the invasion made that connection vociferously from the start. Many historians, perhaps vexed by how Americans could have been manipulated once again into supporting another war of choice, have spilled much ink making the Vietnam-Iraq connection in the prefaces and epilogues of books published after 2003. Truly, the Iraq War clarified the meaning of Michael Herr’s
ponderous last line in Dispatches: “Vietnam, Vietnam, Vietnam, we’ve all been there.” A tapestry of lies, intelligence failures, and the politics of fear constituted much of the debate on Iraq. But a tapestry woven from what?

This past March marked the 10th Anniversary of the invasion of Iraq, and to mark that occasion several political, journalists, and members of the 24-hour-news-cycle commentariat penned thoughtful retrospectives on the war. They reveal that the debate over the meaning of Iraq is alive and well. On the right hand, David Frum, a neoconservative and former presidential speechwriter, took his share of responsibility for the lack of sober debate in 2002-03, although he fell short of an apology. On the left, Ezra Klein, a young, dumb (his words) college student in 2003 and now a columnist for The Washington Post, explicitly apologized for his erstwhile support, calling Iraq a mistake. Somewhat predictably, these articles present a mixture of apologizing for his erstwhile support, calling Iraq a mistake. Somewhat predictably, these articles present a mixture of 

Gone to Look for America: Doing International History in Ghana

By Carly Goodman (Temple University)

In Dr. Richard H. Immerman’s American foreign relations graduate courses at Temple, students spend the first few sessions grappling with the state of the field, and especially looking at changes in the scholarship since the end of the Cold War. Michael Hogan and Thomas Patterson, in their updated tome, Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations, emphasize recent broad changes in the field, which has shifted somewhat from looking at direct state-to-state relationships. Now students and scholars of American foreign relations can choose to look at the interaction of peoples and cultures, as well as states, and we are encouraged to be both multi-archival and creative in our use of non-governmental and cultural sources. What’s more, as Hogan recommended in his 2003 Presidential Address to the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations (SHAFR), we historians of international history should endeavor to internationalize our field by trying “harder to look at our subjects internationally, particularly those grounded in traditional geopolitics, because doing so will help us to contextualize American power.”

As Matthew Connelly argued in a SHAFR roundtable, we should recognize that diplomatic history is a part of the expanding fields of international and transnational history. Recent history has made this shift, he said, “irresistible.”

As a graduate student in this field, I could not resist, and I have set out to write a dissertation that is transnational, very recent, and that uses non-traditional sources. I am writing on recent immigration to the United States from West Africa, and the visa lottery that has enabled it, shaped visions of the U.S., and given unexpected actors a role in U.S. immigration policy. After passing my exams and defending my prospectus in late 2012, it was time to start researching. Because I am dealing with a program that came into existence in the late 1980s and did not start operating in the world until 1994, I had no choice but to think about sources outside the U.S. Archives. Remembering the cries to internationalize the field, I realized that I had to go to the field, in this case, Ghana in West Africa, in order to cont-
I advise any of you planning to come here to research to that. Open sewers abound, and having fallen into one once, day, and more than half the population lives on less than my is growing rapidly. But minimum wage is about $2 per sources, including cocoa, gold, and recently, oil. Its econo- last 20 years, and the country is blessed with natural re- that many of its West African neighbors have seen in the guidebooks as “Africa for beginners” but I think that is somewhat misleading. Ghana has been a democracy since 1957. But that “if you go there, life is going to be great.”

Being here is invaluable. Talking to people about the United States is enriching my understanding of American power and American foreign relations and of Ghana, particularly in the 1990s. One man I talked to in the northern region of Ghana told me that in the late 1990s, he would spend time writing to major hotels in the United States. Walisu would write to ask for pens, shampoos, etc. And he was successful—he often came back from the post office with big parcels full of hotel freebies. This hobby and these items gave him the feeling of being connected to the world outside his village and outside his country. America, he told me, “is life!” You get the feeling that “if you go there, life is going to be great.”

It is exciting – but also challenging – to be on the cutting edge. Working in Ghana is often quite different from working in the United States. Ghana is described in guidebooks as “Africa for beginners” but I think that is somewhat misleading. Ghana has been a democracy since 1992 and has not been embroiled in the kind of violence that many of its West African neighbors have seen in the last 20 years, and the country is blessed with natural resources, including cocoa, gold, and recently, oil. Its economy is growing rapidly. But minimum wage is about $2 per day, and more than half the population lives on less than that. Open sewers abound, and having fallen into one once, I advise any of you planning to come here to research to avoid doing so. A bigger public health problem might be the system of tro-tros, mini-buses that ply inter- and intra-city routes. My neighborhood seems to have inherited many of its tro-tros from German carpet companies. They spew black exhaust and are sometimes held together with rope and tape. It is one of my great pleasures to take public transportation abroad (and indeed, in the United States), but traffic accidents are a major cause of death here.

Actually, a more pressing concern has been “load shedding.” Due to a problem in the West African Light Crude Oil pipeline, Ghana, which produces its own electricity by way of a Kwan Krom-muh-era public works project, the Akosombo Dam, has been unable to meet domestic demand for power. The result has been systematic shutoffs of the electricity grid to conserve power. In my neighborhood, this has meant twelve-hour stints without power every other day, including some long nights from 6 PM to 6 AM. This has been devastating for local “cold stores”—stories that sell frozen and refrigerated meat locally—because the cost of a generator and fuel are prohibitively expensive, and without steady electricity, refrigerated meat spoils quickly. Obviously power outages are much less serious for me. But they are a challenge. Sleeping without a fan (or a breeze, in the dry season) in ninety-plus degree heat is more difficult than it sounds. Making sure my computer and recording equipment are charged is easy when the load-shedding follows a schedule, but much more difficult when, as happened the other day, the power went out for sixteen straight hours without notice. Waking up to find, after a fitful night, that the water is not running, I often take a cold bucket shower.

And then I go out to do my research. I have been walking into travel agencies and Internet cafes in to find people to interview about the American visa lottery. This has meant many false starts, awkward conversations, and, given the unforgiving tropical climate, hot and sweaty walks. After several hours, I was directed to a café in the center of town, where I met Gyasi, who agreed to talk to me. But I would have to come back on Saturday. On Friday, he cancelled because the café would be closed Saturday due to load shedding. On Monday, we agreed to meet, but when I arrived, it was “lights out” – and Gyasi had been sent out on an errand. I sat in the dark and waited, surrounded by faux-wood paneling and the old Dell PCs that dozens of people had used over the years to apply to the American visa lottery, imagining a different life in the United States. After an hour and a half, my subject arrived; scheduling can be an issue here in Ghana. Our interview was punctuated by his work– he stepped out to help customers, to respond to his boss, and, when the lights returned, to turn on the PCs. At that point, I interrupted us, too, to turn off the ceiling fan so that the noise would not interfere with the audio recording. The room was intensely hot and still. But the conversation was excellent.

These challenges and rewards are well-known to our colleagues who work specifically in African history, indeed any field that focuses on a region of the world not
well climate-controlled. (America is indeed exceptional at air conditioning.) But increasingly we historians of diplomacy, foreign relations, and international history, and even historians of American history, are asking questions that require a more international perspective. My advice? Renew your passport now.


CENFAD’s Colloquium Series, Spring 2013
By Matt Fay (Temple University) and David A. Guba, Jr. (Temple University)

This spring CENFAD welcomed four distinguished scholars to Temple University for its colloquium series. This semester’s talks dealt with the origins of the Vietnam War, the most dangerous year of the Cold War, military suicides in the wake of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the study of American history in China during the twentieth century.

Cornell University’s Frederik Logevall kicked off the spring semester on February 6 with a presentation on his Pulitzer Prize-winning book, Embers of War: The Fall of an Empire and the Making of America’s Vietnam. The goal of the book is to break with scholarship that has focused on the Vietnam conflict from early- and mid-1960s American phase onward. In his talk, Dr. Logevall argued that prior to World War II, the French easily dispatched Vietnamese attempts at independence. Weakened by Nazi conquest, the French could not quell the postwar uprising, and the United States, feeling itself invincible in the wake of World War II and untainted by colonial enterprises of its own, essentially followed in French footsteps to become embroiled in its own long war in Vietnam.

German historian Georg Schild, from Universität Tübingen followed on February 18 with his talk “The Most Dangerous Year of the Cold War.” Professor Schild challenged the idea, shared by many Cold War scholars, that years such as 1948 or 1962 represented the most dangerous of the superpower conflict. Instead, he argues, 1983 was the most dangerous due to multiple incidents, such as when Soviet fighters accidentally shot down a civilian airliner and NATO conducted military exercises that included mock nuclear launches that exacerbated U.S.-Soviet tensions. These incidents, coupled with incendiary rhetoric from the Reagan administration, such as when Ronald Reagan labeled the Soviet Union an “evil empire,” made 1983 a truly dangerous year.

On April 9, David Kieran of Franklin and Marshall College discussed his ongoing research on Army suicides in the wake of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. In the first part of a larger study, Dr. Kieran looks at the rising number of suicides by returning veterans, as well as the Army’s attempts to grapple with this crisis. Kieran finds that an increased post-September 11 “op tempo” and risk-acceptant behavior inherent in military culture have both contributed to the suicide epidemic. However, he finds military efforts to deal with the problem have in many ways exacerbated the problem by focusing more on organizational “efficiencies” than the individual needs of troubled soldiers.

In the final colloquium of the semester, Professor Han Yu of China’s Xiamen University presented an engaging talk on the study of American history in the People’s Republic of China (PRC) since 1949. Professor Yu, a specialist in American urban history, spent two weeks at Temple as a visiting scholar and part of CENFAD’s US Global Studies Initiative. In his talk, Yu stated that the study of American history in the PRC underwent four phases of development. Before the establishment of the PRC in 1949, the study of American history in China lacked formal or institutional backing and often appeared only in broad surveys of world history. After the establishment of the PRC in 1949, the formal study of American history emerged in several universities but strictly along the lines of Marxist orthodoxy. Professor Yu described American Studies in the PRC during the height of the Cold War (1949-1978) as the “era of three no’s: no freedom, no material, and no time.” Since the formation of the American History Review of China in 1978, Yu argued, the study of American history in China has grown in both popularity and objectivity. But even today, he concluded, there is still no absolute freedom for Chinese scholars of American history.

CENFAD would like to thank all of Spring 2013 colloquium speakers for their presentations, as well as all the numerous students, faculty, and alumni who promoted and attended these events.

CENFAD’s Military & Society Conference, Spring 2013
By Matt Fay (Temple University)

On March 1, 2013, a group of distinguished historians gathered in the Russell F. Weigley Room at Temple University for a two-day workshop on how historians approach the study of military and society. Led by CENFAD’S Acting Director, Professor Beth Bailey, workshop participants included Michael Allen from Northwestern University, Col. Gregory Daddis from the United States Military Academy, Michael Neiberg from the U.S. Naval Academy, Andrew Heubner from the University of Alabama, Kate Epstein from Rutgers University-Camden, Stephen Ortiz from SUNY Binghamton, James...
Sparrow from the University of Chicago, Heather Stur from the University of Southern Mississippi, High Point University’s Kara Vuic, Mark Wilson from UNC Charlotte, and Temple PhD students E.J. Catagnus and John Worsencroft.

The workshop opened on Friday afternoon, with the first panel focused on the militarization of American culture, and the panelists examined the issue from political, military, and even economic perspectives. The afternoon’s second panel examined historical representations of combat. The panelists discussed images of combat in film and television, what oral histories with veterans can tell about combat experience, and how the military prepares soldiers for what they will experience before they enter combat. Following the second panel, the workshop broke for an evening reception.

When the workshop reconvened on Saturday morning everyone looked forward to a full day of discussion on a variety of different themes. The first panel of the morning dealt with civil-military relations from civilian and military perspectives, and also looked at the political economy of military-industrial relations. The morning’s second panel looked at war and social change, gendered understandings of war, and the role of veterans in society. Of particular interest to the panelists was how gender analysis is often viewed from female perspectives but that the role of “masculinity” requires further examination when studying the military.

After lunch, a panel on teaching war and society discussed the need to distinguish between “war” and “warfare” and how to teach cultural history at the various service academies. The panel also returned to the theme of gender to determine how a course on its role in war and the military could be taught, and identified other themes that will need to be addressed in cultural history courses involving war or the military. Some of these themes included gender, race, nationalism, recruiting, “mythbusting,” politics, imperialism, technology, and much more.

Each panel gave way to a wide-ranging discussion of the topics presented. At the end of their presentation each panelist presented questions to those in attendance that, on each occasion, sparked a lively debated that touched on issues both historical and contemporary in nature.

The workshop ended with a rousing discussion of where historians who study military and society stand in the field. Are they military historians who study its social impact? Or are they social historians who study the military as a social institution? Most in the room leaned toward the latter, but there was concern that those outside of this self-selected group, at times, have trouble understanding where their work belongs. Gathering together this diverse and distinguished group, however, convincingly demonstrated the value of studying the military’s place in society.

Book Reviews:

Nuclear Pasts, Nuclear Futures: Two Books on Nuclear Weapons and International Politics
By Matt Fay (Temple University)


Most historians agree that nuclear weapons have had a tremendous impact on international affairs in the nearly seven decades since their introduction over the skies of Japan. Scholars debate hotly, however, the history of that impact and what it holds for the future of international security. Two recent books on nuclear weapons and politics showcase this fierce debate about the history of the world's most powerful weapons and divergent views of their future.

In Nuclear Statecraft: History and Strategy in America's Atomic Age, Francis Gavin revises the history of the nuclear age, reassessing various topics from crisis behavior to nuclear proliferation to the consequences of nuclear parity. Gavin, a historian and professor at the Lyndon B. Johnson School for Public Policy at the University of Texas, has two purposes for this undertaking. First, he seeks to challenge common misperceptions about nuclear weapons stemming from the conflation of the history of nuclear weapons with the history of the bipolar superpower competition during the Cold War. Here, Gavin succeeds with ease; his arguments challenge many of the theoretical and political assumptions that have characterized Cold War and post-Cold War assessments of nuclear weapons. Gavin’s second objective, to influence contemporary nuclear policymaking, is ambitious but problematic.

Gavin analyzes a variety of events and strategies involving nuclear weapons, including the various crises over Berlin, the Kennedy Administration's move to a strategy of Flexible Response, the process by which the Johnson Administration determined its nuclear non-proliferation policy, Nixon's ideas on nuclear weapons, and superpower nuclear parity in the 1970s. Drawing from newly-available archival documents, Gavin evaluates the prevailing historical and theoretical ideas underlying current notions of how nuclear weapons affected these events. According to Gavin, the role of nuclear weapons in these events has often been misconstrued because the military, ideological, and political conflict with the Soviet Union was seen as synonymous with the nuclear arms race. Complicating these perceptions was the public role of theorists in debates about the use or misuse of nuclear weapons to secure strategic and political aims. According to Gavin, theorists and
strategists presented ideas about what would prevent nuclear war between the United States and the Soviet Union. When no such war occurred, these same theories were viewed as prophetic.

In Gavin’s estimation, and opposing many of the prevailing notions about the Cold War, nuclear weapons could either stabilize or destabilize superpower relations depending on the political context. He argues, for example, that Berlin was a geopolitical anomaly that made the balance of resolve more important than traditional balance of power concerns. American leaders often pursued nuclear superiority and missile defense to support nuclear nonproliferation and bolster American security guarantees. The American acceptance of Soviet strategic parity was a result of detente rather than its cause. These conclusions challenge many of the theoretical and political assumptions that shape how nuclear weapons are viewed in both their Cold War and post-Cold War contexts.

So what does this reexamination of the history of nuclear weapons reveal about nuclear weapons today and ideas such as the Global Zero movement? According to Gavin, the answer depends not only on the actual role of nuclear weapons in international politics, but also on public perceptions of the role of these weapons. To this end, he identifies two broad categories of nuclear thinkers: “sanguinists,” who take a non-alarmist stance on nuclear weapons, believing that they play a vital role in a dangerous world, and “agonists”, who believe the destructive power of nuclear weapons prevents war or crisis by making it too dangerous to risk escalation to the nuclear level. Both sides marshal historical examples to bolster their positions, and as Gavin notes, deterrence is a powerful force in international politics, but so too is misperception.

The history Gavin presents is fascinating, and decoupling the history of nuclear weapons from the history of the Cold War will go a long way toward better understanding what role these weapons might play in the present and future. However, Gavin’s desire to use history as a tool for policymakers is somewhat problematic. Gavin concedes that the attention to nuance and lack of parsimony in historical research might not be useful in an immediate crisis, but he believes a better history can, at the very least, instill some humility in policymakers during times of crisis. If applied properly, this would be heartening. But without deep historical knowledge and analytical tools of a trained historian, a policymaker may use history to fall back onto comforting, but misleading, historical analogies that align with his or her preconceived biases. Furthermore, historians have numerous debates among themselves on these issues, as Gavin himself ably demonstrates. How will policymakers sift through the historiography to find useful information? While we should encourage our policymakers to foster a deep understanding of history, the fluid nature of the discipline might place practical limits on its application to policymaking efforts, especially when it come to high-stakes nuclear strategy.

The main historical lesson of the atomic age, Gavin concludes, is that what matters is not necessarily who possesses nuclear weapons, but how and to what end they are used. In The Second Nuclear Age: Strategy, Danger, and the New Power Politics, Paul Bracken, a professor of management and political science at Yale University, looks closely at the how and why of nuclear weapons and attempts to unlock their strategic implications. Bracken warns his readers—who include many high-level policymakers and military leaders—that overabundant focus on forestalling nuclear proliferation has led to a dearth of strategic thinking about what to do if and when those efforts fail. Unfortunately, Professor Bracken’s effort to lay the groundwork for new strategic thinking on nuclear weapons falls short of this laudable goal.

Bracken’s introductory chapter is an anecdote unto itself, recalling a war game involving a hypothetical Israeli-Iranian nuclear crisis where Iran has extended deterrence over Hezbollah as the latter launches rockets into northern Israel. The dynamics of this game are fascinating and Bracken presents some potential nuclear postures for the hypothetical Iranian arsenal that would be particularly worrisome in a Middle Eastern nuclear crisis. However, Bracken fails to fully explain the war game, leaving the reader with many questions. For example, what political goal would Tehran achieve by extending deterrence over Hezbollah in this crisis? In this scenario, even using the creative postures Bracken describes, Iran cannot strike Israel without inviting its own destruction. Why then, should Israel restrain itself from a scorched earth campaign to destroy Hezbollah once and for all? Iran’s willingness to deploy even a few nuclear weapons to threaten Israel is a threat against the Jewish State’s entire existence and might actually provide Israel with cover to effectively deal with its most immediate threat. To think Iran would risk its own existence to defend its non-state proxy seems like an unrealistic political goal, even in a hypothetical scenario. Such gaps in logic, and an overreliance on anecdotal evidence, distract from Bracken’s larger points.

Like Gavin, Bracken uses history as a means to understand the nuclear future. In one instance, he cites President Harry Truman’s subtle atomic threats during the Berlin Blockade between 1947 and 1948 as evidence of the efficacy of small nuclear arsenals. But this choice is strange; what place does a crisis that took place during America’s atomic monopoly have in a book discussing the dangers of emerging regional nuclear dynamics in a multi-nuclear world? It is perfectly appropriate to look at the efficacy of small nuclear arsenals—considering the existence of several today—but at the time of the first Berlin Crisis, the U.S. arsenal could hardly be considered small vis-à-vis a Soviet arsenal that did not yet exist. In fact, that “small” U.S. nuclear arsenal was, at the time, the largest in the world.

The main problem with The Second Nuclear Age lies in the title’s concept itself. Bracken argues that the second nuclear age is defined by strategic nuclear relationships outside of the superpower Cold War framework. However,
there was ample strategic nuclear activity outside the framework of the superpower conflict during the Cold War—a point that Gavin makes abundantly clear. One of the main features of the new age Bracken describes is that it is a “multiplayer game,” but despite the orthodox focus on the two main players during the Cold War, international politics has always been a multiplayer game. Bracken claims that both the U.S. and Soviet Union exerted tight control over their respective alliances, but this claim ignores important events such as the French exit from NATO’s military command and the Sino-Soviet split, to name just two.

Moreover, Bracken is indecisive about the starting date of his so-called second nuclear age. He points to several possibilities: the dueling Indo-Pakistani nuclear tests of 1998, India’s “peaceful nuclear explosion” of 1974, and China’s atomic test of October 1964. While Bracken does not settle on a particular start date, he acknowledges that there is most likely overlap between the two nuclear ages. If the second nuclear age goes back as far as Beijing’s atomic test, then in the nearly seventy years of the atomic age—from Hiroshima to the present day—Bracken’s two ages overlap by at least twenty-five years. However, if the second nuclear age began more recently, this periodization ignores a wide swath of nuclear activity that took place outside of the superpower competition during the Cold War. In either case, I am not convinced that the distinction between the two is a particularly useful concept, especially given the outpouring of recent scholarship that has broadened Cold War history well beyond the superpower dynamics of the era.

Bracken criticizes post-Cold War academic study of nuclear weapons, arguing that scholars have paid little attention to the strategic consequences of proliferation because foundation grants and federal funding have overwhelmingly funded nonproliferation specialists and disarmament activists. While he is right to note the importance of these funding streams and the resulting state of the field, he actively ignores the existing scholarship of the type he advocates. For example, Bracken’s chapter on South Asia fails to take into account Vipin Narang’s excellent analysis of Pakistan’s evolving nuclear posture and its implications for security on the subcontinent. The chapter on China makes no mention of Taylor Fravel and Evan Medeiros and their work on the evolution of Chinese nuclear doctrine. And to say that academics have spent no time considering how the United States might employ its nuclear arsenal in future crises completely ignores the ongoing—and often controversial—work of Keir Lieber and Daryl Press. One need not agree with these analyses, but they must at least be grappled with before dismissing the academy as a lost cause in the effort to understand the dynamics of a multinationuclear world.

These recent books by Professors Gavin and Bracken present very different pictures of the nuclear past in order to offer a glimpse of our nuclear future. Predicting the future in international politics is never easy and predictions regarding nuclear weapons have, more often than not, been either wholly inaccurate or effectively self-negating. However, a better understanding of the past may yet clarify what to do when the future arrives. While history’s complexity might not be conducive to the quick, clear answers policymakers often seek, Gavin is correct that good history should imbue policymakers with a sense of humility and perhaps they will avoid reaching for hackneyed analogies that offer simplistic explanations of inherently complex situations. Bracken is also correct to warn that the world ignores the strategic consequences of nuclear proliferation at its own peril. His understanding of the past, however, obscures the future he seeks to preserve.


By Kaete O’Connell (Temple University)

Not long ago, historical scholarship on human rights remained scarce, with much of the research left to political scientists and policy scholars. However, as the latest issue of Passport, the publication of the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations, states so succinctly: human rights history is here to stay. Sarah B. Snyder’s Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War is evidence of this trend and an important contribution to a rapidly growing new subfield. Uniting human rights history with the study of U.S. foreign relations, Snyder explores the growth of human rights activism in the final decade of the Cold War. Identifying a complex network of activists motivated by the language of the Helsinki Final Act, she boldly argues that the advocacy of these non-state actors not only facilitated reform, but also hastened an end to the Cold War.

Snyder’s narrative on human rights activism begins with the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) in 1973. Surprisingly, it was the Soviets who first proposed a European security conference, seeking formal recognition for their borders and hoping to promote trade. NATO nations swiftly hijacked the agenda, emphasizing...
greater respect for human rights and the freer movement of people throughout the continent. Eager to conclude the conference as quickly as possible, the Soviet Union signed the Helsinki Final Act (1975), which included an agreement on human rights. The treaty was a declaration of intent not bound by international law, but it did establish that member states could exchange views on the Final Act’s implementation, “meaning human rights abuses would now be subject to international diplomacy” (7). The United States, skeptical of early CSCE negotiations, gradually saw the value in regular meetings designed to assess compliance. These summits provided a forum not only for improving human rights practices, but also for embarrassing and later influencing Soviet leaders.

Snyder convincingly illustrates how the Helsinki Final Act created a means to repeatedly interrogate Soviet actions, or inaction, on issues of human rights. Rather than dissect the CSCE summits, she focuses on the work of activists and dissidents encouraged by the language of the Final Act – advocates who brought international attention to human rights abuses occurring in the Eastern Bloc. These individuals converged to create an informal, transnational “Helsinki network” comprised of diplomats, politicians, activists, journalists, international NGOs, and others. The network lacked the means to organize strategically and directly influence diplomacy, but it united individuals committed to the same ideals. Snyder’s major contribution is her focus on individual, non-state actors, emphasizing that it was not merely human rights ideals but human rights activists who initiated reforms. What began as a series of monitoring agencies evolved into a “more formal transnational ‘coalition,’” with an international nongovernmental organization, the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights (IHFF), at the helm (10). The dissidents and activists inspired by Helsinki did not directly influence Cold War policy, but through careful analysis of their interactions, Snyder reveals how they influenced Western leaders to apply greater pressure on the Soviet Union. Tracing the developments of subsequent summit meetings and the related actions of the Helsinki network on either side of the Iron Curtain, it becomes apparent that the issue of human rights became gradually embedded in East-West diplomacy.

Transnational history is ambitious, and no doubt exhausting, but as Snyder’s research demonstrates, it is equally rewarding. Consulting archives from across the globe to construct a narrative that includes perspectives of the multiple nations involved, Snyder peels back the many complicated layers of the Helsinki process, leaving readers with a clearer understanding of the network that emerged. Not only does she broaden her evidence base, but the addition of non-state actors also deepens her source pool. Her analysis remains the strongest, however, when discussing American political leaders, such as Rep. Millicent Fenwick or President Reagan, whose papers are more easily accessible than those belonging to Russian dissident Yuri Orlov or the Polish Helsinki Committee. Given the paucity and accessibility of surviving Eastern European documentation, Snyder does an admirable job employing both published and unpublished sources, as well as oral histories. I do think more research needs to be done to assess how NATO allies responded to the Final Act. While the views of actors in various Eastern European nations, such as Poland and Czechoslovakia, are considered, the Western perspective is dominated by the United States. British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher is only briefly mentioned, but I would be keen to read more about British interpretations of the Helsinki process given the country’s turbulent relationship with Ireland at this time.

Snyder admittedly seeks to retrieve the Helsinki Final Act from historical obscurity, but is careful to avoid ascribing causality. Through nuanced analysis of the Helsinki network, she illustrates how Soviet officials slowly succumbed to western pressures. Transnational activism made Soviet human rights abuses an obstacle to improved East-West relations. By the late 1980s, changing human rights practices was in Soviet national interest. The Helsinki Final Act did not end the Cold War, but it did foster the development of a network of activists whose contributions remain significant. Snyder’s story concludes with the fall of the Soviet Union, yet human rights abuses in Russia and former Soviet satellites persist, leading one to question not only the success of the Helsinki network, but also the legacy of human rights activism in a post-Cold War world.


By Dan Cormier (Temple University)

This is the final book in Paul Koistinen’s five-volume study of the political economy of American warfare. The study’s intent is to provide scholars and general readers with “a comprehensive, analytical, and interdisciplinary study of the economics of America’s wars from the colonial period to today” (1). This latest volume focuses on the policies, decisions, and circumstances that led to the military industrial complex (MIC) following World War II, throughout the Cold War, and into present day. Unlike previous studies, Koistinen’s work places the MIC at the center of national power and details how it influenced both public and private life.

In State of War, Koistinen describes the permanent economic mobilization of the Cold War and how it was new to, and significantly transformed, the American policy. The extended state of conflict coincided with a strong industrial economy, growing centralization of power in the national government, a modernized military apparatus and increasingly complex weapons technology to develop the MIC. He progressively builds upon each factor, in thematic chapters, to narrate the dominant, composite, pervasive and negative role the MIC plays in American politics, economics, and within the military.
Throughout the books Koistinen focuses on the collusion of the triad of Military-Industry-Government and how this resulted in its over-influence on domestic and foreign policy. A clear strength of the book is the author’s expansion beyond these traditional explanations, offering new dimensions to our understanding. He demonstrates how the MIC was supported by and, subsequently, negatively impacted academic, industrial, financial, and democratic institutions. He demonstrates, for example, how universities functioned as “the cerebral counterparts of defense contractors” (162-63). This enlightens readers toward an expanded understanding of the “complex.”

Another key insight was America’s atypical public-private contributions to national security, when compared to other industrialized nations. This dynamic, due to 19th and 20th century anti-statist attitudes and the lack of a developed professional civil service system, caused more private involvement in public affairs. Koistinen describes how thin-tank reports, such as RAND’s Strategic Airbase Study 1951-53, came to dominate policy. This report’s “calculated vulnerability” model moved to the center stage of strategic analysis—a logic which could never fully reduce or remove all vulnerabilities. The RAND study’s highly technical approach made risk a constant in American policy calculations and quickly outgunned the novices responsible for checking and balancing the process, like Congress (137). This phenomenon contributed to a pervasive environment of runaway military expenses, which quickly moved beyond the capacity of government to control. Today, the author contends, the MIC is “omnipresent and intractable” (138).

The book has clear strong points, but its conclusions are generally pessimistic, nostalgic, and offer few paths to changes. The decline in domestic industry and manufacturing during the period, due to globalization, are lamented, while international economic growth and democratization—pulling millions out of poverty and oppression—are never mentioned. The historic growth and affluence of American society are neglected while economic losses are given center stage. He does not fully examine why the military is one of the most respected institutions in America and why, despite the end of the Cold War, the MIC remains. Perhaps changes in mass consumption, mass production, mass media and mass politics continue to define our world and any solution must leverage these changes as well. Everyone remembers President Eisenhower’s farewell warning to “guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence...by the military-industrial complex.” But few pair it with President Kennedy’s Inaugural Address just hours later in which he reminded the American citizenry that “In your hands, my fellow citizens, more than mine, will rest the final success or failure of our course.” The challenges may require transforming the pervasive apathy of the citizenry and developing solutions bound by contemporary realities. Overall, the book is a significant contribution to our understanding of how the American “military industrial complex” developed and the legacy and challenges it presents today.


By Silke Zoller (Temple University)

Frank Costigliola, Professor of History at the University of Connecticut, is the author of yet another monograph on the origins of the Cold War. Though adding to an enormous literature on the subject, Costigliola’s *Roosevelt’s Lost Alliances: How Personal Politics helped Start the Cold War* takes a fresh look at the beginnings of the Cold War, offering readers an important revision to long-held assumptions. Costigliola is interested in how the Grand Alliance between the United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union formed during World War II, and also why it fell apart to create the Cold War.

Costigliola uses a novel approach in order to explain both the creation and the separation of the Grand Alliance. According to the author, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Winston S. Churchill, and Joseph Stalin formed close personal relationships with each other, and these personal connections, as well as connections formed with and between their underlings, made it possible for the leaders to overcome the huge policy issues and differences between their respective nations. Roosevelt played a vital role in this scenario. He shared Churchill convictions about the value of a capitalist society while simultaneously charming Stalin. Roosevelt adamantly insisted on including Stalin in any postwar planning scenario. When Roosevelt died, however, his successor, Harry S. Truman, was neither willing nor capable of upholding the connections the late president had formed. The personal relationships upon which the Grand Alliance had rested thus fell apart, leading to a spiraling of tensions that eventually ended in the Cold War. According to Costigliola, the death of Roosevelt caused the Cold War by severing the personal connections that might have guaranteed a more amiable post-war scenario.

Costigliola takes a subject with much historiography attached to it and yet manages to present an entirely new thesis. His book is an amalgamation of the traditional and the new. Though the basis of his work is the diplomatic history of Grand Alliance foreign relations, Costigliola makes his argument mainly through the rarely used fields of cultural and biographic history. His sources reflect this. Diaries and personal correspondences take precedence over official memoranda and government records. Costigliola’s use of these sources fleshes out his thesis well and strengthens his argument. With these sources, Costigliola is able to access the personal and private thoughts of the Allied leaders and their associates. Important examples include the Soviet leadership’s genuinely sympathetic reaction to Roosevelt’s death, as well as the Soviet alienation of key American diplomats such as Averell Harriman and George Ken-
The book, however, does have its shortcomings. At times it appears disjointed due to the sheer scale and diversity of methods in play. Diplomatic history is combined with biographies of key figures, and both are joined by analyses of cultural and family background, which leads to psychological analysis to explain why these figures acted the way they did. It is often difficult to grasp what string of thought the author is pursuing, especially since he often jumps back and forth between the key figures. Costigliola also occasionally provides estimates of key figures’ thoughts and why they acted the way they did based solely upon their family and cultural background, without sources like letters or diary entries to back up these claims. This quickly feels speculative.

In summary, though, Costigliola’s book is well-written and provides a compelling new look at a subject that has been heavily covered. The author also avoids falling into any of the ideological traps (such as orthodox or revisionist views) usually waiting to entrap a historian in this field. Roosevelt’s Lost Alliances also contributes to the professional discourse about the methodology of international history. On the one hand, Costigliola’s work is very traditional, focusing on nation-states, their leaders, and the relations between them. On the other hand, however, Costigliola’s cultural and biographical elements introduce the more modern trifecta of race, class, and gender into his book. This is a novelty in diplomatic history. At the same time, Costigliola’s focus on cultural history also includes transnational elements. For example, he describes the circles in which Roosevelt and Churchill were raised as “privileged cosmopolitans” and “a transatlantic elite.” In doing so, Costigliola focuses on subjects and themes that move beyond the traditional nation-state boundaries. Showing such circulations is a vital part of the self-definition of transnational history. Costigliola is therefore the author of an international history book that integrates many of the most recent methodological trends. He thus shows that it is possible to create a well-written, innovative work in the traditional field of diplomatic history.

News from Faculty, Students, and Alumni:
Compiled by David A. Guba, Jr. (Temple University)

Gregory J. W. Urwin, professor of history, assumed the office of president of the Society for Military History (SMH) at the end of that organization’s annual meeting in New Orleans on March 17, 2013. With just under 2,800 members, the SMH is largest international professional organization devoted to the study of past military affairs, and it publishes the journal of record in that field (the Journal of Military History). In addition to attending to various administrative duties, Urwin participated in the New Orleans meeting by commenting on a panel on “Revolution or Restraint? Culture, Identity, and Warfare in Early America,” participating in second panel on “Publishing in a Military History Series: The Editors Speak,” and moderating a plenary session in which seven former SMH presidents discussed “The 80th Anniversary of the Society for Military History: The Past and Future.” On returning to Temple University, Urwin reprised his longtime role as chair of the Professor Russell F. Weigley Award in Military History Committee. Urwin presented the Weigley Award, which is sponsored by the Army Heritage Center Foundation, to the authors of the two best papers in military history given at the latest iteration of the Barnes Club Conference on March 23. Urwin also wrote forewords for two recently released books – James Ottavio Castagnera, Counter Terrorism Issues: Case Studies in the Courtroom (Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press, 2013) and Kathleen Broome Williams, The Measure of a Man: My Father, the Marine Corps, and Saipan (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2013). Urwin plans to spend most of June and July in Richmond, Virginia, and London, England, to wrap up the archival research for his latest book project, “When Freedom Wore a Red Coat: A Social History of Cornwallis’ 1781 Virginia Campaign.”

Jay B. Lockenour’s essay on German war films, the publication of which was announced in the last issue, has won the Society for Military History’s Moncado Prize for five best articles of 2012 published in that society’s journal. In other exciting news, Dr. Lockenour has been invited to be the Distinguished Visiting Professor for the 2013-2014 academic year at the United States Air Force Academy, where Temple alumni Grant Weller (PhD 2008) and Eric Roehrkasse (MA 2012) are on the faculty. Recipients of this newsletter in the Colorado Springs area should feel free to contact Dr. Lockenour, as he would love to see friendly faces.

In February the Oxford Handbook of the Cold War, which Richard H. Immerman co-edited with Petra Goedde, was published, culminating a 6-year process. Immerman also submitted his manuscript, The Hidden Hand: A Brief History of the CIA, to Wiley-Blackwell. He then almost immediately left to take up his Miegunyah Distinguished Visiting Fellowship at the University of Melbourne in Australia. His public lecture on the tension between covert operations and intelligence analysis in the CIA was well received, as were his other talks and guest appearances in various classes on international history. Before returning Immerman gave a lecture assessing America’s official commemoration of the 50th Anniversary of the Vietnam War at Hanoi University. Immerman congratulates Beth Bailey on her outstanding job as acting director of CENFAD while he has been away.

Bobby Wintermute (Ph.D. 2006), Richard Grippaldi (Ph.D. ’11) and Jason W. Smith (Ph.D. ’12) - participated at the Society for History in the Federal Government - Oral History in the Mid-Atlantic Region conference, held 4 & 5 April at the National Archives in College Park, Maryland. The conference theme was "Public History in the Digital Age." The trio served on the panel "New Research and

Lt Col Grant T. Weller, USAF (Temple Ph.D., 2008) has left the Pentagon to return to the US Air Force Academy's Department of History, where he serves as an associate professor of History. He taught world history and modern Russian history this spring, and will teach world history this summer. His monograph, A Motor-Minded Army, will be published by the University Press of Kentucky in 2014. The book is a revision of his Temple dissertation, completed under the direction of Professor Gregory J. W. Urwin. He serves as chair of the Program Committee of the Rocky Mountain Military Affairs Society (RMMAS), which seeks to educate the public about warfare and military issues, past and present, through presentations and publications by scholars and other subject matter experts.

Former Davis Fellow, Matt Shannon (Temple Ph.D., 2013) successfully defended his dissertation, “Losing Hearts and Minds: American-Iranian Relations and International Education during the Cold War,” which was under the direction of Drs. Richard Immerman, Petra Goedde, David Farber, and James Goode (Grand Valley State University). This coming fall, Matt will begin his academic career as (tenure track) assistant professor of History at Emory and Henry College in Emory, Virginia.

This spring David A. Guba, Jr. (Ph.D. Student, Temple University) passed his qualifying exams with distinction and began preparations for his dissertation on the internationalization of higher education in Europe and the United States since the First World War. David (D.J.) would like to thank the entire CENFAD community for its active participation in the Center’s events throughout the past academic year. He would also like to thank Beth Bailey, Richard Immerman, Gregory Urwin, and Lafrance Howard for all of their help, guidance, and patience during his time as Davis Fellow.