

FEATURE REVIEW

Melvyn P. Leffler, *Ideology, and American Foreign Policy*

Melvyn P. Leffler. *The Specter of Communism: The United States and the Origins of the Cold War, 1917-1953*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1994. 147 pp. Index. \$17.95 (cloth). \$7.95 (paper).

In his classic study *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*, William Appleman Williams wrote that "the United States had from 1944 to at least 1962 a vast preponderance of power vis-à-vis the Soviet Union."¹ Those words at once identified Williams as an iconoclast who was radically departing from conventional wisdom about the nature of Soviet-American relations after the Second World War. Since the publication of the revised edition of *Tragedy* in 1972 no one has described as thoroughly as Melvyn P. Leffler how U.S. officials determined that preponderance was essential if they were to contain the spread of Soviet influence around the globe. Whether in his book, *A Preponderance of Power*, co-winner of the Bancroft Prize for 1992, or in his newer, brief synthesis about the origins of the Cold War, *The Specter of Communism*, Leffler has carved out a place for himself as one of the foremost contemporary interpreters of post-1945 U.S. foreign policy.²

Readers will take away two impressions from Leffler's work. First, he has conveyed in a remarkably nuanced fashion an incredible amount of scholarly literature and documentary evidence. Second, he is not altogether convincing about why U.S. officials opted to take potentially dangerous risks in order to achieve preponderant power after 1945. This essay examines the corpus of Leffler's scholarly writing concerning the shaping of American security policy in order better to understand what motivated the Truman administration. I will argue that Leffler, by failing systematically to evaluate the role of ideology in American decision making, cannot adequately address the crucial issue of motivation.

1. William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*, 2d rev. and enlarged ed. (New York, 1972), 207 (emphasis in original). I am grateful to Barton J. Bernstein for bringing this passage to my attention.

2. Melvyn P. Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War* (Stanford, 1992); idem, *The Specter of Communism: The United States and the Origins of the Cold War, 1917-1953* (New York, 1994). Belonging in the same category as Leffler are John Lewis Gaddis for his voluminous writings about the Cold War, Michael J. Hogan for his study of the Marshall Plan, and Bruce Cumings for his two-volume study of U.S. policy and the origins of the Korean War.

Leffler argues the case for seeking preponderance on two grounds, ideology and threat perception. His willingness to try to understand and ultimately to empathize with the worldview of U.S. leaders and the dilemmas they faced enabled him to write a rich history about the early years of the Cold War.³ Through Leffler, the determination of American leaders to defend what they saw as their nation's core values, that is, a dedication to representative institutions and economic freedom, makes the search for preponderant power appear to be the only reasonable course of action. The most prudent thing for officials to do was to seek to attain a position of unassailable, strategic strength—in both military and economic terms.

Some reviewers of *Preponderance* have disagreed with this line of reasoning. Carolyn Eisenberg, for example, recapitulates Leffler's litany of risks that U.S. officials took to head off unspecified future dangers. "It is curious to find," she then observes, "that Leffler's overall assessment of U.S. policymakers is mixed, if not moderately favorable."⁴ John Lewis Gaddis, however, lauds *Preponderance*. He agrees with Leffler that the so-called wise men of foreign affairs were more prudent, and at times more foolish, than they were wise. "Which is only to suggest," Gaddis notes in a conclusion that does not invite rebuttal, "that they were human, and that an ambiguous legacy is perhaps all we should have expected from them."⁵

This legacy of ambiguity is the interpretive heart and soul of *Preponderance*. As they assessed the Soviet threat, officials were highly "prescient" and often showed a "shrewd understanding of Soviet weaknesses . . . [and] Soviet strengths." In the name of national security, however, policymakers inevitably had to take considerable risks as they sought to advance U.S. interests. As if to emphasize the contingent nature of policymaking, Leffler finds that "some of the assumptions undergirding this risk-taking were not altogether wise."⁶

What is going on here, it seems to me, is more than an attempt on Leffler's part to present a balanced, fully informed evaluation of the Truman administration's foreign policy. It is also a concerted effort to influence how other scholars of U.S. foreign relations write history. Leffler is endeavoring to persuade his peers that a national security paradigm replete with voluminous detail constitutes the most authoritative way to write about the

3. One lesser matter, which will not be dealt with at length herein, is Leffler's occasional tendency to conflate his own voice and that of his subjects; see, for example, Leffler, *Preponderance*, 449, where he writes: "Yet the risks of war were great." Michael J. Hogan, it should be noted, raised a similar point in his review of Leffler's first book, *The Elusive Quest: America's Pursuit of European Stability and French Security, 1919-1933* (Chapel Hill, 1979); see *Pacific Historical Review* 50 (February 1981): 128-29.

4. Carolyn Eisenberg, "Wise Men, Foolish Choices," *The Nation*, 25 May 1992, 702.

5. John Lewis Gaddis, "How Wise Were the 'Wise Men'?" *Atlantic Monthly* 269 (February 1992): 100-103, 100 (quotation).

6. Leffler, *Preponderance*, 495, 499, 504.

postwar era.⁷ Scholarship ought to be informed, therefore, by a firm understanding of the world and its dangers as seen through the eyes of U.S. officials themselves. To assess the efficacy of writing from a postrevisionist perspective in the Leffler manner, it is necessary to determine whether officials were as prudent as Leffler claims.

Prudence relates closely to matters of threat and threat perception. To know whether prudence is an appropriate description of the actions of policymakers, we must ask how seriously and how directly the Soviets threatened vital or major interests of the United States during the nearly seven years of the Truman administration. Because of the paucity of Soviet documentation, the answers to these two queries are not fully knowable.

As a result, Leffler understandably refrains from speculating about Soviet goals and motives. He nevertheless suggests that the threat was not very serious and was largely an indirect one except during the Berlin Blockade of 1948–49. In the late winter and spring of 1947, when the Truman Doctrine and Marshall Plan were taking shape, concern about the possibility of a clash with the Soviets escalated in the White House; yet “no one feared Soviet military aggression.”⁸ To what extent, it might be asked, were the administration’s fears self-induced?

At other times when the Soviet threat conceivably loomed larger, the response of U.S. policymakers was not one of alarm. In the aftermath of the first Soviet atomic explosion, for example, Leffler asserts that “hardly anyone of influence in Washington, Paris, or London expected the Kremlin to engage in overt aggression.” More threatening to U.S. interests were the economically destabilizing dollar gap, the obstacles to European integration, and the reconstruction of Germany and Japan. Thus, Leffler concludes, “the problems that so perplexed and alarmed U.S. officials were not the making of the Soviet Union.”⁹ Even the onset of the Korean War, which administration officials portrayed as a Soviet-initiated test of their resolve, did not alter their perception that “the Soviet Union was not ready for and did not want global war.” Washington’s consistent belief in the relative weakness of the Soviet Union led not to a relaxation of tensions but instead to a pattern of American risk-taking in the steadfast pursuit of preponderant power.¹⁰

7. Leffler has not been reluctant to argue for the primacy of security analysis over other methodologies. See his “National Security,” in *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations*, ed. Michael J. Hogan and Thomas G. Paterson (New York, 1991), 202–13. See also Melvyn P. Leffler, “New Approaches, Old Interpretations, Prospective Reconfigurations,” *Diplomatic History* 19 (Spring 1995): 173–96.

8. Leffler, *Preponderance*, 163. Gaddis has described a Soviet threat that appeared to be rather more imminent. “But Soviet unilateralism,” he writes, “together with the conclusions about the roots of Soviet behavior that unilateralism provoked, had by 1947 created a credible source of danger.” John Lewis Gaddis, *The Long Peace: Inquiries into the History of the Cold War* (New York, 1987), 40.

9. Leffler, *Preponderance*, 358, 359.

10. *Ibid.*, 361–63, 367 (quotation), 397.

The Soviet threat, to the extent it existed, was therefore putatively long-term and nebulous. It was, in Leffler's view, a matter of perception; the "fear that the Soviet Union would gain *indirect* control over European resources, skilled labor, industrial infrastructure, and military bases constituted the national security nightmare of U.S. policymakers."¹¹ The belief that Soviet-inspired challenges might eventually threaten U.S. interests in some unspecified fashion made the construction of the national security state seem a mandatory and, consequently, a prudent course of action.

The United States therefore elected to militarize its foreign policy and endeavored to implement a plan of global containment in the face of a potential adversary that key policymakers acknowledged was inherently cautious. "Stalin was conciliatory," Leffler candidly writes. Nevertheless, "it is important to realize that the [Truman administration's] fears were real."¹² What, specifically, was the root cause of those fears? "The very existence of the Soviet Union," writes Leffler, "cast harrowing shadows and accentuated anxieties."¹³ For that reason, Leffler's prudent men sought a preponderance of power and felt compelled to wage cold war—as they did, in his telling, at times wisely, at times foolishly.

The gap between the limited nature of the Soviet threat and the precipitate response by U.S. policymakers has been the basis for the most incisive criticisms of *Preponderance*. Lynn Eden argues that an explanation of this strong reaction "grounded in domestic political economy" in addition to an emphasis upon the external environment would have been a useful way of analyzing U.S. actions.¹⁴ For Eden, *Preponderance* resembles traditional realist scholarship with its attendant conceptual limitations. Strategic power would dictate the course of the early Cold War—both in Leffler's interpretation of it and in the decision making of U.S. officials. Leffler weighs the evidence and concludes that "the Soviets . . . would bow to power realities in the long run [and] . . . acclimatize themselves to a configuration of power that assured America's preponderance."¹⁵

Bruce Cumings's critique of the book is sharper still. He derides Leffler's primary emphasis upon "geostrategic imperatives and inchoate fears," claiming it is essentially more descriptive than analytical. In other words,

11. *Ibid.*, 191 (emphasis added). Gaddis concurs in this depiction of the nature of the Soviet threat, noting that "it was the psychological implications of an extension of Soviet influence over Europe that probably most concerned American leaders." Gaddis, *The Long Peace*, 43. The salient question that arises, of course, is whether a credible threat and an indirect one that may exist at some unspecified future time are one and the same thing.

12. Leffler, *Preponderance*, 144, 146.

13. *Ibid.*, 515–16. Stalin's "cautious expansionism" as a result of wartime devastation and U.S. dominance of atomic power is emphasized in Vladislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War: From Stalin to Khrushchev* (Cambridge, MA, 1996), 1–77, 74 (quotation).

14. Lynn Eden, "The End of U.S. Cold War History? A Review Essay," *International Security* 18 (Summer 1993): 196ff.

15. Leffler, *Preponderance*, 506.

Leffler's exegesis about the shaping of U.S. security policy assumes what it should prove by evidence and argument. Indeed, Cumings characterizes Leffler's opus as an "ahistorical" treatment of the origins of the Cold War because it lacks a sound theoretical framework and fails to draw upon a sufficiently broad temporal context.¹⁶

Leffler responded to his critics in January 1995 in his presidential address to the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations (SHAFR). While reasserting his belief in the primacy of a national security approach to writing the history of American foreign relations, he observed that he would "try even harder today . . . to do justice to domestic political culture, . . . to grapple more effectively with the dynamic interplay between culture, ideology, language, and policy."¹⁷

Leffler's typical willingness to engage his critics pervades the pages of *The Specter of Communism*. Upon first glance, the four chapters of *Specter* seem much like *Preponderance*—a feast of erudition that identifies the quest for national security rather than economic imperatives as the primary force behind American foreign policy. Leffler writes: U.S. "superiority in atomic weapons, strategic forces, and warmaking capabilities" around 1950 induced caution on the part of a Kremlin already concerned about the exercise of American power. For American leaders, "the specter of expanding Communist power abroad engendered real fears at home," thus paving the way not only for an assertive policy of global containment but also for bipartisan support of it.¹⁸

As in *Preponderance*, Leffler avers that fear was a realistic response to Soviet policy initiatives. Leffler also notes in *Specter* that the United States paid a high price for seeking a preponderance of power. "Paradoxically," he finds, "the strategy of containment and preponderance, designed to protect the core values of democratic capitalism, threatened to crush them."¹⁹ Why did the pursuit of preponderant power have adverse consequences? The answer lies in the history of U.S.-Soviet relations.

Until late in the Second World War no discernible threat to U.S. interests emanated from the Soviet Union. The potential for conflict had always existed, though. *Specter* commences: "From the beginning [in 1917], there was an ideological clash."²⁰ The burden of the narrative in the first half of *Specter* places the preponderance of responsibility for subsequent conflict and the intensity of the Cold War squarely upon the obsession of American leaders with Bolshevism. This portion of the book, covering the period from

16. Bruce Cumings, " 'Revising Postrevisionism,' or, The Poverty of Theory in Diplomatic History," *Diplomatic History* 17 (Fall 1993): 564, 563.

17. Leffler, "New Approaches, Old Interpretations," 192. In the interest of full disclosure, I should point out that I read Leffler's presidential address in draft form and suggested a number of changes—some of which found their way into the final version.

18. Leffler, *Specter*, 103, 120.

19. *Ibid.*, 126.

20. *Ibid.*, 3.

1917 through mid-1947, speaks directly to one of Cumings's reservations about *Preponderance*: its ahistoricity.

Leffler also partially responds via *Specter* to another of Cumings's criticisms of *Preponderance*, its "lack of concern for hegemonic advance and decline."²¹ Between 1947 and 1950, the United States took on the role of hegemon in the world and in so doing "accepted responsibility for revitalizing the international economy, thwarting the spread of Communism, and guaranteeing the security of its partners."²² This insight remains largely unexplored in *Specter*, however, because Leffler does not address the relative importance of these tasks. Nor, in my estimation, does he adequately address the extent to which the ideology of U.S. leaders predisposed them to believe they clearly understood Soviet objectives.

Why Leffler seems disinclined to subject U.S. policy in the early Cold War to a systematic, trenchant analysis in *Specter* relates to a third of Cumings's caveats about Leffler's work in general, and about *Preponderance* specifically. Leffler does not explicitly present and evaluate a theory of the basis of state power and the motives of officials. Cumings argues that it is essential to decide whether geostrategy or international economy was more important in the minds of policymakers.²³ By failing to choose, Leffler diminishes the persuasiveness of his analysis.

It would appear as though Leffler and his critics are at an impasse. In two masterly works he has described the worldview of U.S. policymakers and interpreted their actions in the Cold War as a result of their belief that the Soviet Union posed a threat to the national interests of the United States. Critics have found fault with his postrevisionism because it tends to accept the perception of U.S. officials that the Soviets were implacable adversaries and because it is not grounded in theory. As a result, we are left with an incomplete understanding of why the Truman administration sought a preponderance of power in the early Cold War.

At the risk of further complicating matters, let me suggest that Leffler's own work, in *Specter*, *Preponderance*, and several articles published in the 1980s, has the potential to provide an alternative way of understanding how ideology and threat perception contributed to the shaping of American foreign policy. Leffler is right in one major respect. From the outset in 1917 Soviet-American relations were marked by an ideological clash.

The first two chapters of *Specter* discuss America's response to the rise of Soviet communism. U.S. officials aggressively defended their own ideology. Woodrow Wilson's concept of legitimate world order had no room for any revolution that departed from American ideals. "Even President Wilson indulged in red-baiting," writes Leffler.²⁴ For Herbert Hoover, "the specter

21. Cumings, " 'Revising Postrevisionism,' " 564-66.

22. Leffler, *Specter*, 64.

23. Cumings, " 'Revising Postrevisionism,' " 564.

24. Leffler, *Specter*, 15.

of Communism . . . was ideological and moral, not geopolitical or strategic."²⁵ But it was no less dangerous for that. If the leaders of the United States did not fear Soviet power before 1945, they did worry, Leffler argues, that "in a world dominated by totalitarian foes, [their nation] would have to relinquish its basic political and economic values."²⁶

The politics of war between 1940 and 1945 convinced U.S. officials of the need to universalize their ideology to protect themselves and their country against a future Soviet menace. Yet a military threat was not in the offing, given the terrible toll the Second World War took on the Soviet economy and society. Nor was there an imminent ideological threat to major U.S. interests. Leffler argues that "ideology served primarily as a lens through which Stalin interpreted threats and opportunities; revolutionary fervor rarely motivated his foreign policy."²⁷ In fact, U.S. military planners and intelligence analysts "recognized the malleability of Soviet ideology."²⁸

Why, then, did the United States, acting from a position of unassailed strength, opt to take innumerable dangerous risks in order to attain a preponderance of power in the early Cold War? Leffler's reluctance to pursue the logic and evidence of his argument in the first half of *Specter* leads him away from the likely, if disconcerting, answer. To their discredit, U.S. officials possessed scarcely more than rhetorical faith in democracy. They feared its very unpredictability. If left to choose, oppressed people would not necessarily adopt as their own the core values of America's governing elite. Thus, from Wilson through Truman, it was the specter of popular democracy in the form of self-determination and its potentially troubling consequences, as much as and perhaps more than the dark shadow of communism, that threatened the worldview and core values of U.S. officials.

Both *Specter* and *Preponderance* possess ample corroborative evidence to merit further investigation of this controversial proposition by a historian of Leffler's skills. For example: "Bolshevik appeals to the war-wearied masses of Europe . . . deeply troubled American officials" (*Specter*, p. 7); Wilson "worried that Bolshevik rhetoric would capture the imagination of European peoples" (*Specter*, pp. 7-8); "Wilson knew that Bolshevism's strength rested in its great appeal to demoralized and starving people" (*Specter*, p. 11); and "Wilson had thought that the 'American Negro returning from abroad would be our greatest medium in conveying Bolshevism to America'" (*Specter*, p. 14). Republicans in the 1920s saw opportunities for communism in "conflict, poverty, and inequality" (*Specter*, p. 18).²⁹ The late New Deal

25. *Ibid.*, 19.

26. *Ibid.*, 30.

27. *Ibid.*, 34.

28. Leffler, *Preponderance*, 46-47.

29. Returning to an issue that caused debate in his earlier work, Leffler implies that European stability in the 1920s was, in fact, a vital interest of the United States. He contends that "European countries needed Russian markets and raw materials" for reconstruction and, hence, for order and stability; Republicans "believed stability was prerequisite to prosperity

witnessed the creation of the House Committee on Un-American Affairs to curtail the possible spread of Communist influence in America. After the signing of the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact in August 1939, an accord that, Leffler notes, may have reflected Soviet insecurity in the face of overwhelming German power, President Franklin D. Roosevelt authorized the use of wiretaps on suspected domestic subversives.³⁰

Leffler's focus in the second half of *Specter* is on threat perception and the administration's efforts to prevent Soviet adventurism. The potential challenge of popular sentiment to the core values of America's governing elite does not vanish; it appears in a discussion about the threat of Asian nationalism to the globalization of those values. The response to nationalism in Asia was a strategy of co-optation.³¹ Leffler frames his subsequent interpretation of U.S. actions around the spiral model of the "security dilemma" in which the Americans and the Soviets found themselves. At this "critical moment in postwar Soviet policy," the Kremlin knew it "had to defeat the Marshall Plan." Thus, Stalin demanded "rigid compliance and total subordination" to the will of Moscow by Communists in Western Europe.³²

The perceived threat to core values posed by developments in Italy, France, and Greece carried over into the spring of 1948. If the opportunities for the growth of Soviet influence were real, so, too, was the inability of the United States to respond quickly to dire human needs. What transpired in the near term was not an infusion of emergency aid to expedite relief and recovery, but a reliance upon military assistance and covert operations to undermine the threat from the Left in France and Italy and a determination to revive German industrial might.³³

This latter action became especially urgent, officials believed, in the wake of the Czech coup of February 1948. The threat to the United States and its allies was not a military one but a fear, in Leffler's words, of "indigenous communism and the possible co-optation of German power by the Kremlin." This fear subsided when, after the defeat of the Left in Italian elections in April, the Communists did not try to overturn the results by force. The problem was that U.S. leaders were inclined to equate political activity by leftists who were essentially nationalists with evidence of Soviet expansion.³⁴

What Leffler interprets as the result of a diligent effort on the part of policymakers in Washington to overcome a Soviet-inspired ideological offen-

and peace." Leffler, *Specter*, 18. Compare idem, *The Elusive Quest*, 362–63, for an assessment rejecting linkage between European stability and American security.

30. Leffler, *Specter*, 25–26. The internment of Issei and Nisei, not the thousands of more familiar Americans of German ancestry, after Pearl Harbor is also indicative of a profound, if selective, lack of trust in the popular will.

31. Leffler, *Preponderance*, 94.

32. Leffler, *Specter*, 87–89, 66, 67 (quotations).

33. Ibid., 68–71; Leffler, *Preponderance*, 195–98.

34. Leffler, *Preponderance*, 206–14, 511, 213 (quotation).

sive can be analyzed as similar to the fear of popular discontent that so concerned Wilson at the end of the First World War. Identifying Soviet communism as the basis for dissent may be accurate to the extent that Stalin was seeking to reap benefits in the ideological clash with America, but it badly obscures the inability of the United States to meet the vocal demands for economic reconstruction that were resounding throughout Europe. It also minimizes the reality of popular grievances there. An analytical framework related to the nature of American state power might well have explored the events of 1947–48 from that revealing perspective.

Such an approach would also have put greater emphasis upon evidence Leffler adduces suggesting that America's core values were at risk so long as access to the mineral and industrial resources of Europe was in jeopardy.³⁵ Anything resembling the reimposition of state controls on the economy "would endanger the survival of the American system of free enterprise," contended Averell Harriman's Committee on European Recovery, a claim that suggests the existence of ideological rigidity on the part of the United States.³⁶ Indeed, U.S. leaders conveyed a strong sense of entitlement to the material wealth of postwar Europe as they sought a preponderance of power vis-à-vis the Soviet Union.

The price that the American people would have to pay to protect the core values treasured by American leaders would be high. Paul Nitze, father of NSC-68, called for an anti-Communist program of economic aid, military assistance, covert operations, and psychological warfare that would mean higher taxes, fewer social services and welfare programs, and tighter internal security.³⁷ On the latter front, the Truman administration had already made considerable strides through the establishment of its loyalty program. Although the "loss" of China handed over the loyalty issue to Truman's political enemies, the president's willingness to initiate the program and to embrace its principal features indicates how U.S. ideological imperatives in the Cold War defined the boundaries of legitimate political discourse. *Specter*, unlike *Preponderance*, addresses this issue but not through a probing theoretical inquiry into the ideology of America's governing elite.³⁸

It is this reluctance to subject the ideology of American leaders to intense critical scrutiny, a scrutiny that might find their worldview highly inflexible, that prevents Leffler's explanation of American foreign policy from being analytically compelling. He might be better served were he to incorporate into his work an evaluation of the less positive aspects of the belief

35. Leffler, *Specter*, 28.

36. Leffler, *Preponderance*, 162.

37. *Ibid.*, 355–57.

38. Leffler, *Specter*, 78–79, 126–30. Harry Truman, remembered as a "man of the people," turned out to be a man of only some of the people on loyalty questions. Such is the conclusion of a recent favorable biography of Truman; see Alonzo L. Hamby, *Man of the People: A Life of Harry S. Truman* (New York, 1995), 427–29. Hamby's honest account of this episode makes no effort to discuss it in relation to the worldview of key administration officials.

system of U.S. leaders: their persistent fear of self-determination; their readiness to assert the universality of their own core values; and their willingness to limit domestic political discourse in the name of security. Doing so would make it easier to judge how prudent the actions of policymakers actually were.

When Leffler first turned his scholarly attention to the topic of national security, he did not readily accept assertions by U.S. officials about the nature of the Soviet threat. He argued instead that U.S. security imperatives at the outset of the Cold War failed to take into account the "monumental losses" suffered by the Soviet Union during the Second World War and that officials "tended to simplify international realities."³⁹ Gaddis rebuked him for underestimating the nature of the Soviet threat, but for Leffler, it was the American definition of security that "escalat[ed] tension and mutual distrust."⁴⁰ Neither that essay nor another about Turkey and the Cold War carried disclaimers averring that U.S. fears were real. In considering assertions about aggressive Soviet intentions by Ambassador Edwin C. Wilson, Leffler found "considerable reason to question that view of Soviet behavior" and concluded that the Soviets "had reason to worry about the ramifications of United States aid to Turkey."⁴¹

The interpretation in Leffler's writing was clear though not theoretically based. Strategic and economic considerations had emboldened U.S. authorities to act precipitously after the Second World War. The postwar world was a more dangerous place largely because of security imperatives that led U.S. officials to guard against the rather unlikely event of Soviet aggression. Seeking a preponderance of power seemed more reckless than risky, more provocative than prudent.

Leffler soon abandoned this interpretive decisiveness. In examining the Yalta accords of February 1945 and the record of Soviet and American compliance, he described America's "own lackluster commitment to Yalta" and the "public sanctimoniousness" about Soviet compliance with the agreements. Yet he concluded that policymakers were responding "to the real and prospective growth of Soviet power."⁴² A similar interpretive perspective seems to be contained in an essay about U.S. strategy and the Marshall Plan. Leffler wrote that U.S. "initiatives posed real strategic dilemmas to the men in the Kremlin"; at the same time, "the fight against indigenous

39. Melvyn P. Leffler, "The American Conception of National Security and the Beginnings of the Cold War," *American Historical Review* 89 (April 1984): 346–81, 380 (quotations).

40. John Lewis Gaddis, "Comment," *ibid.*, 382–85; Leffler, "Reply," *ibid.*, 391–400, 399 (quotation).

41. Melvyn P. Leffler, "Strategy, Diplomacy, and the Cold War: The United States, Turkey, and NATO, 1945–1952," *Journal of American History* 71 (March 1985): 807–25, 810, 824 (quotations).

42. Melvyn P. Leffler, "Adherence to Agreements: Yalta and the Experiences of the Early Cold War," *International Security* 11 (Summer 1986): 88–123, 111, 119 (quotations).

communism had to be sustained inside Europe."⁴³ It is not clear whether the latter declaration is a paraphrase of the beliefs of U.S. officials or Leffler's own conclusion. If it is not his own, this essay is the only one in which he has not rendered a judgment when writing about U.S. security policy. Even so, the absence of Leffler's own clear voice resembles the interpretive reticence so characteristic of *Preponderance*.

That Leffler has examined thoroughly and published two extremely important accounts of the perils of policymaking in the early Cold War is to his everlasting credit. Would that he had also considered the deeper meaning of what Eisenberg terms the "disturbing narrative"⁴⁴ of *Preponderance*. In his SHAFR address, Leffler described how profoundly William Appleman Williams had influenced his intellectual development. Even so, according to Leffler, Williams had "neglected the international system, understated the threats and pressures that emanated from abroad, and discounted the real evil that existed in the world."⁴⁵

Perhaps so. But Williams understood that any interpretation of the United States in the world had to follow from an analysis of American ideology that was as tough-minded as it was fair. No mention of Williams graces the pages of *Preponderance* or *Specter*. Until Leffler and other scholars undertake a sustained inquiry into the worldview of America's leaders and how it has affected decision making, we are not going to get a thorough analysis of the shaping of foreign policy that persuasively explains why U.S. officials acted as they did in the early years of the Cold War.

43. Melvyn P. Leffler, "The United States and the Strategic Dimensions of the Marshall Plan," *Diplomatic History* 12 (Summer 1988): 277-306, 286, 305-6 (quotations).

44. Eisenberg, "Wise Men, Foolish Choices," 702.

45. Leffler, "New Approaches, Old Interpretations," 194. For Leffler's latest consideration of the history of the Cold War see idem, "Review Essay: Inside Enemy Archives: The Cold War Reopened," *Foreign Affairs* 75 (July/August 1996): 120-35.