

2019

The Catastrophe Artists: Understanding America's Unaccountable Foreign Policy Elite

Samuel Fraser

Recommended Citation

Fraser, Samuel, "The Catastrophe Artists: Understanding America's Unaccountable Foreign Policy Elite" (2019). *CMC Senior Theses*. 2158.

https://scholarship.claremont.edu/cmc_theses/2158

This Open Access Senior Thesis is brought to you by Scholarship@Claremont. It has been accepted for inclusion in this collection by an authorized administrator. For more information, please contact scholarship@cuc.claremont.edu.

Claremont McKenna College

*The Catastrophe Artists: Understanding America's Unaccountable
Foreign Policy Elite*

Submitted To

Professor Jennifer Taw

By

Sam Fraser

For

Senior Thesis

Fall 2018 and Spring 2019

April 29, 2019

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	4
Acknowledgements	5
Abstract	6
Introduction: Impunity and the American Elite	8
The Roots of the American Elite	11
The Evolution of the American Elite	13
The Breakdown of Meritocracy	15
What is the foreign policy elite?	23
The Nature of the Foreign Policy Elite	25
The Mechanisms of Elite Impunity	30
The Internal Dynamics of the Elite: Integration and Cohesion	31
Elite-Public Dynamics	44
Elliott Abrams	54
Mr. Abrams Goes to Washington	58
Mr. Abrams Goes to Court-Mandated Community Service	65
Abrams in the Second Bush Administration	70
Abrams Outside of Government	75
Henry Kissinger	81
Kissinger's Early Life	83
The Successes of Realpolitik	88
The Dark Side of Kissinger's Realism	94
Henry Kissinger, Honorary Harlem Globetrotter	108
Conclusion	120
A Bipartisan Problem	125
The Opinion-makers	130
Solutions	138
Bibliography	144

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank Professor Jennifer Taw, my adviser and reader for this project. The idea for this thesis would not have existed without her input, nor would the paper have taken shape as it did without her guidance. I further thank her for her patience with my sporadic and delayed approach to the writing process. I am additionally grateful to Ben Rhodes for giving me some of his thoughts on the issues addressed in this thesis, and to Professor Mietek Boduszynski for providing helpful guidance on my case studies.

I would also like to thank my parents, Bill and Janet Fraser, for supporting my education and enabling me to be here in the first place. I further thank my mother for providing me with much needed encouragement and prodding midway through the year.

Lastly, I am grateful for my friends here at Claremont McKenna, particularly Alejandro Sandell, Harrison Chotzen, Jesse Jennings, and Owen Dubeck. They kept me sane throughout the most exhausting weeks of this process.

Abstract

The 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq was a foreign policy action that violated international law, was based on false premises, and came to represent a clear and costly political disaster for the United States and Iraq. Why then, did none of the top policymakers responsible for the decision to invade face meaningful consequences – be they professional consequences, or legal ones? Why too have so many of the media figures who helped sell this war to the American public remained in their prestigious positions, with massive platforms to influence the American people?

This paper argues that the above groups, referred to as the foreign policy elite or foreign policy establishment, are granted a general impunity for their actions. It seeks to explain this condition of elite impunity, and how it operates, through Robert Putnam's theory of "elite integration." It also examines the role of congressional marginalization and public disengagement in enabling the foreign policy elite to escape accountability. The subsequent chapters offer case studies of how each of these factors has helped advance and preserve the careers of two prominent members of the foreign policy elite, Elliott Abrams and Henry Kissinger. Finally, the conclusion explores further questions on the matter of elite impunity, and offers some basic steps towards creating a more accountable foreign policy elite.

Keywords: foreign policy elite, foreign policy establishment, impunity, accountability

Introduction: Impunity and the American Elite

"In Washington, the very architects of disaster – the pundits who sold the Iraq War, the prophets of deregulation, the corrupt and discredited lobbyists and merchants of influence – return time and again, Terminator-like, to the seats of power." – Christopher Hayes, *Twilight of the Elites*, 2012.

In July of 2018, President Donald Trump nominated Judge Brett Kavanaugh of the D.C. Circuit Court to fill the vacancy on the U.S. Supreme Court left by the retirement of Justice Anthony Kennedy. Months later, Kavanaugh's confirmation was put in jeopardy after multiple women made detailed and credible allegations that the judge had sexually assaulted them while intoxicated in high school and college.¹

Beliefs regarding the judge's guilt and the seriousness of the allegations quickly divided along partisan lines, and after a limited investigation by the FBI, Republicans pushed through Kavanaugh's confirmation despite the accusations, and despite the fact that the judge appeared to lie numerous times in his testimony to the Senate.²

A number of left-wing writers pointed out that the non-punishment of Brett Kavanaugh is representative of a broader phenomenon of elite impunity in American politics and society. Not only do elites of various stripes typically escape punishment for many forms of malfeasance, but their defenders actually argue that any kind of

¹ Jamelle Bouie, "Brett Kavanaugh Is the Culmination of a Political Movement Devoted to the Status Quo," *Slate Magazine*, September 19, 2018, <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2018/09/brett-kavanaugh-christine-blasey-ford-elite-power.html>.

² Sheryl Gay Stolberg, "Kavanaugh Is Sworn In After Close Confirmation Vote in Senate," *The New York Times*, October 7, 2018, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/06/us/politics/brett-kavanaugh-supreme-court.html>.

punishment for their actions, usually characterized as “mistakes,” would be detrimental to the country as a whole. To punish these accomplished men (usually) would not only be unfair to them, as they have spent their whole lives climbing America’s meritocratic ladder and demonstrating the sort of virtues celebrated by the elite, but it would be unfair to the public, who would be deprived of the unique and irreplaceable skills these individuals offer.

Writing in *Slate*, Jamelle Bouie contrasts these defenses with the treatment less fortunate Americans might face for similar actions. “Calls for leniency and understanding for the judge before courts of power and opinion that may determine his career sit uncomfortably next to the treatment of young black Americans at the hands of police, or of unauthorized immigrants at the hands of border authorities.”³

In *Vox*, Matthew Yglesias notes that arguments for Kavanaugh’s indisputable legal credentials are made “despite never in his life having been involved in anything successful.”⁴ Instead, his career has been comprised of a series of fiascos – including work for independent counsel Ken Starr, whose investigation led to the failed impeachment proceedings against Bill Clinton, a clerkship for Alex Kozinski, an appeals court judge who was recently brought down by a sexual harassment scandal of his own, and a role as a senior staffer in the Bush administration. In this last position, he was revealed to have misled Congress on the administration’s handling of emails stolen from Democratic Committee staff.⁵

³ Bouie, “Brett Kavanaugh Is the Culmination of a Political Movement Devoted to the Status Quo.”

⁴ Matthew Yglesias, “Kavanaugh and Trump Are Part of a Larger Crisis of Elite Accountability in America,” *Vox*, September 21, 2018, <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2018/9/21/17876832/kavanaugh-trump-crisis-elite-accountability>.

⁵ *Ibid.*

In light of this, along with the allegations of sexual assault against him, it would have seemingly been prudent for the Trump administration to withdraw Kavanaugh's nomination and replace him with another staunchly conservative judge. Instead, however, the nomination became a proxy war over elite privilege at large. As Zach Carter wrote in *The Huffington Post*, the "highest pleasure" of the American elite "is the knowledge shared among its members that they live above democratic accountability, that their words and deeds are not constrained by the broader political community the way the words and deeds of mere citizens can be."⁶

In the last two decades, this privilege has been exercised conspicuously. As stated by Bouie, "The leaders who produced the catastrophic failures of the 2000s—from the Iraq War and an illegal torture regime to the financial crisis and the near-collapse of the global economy—remain elites in good standing, with leading roles in political and economic life."⁷

How has it come to pass that in a nation founded on liberty, justice, and equality before the law, political and economic elites could produce such failure and indulge in criminal behavior seemingly without consequence? While this current crisis of elite accountability is profoundly modern, it too has its roots in the nation's founding, and the notion of a ruling class characterized by higher talent and virtue.

⁶ Zach Carter, "Brett Kavanaugh Is A Poster Child For The American Aristocracy," *HuffPost*, September 19, 2018, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/brett-kavanaugh-american-aristocracy_n_5ba2cc8de4b0375f8f99c5d2

⁷ Bouie, "Brett Kavanaugh Is the Culmination of a Political Movement Devoted to the Status Quo."

The Roots of the American Elite

When America's founders broke away from the British Empire and formed a new state, they drew their primary inspiration not from ancient democracies, but from the Roman Republic.⁸ Democracy, they believed, in empowering the masses, would lead to factionalism and anarchy.⁹ In *Federalist 10*, James Madison explained how a republic would differ from this mass rule: government would be delegated to a number of representatives, who would be defined by their "wisdom" and by their "patriotism and love of justice."¹⁰

These representatives would constitute a "natural aristocracy," a notion endorsed even by Thomas Jefferson, who is considered one of the most democratically-inclined of the founders.¹¹ Jefferson believed that such an aristocracy should be actively cultivated, in contrast to John Adams, who believed it would rise inevitably, but both supported its rule.¹²

Thus, the founders accepted an inequality of wealth and power resembling, if not exactly, that of the patricians and the plebeians of Rome. This was premised on the notion that the ruling class would have different and better values than the masses.

The virtues of the ruling class were not, however, exercised equally towards all. Roman patricians were to treat and govern plebeians well, but not as peers. Furthermore,

⁸ Mortimer Newlin Stead Sellers, "Classical Influences on the American Founding Fathers," in *The Classical Tradition*, ed. Anthony Grafton, Glenn Most, and Salvatore Settis (Rochester, NY: Harvard, 2009), <https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=1437142>.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay, "Federalist 10," in *The Federalist Papers*, ed. Lawrence Goldman (Oxford ; Oxford University Press, 2008), 48.

¹¹ Philip J. Costopoulos, "Jefferson, Adams, and the Natural Aristocracy," *First Things*, May 1990, <https://www.firstthings.com/article/1990/05/jefferson-adams-and-the-natural-aristocracy>.

¹² Ibid.

the virtue of Roman consuls was not considered tarnished by how terribly they treated those on the receiving end of their republic's foreign policy, such as Carthaginians or Gauls. Accordingly, many of the founders could count themselves as honorable and virtuous despite the fact that they owned and abused slaves. Thus, republican virtue is tiered, with the highest decency and civility reserved for one's aristocratic peers, and the lowest for those excluded from citizenship.

This natural aristocracy was not to be unrestrained, however. The founders emphasized that rulers must be equally subject to the rule of law. In *Federalist 71*, Alexander Hamilton argued that the president must be "subordinate to the rule of law," while in *Federalist 57*, James Madison argued that without equality before the law, "every government degenerates into tyranny."¹³ Unambiguously, the first president of the United States, George Washington, declared that "the executive branch of this government never has, nor will suffer, while I preside, any improper conduct of its officers to escape with impunity."¹⁴

Thus, in conjunction with regular elections and checks-and-balances, equality before the law would theoretically ensure the continual replenishment of the political elite with capable, law-abiding, and honorable individuals, preserving liberty and justice despite inequalities of wealth and power.

¹³ Glenn Greenwald. *With Liberty and Justice for Some: How the Law is Used to Destroy Equality and Protect the Powerful*. (New York: Picador, 2011), 8.

¹⁴ Greenwald, 9.

The Evolution of the American Elite

The American aristocracy has changed a great deal since the time of the nation's founding. As Jefferson and Adams hoped, and as early scholars of American society like Alexis de Tocqueville recognized, a European-style aristocracy of lineage never took hold. However, those who did come to assume control of America's political, economic, and military might have steadily grown in power.

In his 1956 book *The Power Elite*, the sociologist C. Wright Mills documented the rise and development of the American elite from the Revolution to the early Cold War. He divided the elite's development over this time period into five epochs based on changes in the nation's structure of power. In the first such period, from the Revolution through the administration of John Adams, "the social and economic, the political and the military institutions were more or less unified in a simple and direct way" as "the individual men of these several elites moved easily from one role to another at the top of each of the major institutional orders."¹⁵ In the following epoch, from the presidency of Jefferson to Lincoln, the economic order broadened and became "ascendant" as the nation's territory grew, but the elite in command of these orders was more loosely overlapping, with decentralized power.¹⁶ With the Gilded Age, the economic elite through vast expansion of their wealth and naked corruption subordinated the political elite and public power in general. This trend was reversed somewhat with the reassertion of political power in the Progressive era, but Mills marks his fourth epoch with the New Deal.¹⁷ The new deal, in Mills description, "did not reverse the political and economic

¹⁵ C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), 269.

¹⁶ Mills, 271.

¹⁷ Mills, 272.

relations of the third era” but created “within the political arena... competing centers of power that challenged those of the corporate directors.”¹⁸

From the Second World War through the beginning of the Cold War, Mills identified the beginning of a fifth epoch. This era brought the ascent of Mills’ “power elite,” those “political, economic, and military circles which as an intricate set of overlapping cliques share decisions having at least national consequences.”¹⁹ “In so far as national events are decided,” said Mills, “the power elite are those who decide them.”²⁰

In the American power structure’s fifth epoch, the “tendency of business and government to become more intricately and deeply involved with each other... reached a new point of explicitness,” as in many cases, men of the corporate world assumed the reins of state power.²¹ Furthermore, with an enlarged executive branch and an entrenched war economy, military men gained a lasting and “decisive political relevance.”²² These developments occurred, Mills says, as “the focus of elite attention” shifted from domestic to international problems.²³ The United States, long a regional hegemon that involved itself only reluctantly in broader global conflict, had become the stronger of the world’s two superpowers, with the ability to shape a world order and influence events around the globe. The American elite, commanding enlarged and centralized institutions of power, had with nuclear weapons gained even the ability to wipe out life on earth.²⁴

¹⁸ Mills, 272.

¹⁹ Mills, 18.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Mills, 274.

²² Mills, 275.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Mills, 7.

After Mills' death in 1962, the role of the American elite within the country and the world continued to change. As Mills might have predicted, the elite soon faced a self-inflicted crisis of public confidence with the disastrous Vietnam War, the economic stagnation of the 1970s, and the fall of the Nixon administration due to the Watergate scandal. As journalist Christopher Hayes notes in his book *Twilight of the Elites*, this crisis of authority inspired polling companies like Gallup and the General Social Survey to begin periodically surveying Americans on their trust in major institutions such as “big business, public schools, the Supreme Court, and about a dozen others.”²⁵

Combined with the social movements of the 1960s, this led to a reshaping of America's power elite along the lines of meritocracy. The major institutions that made up this power structure, such as corporations, government agencies, and Ivy League colleges, remained in place, but were no longer as solely-dominated by the Anglo-Saxon company and military men described by Mills. In the principle of natural aristocracy, they brought into their ranks people from a more diverse set of geographical, racial, and religious backgrounds, as well as women and later, LGBT people.²⁶

The Breakdown of Meritocracy

Meritocracy is in principle a system in which rank, power, and wealth are theoretically distributed to those who through work and training have demonstrated the most merit to wield them. In *The Twilight of the Elites*, Hayes explains that a functioning meritocracy must operate on two principles: the Principle of Difference and the Principle

²⁵ Christopher Hayes. *The Twilight of the Elites: America After Meritocracy*. (New York: Crown Publishers, 2012) 10.

²⁶ Hayes, 22.

of Mobility.²⁷ The Principle of Difference states that different people have widely varying abilities and that society should be organized along those lines, with the most difficult, complex, and rewarding tasks falling to the most able people. The Principle of Mobility states that meritocracy requires “a continuous competitive selection process that ensures that success is rewarded and failure punished.”²⁸ That is, even once an individual has demonstrated the aptitude to gain a position of power, they must continue to do so throughout their career in order to retain that position. In a true meritocracy, rank cannot be fixed for lifetime and its advantages cannot be inherited by the next generation.²⁹

Such a continuous competitive selection process, however, proves difficult to sustain. Hayes cites the work of German social theorist Robert Michels, whose study of organizations led him to identify what he called “The Iron Law of Oligarchy.”³⁰ In short, this law posits that in any organization of a significant size, a “permanent, full-time cadre of leadership” will have to be selected to make everyday decisions.³¹ Eventually, no matter how nominally committed the organization is to democracy, this leadership class will develop its own interests distinct from those of membership at large, and will have the means of power to “manipulate the opinion of the masses” and become independent of their control, creating what is functionally an oligarchy.³²

Hayes asserts that a similar outcome is an inevitable product of meritocracy. Dubbing this “the Iron Law of Meritocracy,” he says that in any meritocratic system, the vital process of mobility will eventually break down. “Eventually,” he states, “the

²⁷ Hayes, 56.

²⁸ Hayes, 57.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Hayes, 56.

³¹ Hayes, 55.

³² Ibid.

inequality produced by a meritocratic system will grow large enough to subvert the mechanisms of mobility. Unequal outcomes make equal opportunity impossible.”³³ The result of this is that Jefferson’s “natural aristocracy” comes to resemble something closer to a classical aristocracy – and in keeping with this, the United States in the 21st century has seen wealth inequality reach record levels while social mobility has dropped significantly.³⁴

Through this process, the elite does not only become wealthier and more entrenched, but it is also thoroughly corrupted. Hayes describes the kind of elite that such a broken meritocracy might produce as “a group of hyper-educated, ambitious overachievers who enjoyed tremendous monetary rewards as well as unparalleled political power and prestige, and yet who managed to insulate themselves from sanction, competition, and accountability.”³⁵ Members of this elite class would “face no actual sanctions for failing at their duties or succumbing to the temptations of corruption” and it would “reflexively protect its worst members.”³⁶

A thorough examination of the American elite and its record over the past several decades suggests that exactly this has occurred. The new meritocracy did not dispense with the structural inequalities of wealth and power that defined Mills’ power elite. If anything, it exacerbated them, as it conferred, in the words of Hayes, “vastly unequal compensation and resources” on those determined to be ambitious and talented” and

³³ Hayes, 57.

³⁴ Alana Semuels, “Poor at 20, Poor for Life,” *The Atlantic*, July 14, 2016, <https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2016/07/social-mobility-america/491240/>.

³⁵ Hayes, 64.

³⁶ Hayes, 64.

“facilitated accelerating and extreme economic inequality of a scope and scale unseen since the last Gilded Age.”³⁷

Aided by a series of crises in the early 21st century, this meritocratic elite has overseen declines in public trust in institutions to well below their levels following Watergate and the Vietnam War. For some institutions, like big business and organized labor, decline in trust since the 1970s has been slight – in large part because public confidence in each was quite low already.³⁸

Other institutions saw more drastic drops in public confidence. According to Gallup, the percentage of Americans expressing “a great deal” or “quite a lot” of confidence in the Supreme Court declined from 45 to 37 percent between 1973 and 2018, while trust in Congress fell from 42 percent to a dismal 11 percent. Trust in the presidency fell from 52 to 37 percent, and in newspapers, from 39 to 23 percent. Trust in television news, which Gallup began monitoring in 1991, fell from 46 to 20 percent.³⁹

Only a handful of institutions saw increases in public confidence during this period – and notably, all three were institutions of state coercion. Trust in the criminal justice system remains low, but increased from 17 percent in 1993 to 22 percent in 2018, while the police saw their public trust increase from 52 to 54 percent over this period. The military, meanwhile, has cemented its position as America’s most trusted institution, with public confidence in the armed forces growing from 58 percent in 1975 to 74 percent today.⁴⁰

³⁷ Hayes, 22.

³⁸ “Confidence in Institutions,” Gallup, accessed April 26, 2019, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/1597/Confidence-Institutions.aspx>.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

Of course, complete blame for this crisis of confidence cannot be placed at the feet of the elite. It is possible that these low levels of trust are not caused by the elite's actual performance. One explanation favored by many in the elite is the rise of the 24-hour news cycle and the proliferation of alternative media sources on the Internet. As Hayes says, "the twenty-four-hour news cycle and the frenetic intensity of the Internet eat away at people's faith by sensationalizing mistakes and insinuating nefarious motives."⁴¹ This fragmented and polarized media landscape may highlight negative news, giving the public the impression that things are worse than they really are.

However, this is not a sufficient explanation for the crisis. Whatever the corrosive effects of the modern media ecosystem may be, the elite has provided more than enough fodder for negativity. In the first decade of the 21st century, the political and economic elite set up, through actions both misguided and malicious, a financial crisis that caused the worst global recession since the 1930s. Furthermore, the political elite allowed the worst and highest offenders in this crisis to escape any meaningful consequences.⁴²

Some of the most flagrant failings of the U.S. elite, however, have come in the realm of foreign policy. In the 1970s, the disaster of the Vietnam War exposed the fallibility and recklessness of America's foreign policy establishment, while the Church Committee exposed the overreach and abuses of the U.S. intelligence apparatus.⁴³ The collapse of the Soviet Union and America's "victory" in the Cold War in 1991 briefly

⁴¹ Hayes, 11.

⁴² William D. Cohan, "How Wall Street's Bankers Stayed Out of Jail," *The Atlantic*, August 10, 2015, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/09/how-wall-streets-bankers-stayed-out-of-jail/399368/>.

⁴³ Thomas Young, "40 Years Ago, Church Committee Investigated Americans Spying on Americans," *Brookings*, November 30, 2001, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brookings-now/2015/05/06/40-years-ago-church-committee-investigated-americans-spying-on-americans/>.

appeared to vindicate U.S. foreign policy. However, this momentary sense of triumph was shattered by the terrorist attacks of September 11th, and perhaps even more so by the U.S. invasion of Iraq shortly after.

In 2003, the United States and several allies invaded Iraq against much opposition among the international community, on the basis that the Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein was building weapons of mass destruction with which he could threaten the world.⁴⁴ The invasion, according to the Bush administration and its backers in the media and foreign policy intelligentsia, would depose the cruel and reckless Hussein and build a stable democracy in Iraq, which in turn would help promote peace and democracy throughout the Middle East at large.⁴⁵

Of course, only the first of these goals was achieved in any meaningful way. Hussein was ousted in short order, and later tried and executed, but the supposed WMDs – biological, chemical, or nuclear – never materialized. Instead, it was revealed that the Bush administration had manipulated questionable intelligence on the alleged Iraqi weapons program to make their case for the war seem stronger. Despite quick victory over Saddam’s forces, the U.S. coalition was soon battling a sectarian insurgency that would keep its forces fighting in the country until 2011. The war also helped birth a new international terror threat in the Islamic State, empowered Iran, and over seven years since it officially ended, has not produced a functioning pluralistic democracy in Iraq.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ “The Iraq War,” Council on Foreign Relations, accessed April 26, 2019, <https://www.cfr.org/timeline/iraq-war>.

⁴⁵ Dan Murphy, “Iraq War: Predictions Made, and Results,” *Christian Science Monitor*, December 22, 2011, <https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Backchannels/2011/1222/Iraq-war-Predictions-made-and-results>.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

Over eight years of war, somewhere around 461,000 Iraqi civilians were killed, with other estimates ranging higher or lower.⁴⁷ At the same time, the war cost the lives of 4,410 U.S. soldiers while leaving countless others wounded or suffering from psychological effects such as PTSD.⁴⁸ All this came at a cost of about \$1.7 trillion to U.S. taxpayers.⁴⁹

The greatest failure of the Iraq War, however, was the fact that it was allowed to happen at all. Of course, the Bush administration bears the brunt of responsibility, but opposition politicians, prominent members of the foreign policy establishment, and the media largely failed to challenge the administration's case for the war or to present meaningful opposition.

The Senate voted to authorize the invasion of Iraq by a margin of 77 to 22 votes, with 60 percent of the Democratic caucus voting in favor.⁵⁰ This included leading figures such as Hillary Clinton, while outside government, "prominent Democratic foreign policy experts like Richard Holbrooke and James Steinberg were open supporters as well."⁵¹ In think tanks like the Brookings Institution, where support for the war was not monolithic, writings and panels in the lead-up to the invasion were nonetheless dominated by war supporters like Michael O'Hanlon and Kenneth Pollack.⁵²

⁴⁷ "Iraq War 'Left Half a Million Dead,'" *BBC News*, October 16, 2013, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-24547256>.

⁴⁸ "Casualty Status as of 10 a.m. EDT April 25, 2019," U.S. Department of Defense, accessed April 26, 2019, <https://dod.defense.gov/News/Casualty-Status/>.

⁴⁹ Daniel Trotta, "Iraq War Costs U.S. More than \$2 Trillion: Study," *Reuters*, March 14, 2013, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iraq-war-anniversary-idUSBRE92D0PG20130314>.

⁵⁰ Hayes, 110.

⁵¹ Walt, 110.

⁵² Stefan Halper and Jonathan Clarke, *The Silence of the Rational Center: Why American Foreign Policy is Failing* (New York, Basic Books, 2007) 107.

The picture in the news media was no better. Analyzing over one thousand news reports from ABC, NBC, and CBS in the lead-up to the war, one study found that “Bush administration officials were the most frequently quoted sources, the voices of anti-war groups and opposition Democrats were barely audible, and the overall thrust of coverage favored a pro-war perspective.”⁵³

Worse yet, there has been minimal effort among these elites to reckon with these failures. While success in foreign policy is subjective, it is near-undeniable that the Iraq War’s supporters inside and out of the Bush administration were guilty of pushing a bad policy. Furthermore, some officials in the Bush administration were almost certainly guilty of actual crimes, related to both the war in Iraq and the War on Terror at large. Yet few in either category have faced meaningful consequences for these actions. No high-level officials were criminally sanctioned for the Bush administration’s torture regime, and prominent supporters of the war have mostly been rewarded with sinecures in the media and think tanks, or with jobs in the Trump administration.⁵⁴

The Iraq War is only a recent and prominent example of the foreign policy elite’s failures, and the success of its members in evading both legal sanctions for criminal policies and professional consequences for merely bad policies. Instead, Iraq is only representative of a longstanding fallibility and lack of accountability among foreign policy elites, dating back at least to the beginning of the Cold War, but reaching a new height of flagrancy in the mass-media era.

⁵³ Danny Hayes and Matt Guardino, “Whose Views Made the News? Media Coverage and the March to War in Iraq,” *Political Communication* 27, no. 1 (January 29, 2010): 59–87, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584600903502615>.

⁵⁴ Nancy Cook, “‘Bushies’ Creep into Trump’s Administration,” *POLITICO*, December 23, 2018, <https://politi.co/2QQW6wV>.

By examining the U.S. foreign policy elite – its internal mechanisms, how its members are selected and promoted, and how they are insulated from accountability – we can better understand the failures and impunity of the American elite at large.

What is the foreign policy elite?

The pundits and policymakers who planned, sold, and executed the Iraq War were, and for the most part remain, members of a select group of individuals known as the foreign policy elite, or alternatively, the foreign policy establishment. Foreign policy elites are the people and institutions that occupy the highest positions among what international relations scholar Stephen Walt calls “the foreign policy community.”

In his book *The Hell of Good Intentions: America’s Foreign Policy Elite and the Decline of US Primacy*, Walt defines the foreign policy community as “individuals and organizations that actively engage on a regular basis with issues of international affairs.”⁵⁵ This includes people within the policymaking organs of government such as the State Department, Department of Defense, and National Security Council, as well as the people and institutions outside of government that work to influence foreign policy and shape public opinion on it.⁵⁶ The latter group includes fellows at foreign policy think tanks, prominent scholars of international relations, members of influential interest groups, and pundit-journalists who regularly comment on foreign policy issues.⁵⁷

The elite distinguishes itself from this broader community through its power. Elites either exercise power directly, have influence over it, or exist in close proximity to

⁵⁵ Stephen Walt, *The Hell of Good Intentions*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018) 95.

⁵⁶ Walt, 96.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

it. The foreign policy elite is the inner ring of the foreign policy community; it is a tighter network of individuals in the same field who reside at or near the top of the institutions they occupy. Thus, a deputy or assistant secretary of state is a member of the foreign policy elite where an average Foreign Service officer is merely a member of the greater foreign policy community. Elites are also characterized by their tendency to partake in a “revolving door” mechanism. Members of the elite often cycle between roles in government, think tank fellowships, academia, and punditry. The influence and reputation accrued in one of these positions allows an individual to secure another.⁵⁸ Indeed, most members of the foreign policy elite discussed in this paper will have occupied roles in multiple sectors of the foreign policy community – including, most importantly, at least one stint in policymaking.

Those members of the elite who have not held a policymaking role justify their position through their proximity to and influence over high-level policymakers. Some, like Max Boot, have mostly worked in the think tank world but would have likely received a policymaking role had the presidential candidate to whom they were attached not lost an election.⁵⁹ Other characters, most commonly career journalists-turned-pundits, simply have a big platform and access to top policymakers that allow them to influence elite opinion.

⁵⁸ Walt, 104.

⁵⁹ Jacob Heilbrunn, “Trump Is Trampling Over the GOP’s Corpse,” *POLITICO Magazine*, February 16, 2016, <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2016/02/donald-trump-2016-gop-republican-party-213642>.

The Nature of the Foreign Policy Elite

One of the most salient characteristics of the foreign policy elite is that it is an interconnected network of individuals and institutions. Each sector of the foreign policy elite serves a different function. Government institutions and the individuals who populate them wield direct power, crafting and implementing policy. Institutions outside government, like think tanks, the media, and to an extent, academia, wield indirect power by influencing policymaking and policing the boundaries of acceptable policy views. This notion is supported empirically by a 2007 study by Mark Souva and David Rohde, which demonstrated that cleavages between Republican and Democratic opinion-makers strongly correlated with more partisan congressional votes on foreign policy issues.⁶⁰ Walt asserts that the media, too “plays a key role in shaping what elites and publics know and believe about the world at large and about U.S. foreign policy itself” while think tanks “conduct research, testify to Congress and other government agencies, and appear frequently as media commentators,” often for the purpose of promoting a certain ideological direction in policy.⁶¹ Additionally, according to Walt, think tanks “provide entry level opportunities for young policy wonks seeking to make their way into government positions, and... provide sinecures for former government officials, including those seeking to return to public service at a later date.”⁶²

Academia fills a somewhat similar role to that of think tanks. For one, universities and professors “train the people who end up working in government, media, and the think

⁶⁰ Mark Souva and David Rohde, “Elite Opinion Differences and Partisanship in Congressional Foreign Policy, 1975-1996,” *Political Research Quarterly* 60, no. 1 (March 1, 2007): 113–23, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912906298630>.

⁶¹ Walt, 100.

⁶² Walt, 99.

tank world.”⁶³ Thus, academia shapes the thinking of members of the foreign policy elite and provides them with a somewhat uniform background of elite education. Indeed, a 2008 study by Joshua Busby and Jonathan Monten found that in both the Cold War and post-Cold War eras, a high proportion of high-level foreign policymakers were educated at Ivy League universities. Among top executive branch officials and the heads of foreign policy committees in Congress during the Cold War, 46.41 percent boasted Ivy League- backgrounds, while among their post-Cold War counterparts, the figure was 42.19 percent.⁶⁴

Like the think tank world, academia can also provide a starting point for those hoping to get into foreign policymaking, or a landing pad for those who already have. As Walt says, “the faculty ranks at most schools of public policy or international affairs are filled with people who have combined scholarly careers with periods of public service.”⁶⁵

The individuals who fill the different sectors of this elite remain part of one coherent community. As Walt says of the foreign policy elite, “Many of its leading members know one another and participate in overlapping activities and organizations... and prominent figures within this community often work for several different organizations over the course of a career, sometimes simultaneously.”⁶⁶

Members of the foreign policy elite often take advantage of a “revolving door” mechanism, highlighted both Walt and by Mills as a characteristic of the American elite at large. For one example, Richard Haass, the president of the Council on Foreign

⁶³ Walt, 102.

⁶⁴ Joshua W. Busby and Jonathan Monten, “Without Heirs? Assessing the Decline of Establishment Internationalism in U.S. Foreign Policy,” *Perspectives on Politics* 6, no. 3 (September 2008): 451–72, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S153759270808122X>.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ Walt, 104.

Relations, began his career at the Department of Defense before moving to the State Department and then to the White House as National Security Council Senior Director for Near East and South Asian Affairs. After the administration of George H.W. Bush, he held a visiting professorship at Hamilton College before becoming Director of Foreign Policy Studies at the Brookings Institution. Haass returned to government as the Director of Policy Planning at the State Department from 2001 to 2003, after which he finally became president of the Council on Foreign Relations.⁶⁷ Others may follow a reverse order, beginning in academia and eventually landing in a government role, but gaining increasingly prestigious positions all along the way.

Connections between members of the foreign policy elite can be formal, through shared membership in organizations, or informal, through personal relationships. One example of the former highlighted by Walt is the Aspen Strategy Group, “a bipartisan forum to explore the preeminent foreign policy challenges the United States faces.”⁶⁸ Its members include “former government officials like Madeleine Albright, Brent Scowcroft, Nicholas Burns, Thomas Donilon, Anne-Marie Slaughter, and Robert Zoellick; journalists like CNN’s Fared Zakaria... think tanks presidents like Richard Haass of the Council on Foreign Relations... and academics like Eliot Cohen of Johns Hopkins.”⁶⁹ Forums like this are supposed to “explore” and “debate” often controversial issues of foreign policy, but too often collect elites who broadly agree with one another. Walt points to the World Affairs Councils of America National Conference, which

⁶⁷ “Richard N. Haass,” Council on Foreign Relations, accessed April 26, 2019, <https://www.cfr.org/expert/richard-n-haass>.

⁶⁸ Walt, 105.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

assembles “speakers from... mainstream think tanks,” prominent journalists, and former government officials, who tend to be similarly “dedicated internationalists.”⁷⁰ Typically absent from these events are prominent critics of U.S. foreign policy.

Personal relationships between elites are also extensive, with some even related by blood or by marriage. There are a few notable examples of “power couples” – spouses who both hold influential positions in the foreign policy world.⁷¹ Robert Kagan, co-founder of the neoconservative think tank Project for a New American Century, provides a good example of this. His wife, Victoria Nuland, is a former assistant secretary of state and current CEO of the Center for a New American Security, while his father Donald and brother Frederick are also neoconservative intellectuals.⁷²

Walt notes how important these relationships are for someone who wants to ascend into the ranks of the foreign policy elite and stay there. Contrary to many professions which require a formal path of training and certification, “aspiring foreign policy gurus need only establish a close relationship with a successful politician or acquire a solid reputation among established figures within some part of the existing community.”⁷³ To draw in new talent, the foreign policy establishment offers internships and fellowships through which “new entrants are recruited, groomed, and promoted based on judgments made by established figures.”⁷⁴ This makes foreign policy elites the gatekeepers of the foreign policy community; their approval is a prerequisite for ascending its ranks. One’s ability to enter the foreign policy elite, says scholar Janine

⁷⁰ Walt, 114.

⁷¹ Walt, 104.

⁷² Peter Beaumont, “The Observer Profile: Robert Kagan,” *The Guardian*, April 26, 2008, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/apr/27/usa>.

⁷³ Walt, 106.

⁷⁴ Walt, 107.

Wedel, “depends not just on quick study, but on connecting and forging networks, on conferences and cross-pollination among politics, business, and media.”

Once an individual ascends to the ranks of the foreign policy elite, with the network of relationships and institutional positions that implies, it is difficult and rare for them to be removed. Walt recounts numerous cases of members of this elite who repeatedly demonstrated bad judgment and dishonesty, or produced catastrophic policy failures. Some of those he describes were responsible for severe crimes, like torture and illegal mass surveillance. Yet in each case, the individuals in question faced no consequences (or extremely light ones) for these actions, and instead continued to be rewarded with ever-more prestigious positions and larger platforms.⁷⁵

Members of the foreign policy elite are granted the same impunity that is enjoyed by the American elite at large. They consistently avoid both professional accountability for policy failures and legal accountability for outright crimes. This paper seeks to explain how, and why, this occurs. The next chapter will offer theoretical explanations for the mechanisms that facilitate impunity for the foreign policy elite, while the following two will examine impunity through the careers of two of the elite’s most prominent and notorious members. Lastly, the conclusion will explore further questions on the matter of elite impunity, and will offer some basic steps toward bringing accountability to the foreign policy elite.

⁷⁵ Walt, 188-209.

The Mechanisms of Elite Impunity

"To participate in this aristocracy is to enjoy the comforts of fine living — calm neighborhoods, well-engineered automobiles, intellectually engaging art. But its highest pleasure is the knowledge shared among its members that they live above democratic accountability, that their words and deeds are not constrained by the broader political community the way the words and deeds of mere citizens can be." – Zach Carter in The Huffington Post, 2018.

The central question of this paper is how members of America's foreign policy elite so often avoid accountability for both failings of policy and criminal acts. This impunity has created a foreign policy elite whose most prominent members include men and women with careers marked primarily by the advocacy for or implementation of disastrous policies, and in some cases, by instances of flagrant law-breaking.

I seek to explain this problem primarily through the paradigm known as elite theory, especially through Robert Putnam's 1976 work *The Comparative Study of Political Elites*.⁷⁶ Putnam's arguments expand and improve upon those of earlier elite theorists like Robert Michels and C. Wright Mills, whose contributions were described in the previous chapter. Elite theory offers a diverse set of explanations for elite power, and differing normative assumptions about the benefits and drawbacks posed by political elites. However, it generally rests on one core tenet: that "due to their strategic positions and resources under their control, elites – that is, small groups of 'persons who are able,

⁷⁶ Robert D. Putnam, *The Comparative Study of Political Elites*, Contemporary Comparative Politics Series (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1976).

by virtue of their strategic positions in powerful organizations and movements, to affect political outcomes regularly and substantially’ – have the power that the majority of people or non-elites lack, and they make systematic use of their power in both democratic and non-democratic polities.”⁷⁷

There are two broad structural mechanisms which protect the U.S. foreign policy elite from accountability. The first is the integration or cohesion of this sector of the elite, which I describe along the dimensions laid out by Putnam. The second is the elite’s relationship with the American mass public, which is defined primarily by elite influence over public opinion, and by public disengagement from esoteric issues of foreign policy.

The Internal Dynamics of the Elite: Integration and Cohesion

In his study of political elites, Robert Putnam defines elite power as “the probability of influencing the policies and activities of the state.”⁷⁸ In any society, this power exists in a stratified system, with those closest to the top typically wielding the most of it. Putnam identifies six strata of power, but for the purposes of this paper, the top two – “proximate decision makers” and “influentials” – shall be considered the elite. Proximate decision makers are “those individuals directly involved in national policy making,” while influentials are “those who actively try to influence the opinions either of the national decision makers, the public as a whole or large parts of it, or the other opinion makers.”⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Jan Pakulski, “Introduction: John Higley’s Work on Elite Foundations of Social Theory and Politics,” *Historical Social Research / Historische Sozialforschung* 37, no. 1 (139) (2012): 10.

⁷⁸ Putnam, *The Comparative Study of Political Elites*, 6.

⁷⁹ Putnam, 11.

“Elite integration” describes the degree of unity of this elite in terms of the common characteristics, views, and motives of its members. This type of unity was deemed by Mills to be a defining feature of the elite. Mills states: “Insofar as the power elite is composed of men of similar origin and education, insofar as their careers and their styles of life are similar, there are psychological and social bases for their unity, resting upon the fact that they are of similar social type and leading to the fact of their easy intermingling.”⁸⁰

Putnam seeks to make an empirical examination of this unity through six “dimensions of integration.” These are social homogeneity, common recruitment patterns, extensive personal interaction, value consensus, group solidarity, and institutional context.⁸¹ An elite that fulfills each of these dimensions to a significant degree may be considered highly integrated or cohesive.

Social homogeneity is highest in nations with hereditary ruling classes, which are increasingly rare in the modern era. However, Putnam nonetheless found that “in nearly every political system... the upper social strata supply a quite disproportionate share of the political elite.”⁸² This finding was supported more recently by John Higley, who contended that “occupants of national elite positions are distinguished by their privileged social origins.”⁸³ Beyond class, social homogeneity entails common traits of “education, ethnicity, religion, geographic origin, and sex.”⁸⁴ Thus, a fitting example of a socially

⁸⁰ Mills, *The Power Elite*, 19.

⁸¹ Putnam, *The Comparative Study of Political Elites*. 107.

⁸² Putnam, 108.

⁸³ John Higley et al., “Elite Integration in Stable Democracies: A Reconsideration*,” *European Sociological Review* 7, no. 1 (May 1991): 43, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordjournals.esr.a036576>.

⁸⁴ Putnam, 108.

homogeneous elite is the old “Northeastern Elite” of U.S. politics, made up primarily of white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant men from the country’s northeast coast.⁸⁵

Putnam’s second dimension of integration is common recruitment patterns. In elite groups where social homogeneity has declined, patterns of recruitment fill a key role in socializing would-be members into a cohesive group. Educational institutions like elite universities “play a key role in sifting and channeling aspirants” and “create a pool of eligibles” who can join the elite.⁸⁶ From this pool, individuals can be selected into the elite through different means. Most important is what Putnam calls an “intramural selectorate” in which a narrow group of pre-existing elite gatekeepers chooses or appoints new members of the elite.⁸⁷ This groups becomes “the effective constituency to which the elite member will respond” and according to Kenneth Prewitt and Alan Stone, these “persons who have control over the pathways to membership in the political elite tend to naturally favor persons of similar ideology, status, and background.”⁸⁸ Prewitt and Stone further assert that these processes filter out “those whose views are bizarre,” or in other words, outside the accepted boundaries of elite opinion.⁸⁹

According to Trygve Gulbrandsen, through educational institutions and the organizational positions elites hold, “they are moulded to certain standards of work, norms, work habits and even basic views characteristic of the organization” which in turn “promotes integration of professional attitudes, and probably also fosters similar

⁸⁵ Mark Ledwidge and Inderjeet Parmar, “Conceptualising and Historicising the US Foreign Policy Establishment in a Racialized Class Structure,” *International Politics* 54, no. 3 (May 2017): 316, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41311-017-0034-z>.

⁸⁶ Putnam, 52.

⁸⁷ Putnam, 56.

⁸⁸ Putnam, *The Comparative Study of Political Elites*, 56; Kenneth Prewitt and Alan Stone, *The Ruling Elites: Elite Theory, Power, and American Democracy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 142.

⁸⁹ Prewitt and Stone, *The Ruling Elites: Elite Theory, Power, and American Democracy*. 150.

ideological orientations.”⁹⁰ In this way, rising elites are “socialized to adopt the basic values and orientations of “their” institution or organization.”⁹¹ Thus, by the time he reaches an elite position, “a leader's views are influenced less by the social circumstance of his youth than by adult roles and affiliations.”⁹²

An important aspect of elite recruitment is the degree to which elites can hold multiple top positions simultaneously, or can change among “top posts in diverse sectors” in immediate succession of one another.⁹³ This is characteristic of what Putnam calls “permeable recruitment channels,” whereby individuals ascend the ranks of power by moving back and forth between different sectors of the elite, rather than following a single closed path as one might do in advancing through a bureaucracy.⁹⁴

Such “sequential overlap” enhances elite cohesion, as elites in one sector may be inclined to accommodate the desires of elites in another in order to improve their career prospects in the latter sector. Past positions may also shape how a member of the elite acts in their present role, as each experience shapes how the individual views the world and what interests they prioritize.⁹⁵

Social interaction marks a third dimension of integration, defined by “networks of personal communication, friendship, and influence” among elites.⁹⁶ Putnam cites James Rosenau, who asserted that “the greater the interaction among diverse types of leaders,

⁹⁰ Trygve Gulbrandsen, “Elite Integration – An Empirical Study,” *Historical Social Research / Historische Sozialforschung* 37, no. 1 (139) (2012): 153.

⁹¹ Gulbrandsen. 161.

⁹² Gulbrandsen. 150.

⁹³ Putnam, *The Comparative Study of Political Elites*. 110.

⁹⁴ Putnam, 110.

⁹⁵ Putnam, 111.

⁹⁶ Putnam, 112.

the more they will comprehend each other's attitudes and thus the readier they will be to join together in support of a particular policy."⁹⁷

Empirical studies of the Venezuelan and Yugoslavian elites confirmed the contention of elite theorists that such bonds of social interaction increase in density as one moves up the social hierarchy.⁹⁸ In the United States, these highest circles were additionally shown by John Higley to be "more active... in policy advisory capacities, such as testifying before Congress and serving on federal commissions, and... more visible in the mass media, as measured by the frequency with which they gave TV, radio or magazine interviews, presented lectures and wrote articles and books."⁹⁹

Social interaction can be facilitated by other dimensions of elite integration, like educational background and recruitment channels. It is also facilitated by particular social institutions that exist primarily for this purpose, such as "the Georgetown cocktail circuit" and the Council on Foreign Relations.¹⁰⁰ This interaction can also take place in a more removed manner, through the pages of elite media outlets such as the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, which are contributed to and read by much of the political elite.¹⁰¹

These interactions between elites occur in spite of disagreements they may hold among them. In a study of elites in stable democracies, including the United States, John

⁹⁷ Putnam, 112.

⁹⁸ Putnam, 113.

⁹⁹ John Higley and Gwen Moore, "Elite Integration in the United States and Australia," *American Political Science Review* 75, no. 03 (September 1981): 589, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1960954>.

¹⁰⁰ Putnam, 113.

¹⁰¹ Putnam, 114.

Higley found that “elites with sharply opposing views nevertheless interact extensively with each other.”¹⁰²

Putnam identifies as the most important dimension of elite cohesion “value consensus” or agreement on “what is to be done.”¹⁰³ This is not to say that members of an elite agree on all or most matters of policy. Rather, as asserted by Kenneth Prewitt and Alan Stone, political elites in Western democracies agree on “codes of conduct.”¹⁰⁴ This might entail “the politics of bargaining and compromise, tolerance for political opponents, and a willingness to abide by... electoral decisions.”¹⁰⁵ Putnam asserts that this commitment to the norms of a system reflects “the gratification” that the system gives to the elites. “Leaders are more likely to agree on the rules of the game,” Putnam says, “because it is fundamentally their game.”¹⁰⁶ As with the density of social interactions, support for systemic political norms rises as one approaches the top of the elite. Putnam cites Giuseppe Di Palma, who states that “the acceptance and practice of the rules for conflict accommodation are most widespread at the upper level of the elite.”¹⁰⁷

This is not to say however, that elite consensus is limited to agreement over procedural norms. Indeed, many elite theorists assert that elites are also united “on overriding issues of international affairs and political economy.”¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, Peter Bachrach asserts that these procedural norms “cannot realistically be dissociated from the

¹⁰² Higley et al., “Elite Integration in Stable Democracies.” 45.

¹⁰³ Putnam, 115.

¹⁰⁴ Prewitt and Stone, *The Ruling Elites: Elite Theory, Power, and American Democracy*. 151.

¹⁰⁵ Putnam, 116.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Putnam, 121.

¹⁰⁸ Putnam, 130.

political context in which they operate and the substantive values and interests which they affect” – meaning, essentially, that consensus on procedure will at least to some degree affect views on matters of policy.¹⁰⁹

The final dimensions of elite integration identified by Putnam are solidarity and institutional context. Solidarity is, put simply, the affinity elites feel for one another by virtue of their shared elite status. Putnam emphasizes the notion that “nothing brings elites together so much as mutual respect which flows from sharing in the confraternity of power.”¹¹⁰ Mills calls this a “class consciousness,” asserting that members of the elite feel a level of responsibility towards each other, and that “psychological affinities... make it possible for them to say of another: He is, of course, one of us.”¹¹¹ Thus, “the mark of a unified elite,” Putnam says, “is not the absence of disagreement, but rather sufficient mutual trust.”¹¹²

Lastly, elite integration requires social and institutional context. As stated previously, elites derive their power from institutional positions, and their networked connections and social interactions are also facilitated by the institutions they occupy in common. Institutional context enhances the common interests of elites. Putnam says: “If the institutions whose command posts the elite occupy have overlapping interests, the elite incumbents may be led to take complementary actions.”¹¹³ Putnam also states that “functional specialization and organizational loyalties force leaders to view national problems from divergent perspectives.”¹¹⁴ For institutions and elites occupying the same

¹⁰⁹ Peter Bachrach, *The Theory of Democratic Elitism: A Critique* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1967). 53.

¹¹⁰ Putnam, 121.

¹¹¹ Mills, 283.

¹¹² Putnam, 122.

¹¹³ Putnam, 122.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

sector, however – such as foreign policy or finance – perspectives and interests are driven by similar imperatives, and therefore lead to greater unity and cohesion.

Additionally, Putnam addresses the normative question behind elite integration – that is, is an integrated elite essential to stable democracy, or does it necessarily result in unaccountable oligarchy? Those favoring the latter perspective stress that “an integrated elite is likely to be oligarchic and that democracy can survive only where leaders are socially heterogeneous and politically divided.”¹¹⁵ As Putnam recognizes, however, these states are not totally mutually exclusive. It could be that elite integration produces both stability and oligarchy, and some theorists argue for a “golden mean” or a point of integration that balances between the two conditions.¹¹⁶

But where does the U.S. foreign policy elite fall along this theoretical continuum? Unfortunately, there is a lack of research on the membership of the U.S. foreign policy elite that could empirically measure how it scores on each dimension of integration. However, qualitative examinations of the foreign policy elite show each of these dimensions present in different ways, and at each turn, these conditions seem to thwart accountability and point towards oligarchy.

Recall Stephen Walt’s descriptions of the foreign policy elite from the previous chapter. The modern foreign policy elite may be less socially homogeneous than the northeastern establishment, but its fulfilment of Putnam’s other “dimensions of integration” is striking. Walt states the foreign policy elite “is a community, especially at the highest levels” and that “many of its leading members know one another and

¹¹⁵ Putnam, 129.

¹¹⁶ Putnam, 132.

participate in overlapping activities and organizations.”¹¹⁷ Prominent members of the elite are “connected by personal association,” including friendship, familial relations, and marriage.¹¹⁸ Moreover, these interactions take place within an institutional context, namely, in think tanks or networks like the Aspen Strategy Group.¹¹⁹

Walt also describes the foreign policy elite in terms resembling Putnam’s “patterns of recruitment.” Elite universities, fellowships, and internships serve to “identify, recruit, socialize, and advance the careers of young people eager for a career in this world.”¹²⁰ These entrants are “recruited, groomed, and promoted based on judgments made by established figures.”¹²¹ Advancement requires only “a close relationship with a successful politician... or a solid reputation among established figures within some part of the existing community.”¹²² Elites also display “sequential overlap” in their organizational positions, often working “for several different organizations over the course of a career, sometimes simultaneously.”¹²³

Perhaps most importantly to both Walt and Putnam’s analysis, the U.S. foreign policy elite displays strong value consensus. Walt asserts that the foreign policy community “creates powerful incentives for conformity.” He quotes Edward Luce of the *Financial Times*, who notes that in government today, “it is better to be wrong in good company than right and alone.”¹²⁴ This is aggravated by the institutions of the foreign policy world, including think tanks and membership organizations, of which the most

¹¹⁷ Walt, 104.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Walt, 107.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Walt, 106.

¹²³ Walt, 104.

¹²⁴ Walt, 110.

prominent and best funded are united in the embrace of U.S. hegemony and active interventionism.¹²⁵

Such incentives for conformity help explain the foreign policy elite's near-consensus in favor of war leading up to the 2003 invasion of Iraq. While disagreements among elites certainly do occur, they "take place within a broader climate of opinion that sees U.S. primacy and active global leadership as good for America and good for the world."¹²⁶

The cohesion of the foreign policy elite helps insulate its members from both professional and legal accountability. For a member of this elite, professional advancement depends on one's reputation and relationships among his colleagues and superiors. In the case that a policymaker is accused of or charged with crimes in the course of his duties, whether or not he faces legal sanction is dependent on the decisions of high officials in the U.S. Department of Justice, and ultimately, on the president. In any case, the integrated state in which these elites exist disincentivizes accountability. Elites who maintain good relationships and reputations continue to find professional success despite their actual records, and presidents usually choose to shield their foreign policy officials from accountability or to forgo investigations into foreign policy-related crimes under their predecessors.

The United States is a representative democracy, however, and in theory, if elites will not hold each other accountable, they should be accountable to the people. For one, Congress, as the people's representatives in Washington, can investigate the actions of

¹²⁵ Walt, 113.

¹²⁶ Walt, 112.

executive branch officials, or place limits on their activities.¹²⁷ Congress is vested with the constitutional power to “provide for the common defense,” “to regulate commerce with foreign nations,” “to raise and support armies,” and “to declare war.”¹²⁸ The Senate has the power to approve treaties and confirm or reject nominees to key foreign policy posts in the executive branch.¹²⁹ Congress controls appropriations, giving it the ability to fund its own foreign policy priorities and defund the president’s.¹³⁰ Lastly, Congress can “hold hearings, conduct investigations, and debate issues” to put pressure on the executive branch and shape public opinion on foreign policy.¹³¹

However, the fact that these powers are delineated does not mean they will be exercised. As James Lindsay explains, Congress is especially likely to defer to the president on foreign policy during times of war and intense activity abroad. During wars, members of Congress recognize the legitimate need for strong presidential leadership and decisive action while also adopting a dangerous level of deference to the president for fear of being called unpatriotic or accused of damaging the U.S. cause.¹³² With the exception of the 1990s, the U.S. has been in a continuous war posture since the Second World War, as the Cold War of the 20th century was replaced by the War on Terror in the 21st.¹³³

¹²⁷ Walt, 93.

¹²⁸ James M. Lindsay, “The Shifting Pendulum of Power: Executive-Legislative Relations on American Foreign Policy,” in *The Domestic Sources of American Foreign Policy: Insights and Evidence* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2012), 225.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Lindsay, 226.

¹³² Lindsay, 232.

¹³³ Lindsay, 228-230.

While congressional influence over foreign policy has ebbed and flowed during this time, it has been consistently decreasing in the long-term.¹³⁴ James Goldgeier and Elizabeth Saunders write that since the Cold War, “Congress’ oversight of U.S. foreign policy has declined markedly” and that Senate committees charged with foreign policy and national security oversight “have held substantially fewer hearings... over time, resulting in far less supervision of major foreign policy endeavors.”¹³⁵

This decrease in oversight has been driven by party polarization and a decline in congressional foreign policy expertise. According to Goldgeier and Saunders, polarization undermines oversight because periods of unified government yield “extreme deference to the president.”¹³⁶ Meaningful congressional supervision only occurs when one or both branches of congress are controlled by the opposition party, which can use oversight to score political points.¹³⁷ Reflexive opposition in Congress in turn encourages the president to actively circumvent the legislature in foreign policy, as President Obama did in pursuing a nuclear deal with Iran as an executive agreement rather than a treaty requiring Senate ratification.¹³⁸ Furthermore, Congress’ capacity to conduct oversight and give input on foreign affairs has been eroded by its loss of foreign policy expertise. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee in particular once provided a locus for seasoned veterans of foreign affairs who commanded the respect of presidents, the public, and other members of Congress, and were thus better positioned to provide oversight and

¹³⁴ Lindsay, 236.

¹³⁵ James M. Goldgeier and Elizabeth N. Saunders, “The Unconstrained Presidency: Checks and Balances Eroded Long Before Trump,” Council on Foreign Relations, August 14, 2018, <https://www.cfr.org/article/unconstrained-presidency-checks-and-balances-eroded-long-trump>.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Lindsay, 233.

¹³⁸ Goldgeier and Saunders, “The Unconstrained Presidency.”

challenge the executive branch on foreign policy.¹³⁹ Due in part to higher turnover in Congress and an increase in committee posts held by each member, such foreign policy leaders are rarer in today's legislature.¹⁴⁰

In the executive branch, foreign policymaking has been further insulated from Congress by the increased importance of the National Security Council. Established in 1947, the Council was originally conceived as a body to coordinate policy between the Senate-confirmed heads of cabinet agencies like the departments of State and Defense.¹⁴¹ However, beginning in the John F. Kennedy administration and accelerating under President Richard Nixon, the Council increasingly took over the role of day-to-day policymaking and execution. Further, since the 1990s, the Council staff has grown in size from about 50 to 400 members.¹⁴² Neither the head of the Council nor its top staffers are subject to Senate confirmation, and all are protected from congressional oversight by executive privilege. This means that foreign policy decisions are increasingly concentrated in a body over whose composition Congress has no input, and whose members have no obligation to appear before congressional hearings.¹⁴³

In some cases, members of Congress have been perfectly happy to keep their fingerprints off foreign policy decisions. By allowing presidents to pursue military actions and other foreign policies without congressional approval, legislators avoid having to answer for their votes on these matters during re-election. This dynamic was shown during the Obama administration with congressional refusals to vote on military

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Goldgeier and Saunders.

¹⁴¹ Alexander Broboske, "Reforming the National Security Council," American Action Forum, December 21, 2016, <https://www.americanactionforum.org/research/reforming-national-security-council/>.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

action in Syria and Libya, and during the Trump administration with congressional reluctance to demand a say over the imposition of trade tariffs.¹⁴⁴

The marginalization of Congress is bad for the effectiveness of U.S. foreign policy, because, as Lindsay states, potential congressional opposition “encourages presidents to think through their policy proposals more carefully.”¹⁴⁵ Its absence, on the other hand, raises the likelihood that executive branch officials will act “unwisely” or “overreach.”¹⁴⁶ It also undermines accountability, as the lack of oversight hearings and investigations into the president’s foreign policies makes it more likely that potential malfeasance by his officials will escape public scrutiny.

Beyond Congress, however, the president is supposed to be directly accountable to the people, as he, unlike the foreign policy officials who serve under him, must face re-election (and in his second term, he has a strong interest in seeing the election of a new president from his own party). If a president and his subordinates make bad foreign policy decisions or commit crimes, the president should theoretically be voted out and replaced by one from the opposing party who promises to do better.¹⁴⁷ Why, despite this mechanism, does popular accountability remain elusive in the foreign policy world?

Elite-Public Dynamics

There are a number of reasons why foreign policy elites are, for the most part, not held accountable by the public. In his article entitled “A Democratic Foreign Policy,”

¹⁴⁴ Broboske.

¹⁴⁵ Lindsay, 236.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Walt, 93.

Eric Alterman asserts that “the foreign policy elite and the American people have different and often conflicting interests and problems.”¹⁴⁸ The elite, Alterman says, “are ideologically committed to free trade and widespread military intervention” while “the public believes that the United States should protect American jobs and mind its own business whenever possible.”¹⁴⁹

However, according to Alterman, the establishment is extremely comfortable “setting the terms” of foreign policy debate, and enacting its policies with minimal interference from below.”¹⁵⁰ There are a number of features of the American public as it relates to foreign policy that enable this. The most salient factors are the following: first, the public is broadly disengaged from foreign policy issues. Second, where the mass public is paying attention to foreign policy, their opinions tend to follow rather than lead the opinions of elites. Lastly, the inaccessible or classified nature of crucial foreign policy information, along with the psychological justifications provided by patriotism and national security, encourage the public to accept what elites say and do in matters of foreign policy.

It is taken as something of a given that the American public usually does not pay close attention to foreign affairs. Political scientist Gabriel Almond said, “Americans tend to exhaust their emotional and intellectual energies in private pursuits... On questions... such as foreign policy, they tend to react in formless and plastic moods which undergo frequent alteration.”¹⁵¹ Writing in 1976, Robert Putnam asserted that

¹⁴⁸ Eric Alterman, “A Democratic Foreign Policy,” *World Policy Journal* 13, no. 2 (1996): 23.

¹⁴⁹ Alterman, 24.

¹⁵⁰ Alterman, 23.

¹⁵¹ James A. Nathan, *Foreign Policy Making and the American Political System* (Baltimore, Md. : Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 149.

“where voters are inattentive, as is usually true in foreign affairs, for example, latitude for elite discretion is wide.”¹⁵²

In 1996, Eugene Wittkopf and Charles Kegley wrote that “most Americans are uninterested in and ill-informed about foreign affairs.”¹⁵³ Even at the height of the Gulf War, “only 36 percent of the American people said that they were very interested in following news about other countries” and just over half said that they were “very interested in news of U.S. relations with other countries.”¹⁵⁴ Wittkopf and Kegley cite Doris Graber, who stated that Americans “do not seek out foreign policy news.”¹⁵⁵ When presented with foreign policy news, as they were with an hour long interview of Soviet premier Mikhail Gorbachev by NBC News in 1987, members of the public are sometimes inclined to tune it out. In this instance, “only 15 percent of the national audience tuned in” and “half of the viewers who at that time ordinarily watch NBC’s entertainment programs switched to other networks.”¹⁵⁶

This mostly holds true today. In a 2017 survey by Pew Research Center found that while 60 percent of Americans could recall that the United Kingdom was in the process of leaving the European Union, only 44 percent could correctly identify the U.S. Secretary of State at the time, Rex Tillerson, and only 37 percent could identify the president of France, Emmanuel Macron.¹⁵⁷ A 2013 Pew study found that only 40 percent of Americans could identify Egypt when the country was highlighted on a map of the

¹⁵² Putnam, 152.

¹⁵³ Charles W. Kegley and Eugene R. Wittkopf, *American Foreign Policy : Pattern and Process* (New York : St. Martin’s Press, 1996). 320.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Kegley and Wittkopf, 321

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ “From Brexit to Zika: What Do Americans Know?,” Pew Research Center, July 25, 2017, <http://www.people-press.org/2017/07/25/from-brexit-to-zika-what-do-americans-know/>.

Middle East, while a 2010 study found that only 41 percent could accurately describe the state of India-Pakistan relations as hostile and a dismal 15 percent could identify the then-British prime minister as David Cameron.¹⁵⁸ While this is not an exhaustive survey of foreign policy topics, it is indicative of a general lack of public knowledge of important actors and issues in foreign affairs.

Where Americans are paying attention to foreign policy, scholarship has found that their views are more shaped by cues from elite opinion leaders than in response to events and unmediated information. This is the conclusion of Adam Berinsky's study entitled "Events, Elites, and American Public Support for Military Conflict." Berinsky showed that in the case of the Iraq War, public opinion followed what is called "elite cue theory" – which states in short that "the balance of elite discourse influences levels of public support for war."¹⁵⁹ Under this set of assumptions, "when elites come to a common interpretation of a political reality, the public gives them great latitude," but when "prominent political actors take divergent stands on the wisdom of intervention, the public divides as well."¹⁶⁰ Citizens use the opinions expressed by elites with whom they share ideological affinity as a "reference point" and form their own opinions around these cues.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁸ "What the Public Knows – In Words, Pictures, Maps and Graphs," Pew Research Center, September 5, 2013, <http://www.people-press.org/2013/09/05/what-the-public-knows-in-words-pictures-maps-and-graphs/>; "Public Knows Basic Facts about Politics, Economics, But Struggles with Specifics," Pew Research Center, November 18, 2010, <http://www.pewresearch.org/2010/11/18/public-knows-basic-facts-about-politics-economics-but-struggles-with-specifics/>.

¹⁵⁹ Adam J. Berinsky, "Events, Elites, and American Public Support for Military Conflict," in *The Domestic Sources of American Foreign Policy: Insights and Evidence*, ed. James M. McCormick (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2012), 123.

¹⁶⁰ Berinsky, 124.

¹⁶¹ Berinsky, 127.

In his survey, Berinsky found that most Americans could not correctly state the number of U.S. war deaths in Iraq to that point, and thus that they could not be accurately forming opinions around those figures. Furthermore, he found that respondents' support for the war was not significantly affected when they were told actual casualty statistics, even if they had vastly over or underestimated deaths before.¹⁶² Instead, he found that support and opposition were most strongly affected by partisanship and each individual's degree of knowledge about the war. Strong Democrats opposed the war more as their information levels increased, while strong Republicans supported the war more with more information.¹⁶³

Berinsky's findings are consistent with the "cascade model" of opinion flow described by Robert Putnam. Putnam describes a system in which information and opinion typically trickle downwards from elites to the masses.¹⁶⁴ The cascade model divides a society into four levels, from highest to lowest influence: the political and socioeconomic elite, the mass media, opinion leaders, and the mass public.¹⁶⁵ Putnam acknowledges that "none of these levels is likely to be eternally homogenous," that "in most societies, information flows through multiple channels" and that "there is occasionally some capillary movement of information and opinion upward."¹⁶⁶ As a general rule, however, he asserts that "information and persuasion flow more freely within each level than between levels and more easily downward than upward."¹⁶⁷

¹⁶² Berinsky, 133

¹⁶³ Berinsky, 137.

¹⁶⁴ Putnam, *The Comparative Study of Political Elites*, 135.

¹⁶⁵ Putnam, 138.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Putnam, 138.

With information and opinion flowing mostly from the elite to the masses, it is difficult for the masses to exercise direct or even indirect influence over elite decision-making. Instead, in Putnam's model, most popular influence over the elite comes from the "rule of anticipated reactions."¹⁶⁸ This rule states that powerful actors will try to anticipate how key constituencies will react to a particular decision, and that they will modify their decision to elicit the most favorable reaction possible.¹⁶⁹ For example, the president of the United States might base a foreign policy decision on how he expects it to be received by key constituencies in Congress and the public. In such an instance, neither party was consulted or actively influenced the decision in any way, but instead exercised what Putnam calls "implicit power" over it.¹⁷⁰

Implicit power is thus most significant when the public is especially attentive or reactive to a particular issue, as it depends on the potential of a serious backlash to elite decision-making. If such a backlash can be consistently kept at bay, the public's implicit power is minimized. Beyond public inattention, there are a number of other factors that keep the U.S. public acquiescent to elite foreign policy decisions.

Stephen Walt has described means by which elites sell what he deems "a failing foreign policy" to the American public.¹⁷¹ This is accomplished primarily by inflating threats, exaggerating the benefits of certain policies, and concealing their costs.¹⁷² Each of these measures is made more effective by the asymmetry of information between the elite and the public. As Walt says, "vested interests within the government and the

¹⁶⁸ Putnam, 7.

¹⁶⁹ Putnam, 152.

¹⁷⁰ Putnam, 8.

¹⁷¹ Walt, 137.

¹⁷² Walt, 138.

broader foreign policy establishment have significant advantages in shaping what the public knows about international politics and foreign policy.”¹⁷³ Eric Alterman notes in “A Democratic Foreign Policy” that policymakers can manipulate public opinion by keeping key information classified.¹⁷⁴ Policymakers can then manipulate opinion further by selectively leaking some classified information to the media and the public. Walt describes how such a strategy was carried out by the Bush administration in the run-up to the Iraq War, as Bush officials engaged in “a well-orchestrated campaign of leaks and false statements” to inflate the threats posed by the regime of Saddam Hussein and to create the impression that a U.S. invasion was a dire necessity.¹⁷⁵

These tactics are also helpful in exaggerating the benefits and concealing the costs of policies, as policymakers and the media can play up successes while downplaying, omitting, or covering up failures and other negative information.

When it comes to concealing policies’ costs however, the elite is also aided by the growing fact of “social distance” between the consequences of America’s foreign policy and the American public at large. As Christopher Hayes describes in *Twilight of the Elites*, decision-makers must be “connected or proximate to the consequences of their decisions” or they will be deprived of proper feedback and unable “to make course corrections.”¹⁷⁶ “In a democracy,” Hayes says, “elections are the ultimate feedback.”¹⁷⁷ But it is difficult for the public to provide this feedback if they are also, generally speaking, distant from the consequences of a policy.

¹⁷³ Walt, 139.

¹⁷⁴ Alterman, “A Democratic Foreign Policy,” 26.

¹⁷⁵ Walt, 140.

¹⁷⁶ Hayes, *Twilight of the Elites: America after Meritocracy*, 182.

¹⁷⁷ Hayes, 184.

For the United States, in some issues of foreign policy the public is almost by definition insulated from most consequences. This is particularly true of war and security policy, especially given that for over a century, all of America's wars have taken place abroad. Thus, those most closely affected by U.S. security policy are citizens of foreign nations and U.S. military personnel. The former, of course, have no influence over U.S. policy, while the latter group has increasingly come to represent a narrow band of the U.S. public that is more distant from the levers of political power. As Walt notes, since the implementation of an all-volunteer military at the end of the Vietnam War, "only a small proportion of American society is directly affected when... wars go badly."¹⁷⁸ Fewer than 2 percent of fighting-age Americans serve in the armed forces, and these personnel and their families bear the brunt of the deaths, injuries, and afflictions like PTSD that America's recent wars have caused.¹⁷⁹ Furthermore, while previous wars have "imposed some level of civilian sacrifice through rationing, higher taxes, or both" America's wars since 9/11 have been primarily financed by borrowing.¹⁸⁰ This means that the U.S. can wage war without materially affecting the lives of the vast majority of its citizens, greatly reducing the likelihood of a severe public backlash.

Often, of course, members of the public do get information that suggests that U.S. policy may be wrongheaded, harmful, or even illegal. A 2013 study by Barbara Sutton and Kari Norgaard examined how Americans process negative information about U.S. foreign policy, especially torture and human rights violations carried out by the U.S. government. Sutton and Norgaard emphasized that "knowledge about human rights

¹⁷⁸ Walt, 173.

¹⁷⁹ Hayes, 200.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

abuses at the hands of U.S. officials has been available in the mainstream media, and not just in obscure sources,” but found that “the ideology of patriotism and national security provided some interviewees with compelling tools to minimize, normalize, or justify human rights violations.”¹⁸¹ Such subjects “exhibited a reluctance to acknowledge or condemn violations of human rights by U.S. officials, particularly under the administration they supported,” and would instead deflect to human rights abuses carried out by and in other countries.¹⁸²

Even interviewees who were more critical of the government still to some degree processed abuses through euphemism and accepted official explanations for rights violations, such as the blame directed at “a few bad apples who committed abuses at Abu Ghraib,” which excuses higher officials and the overall thrust of U.S. policy in the War on Terror.¹⁸³ The researchers also highlight the usage of terms like “collateral damage” and “enhanced interrogation techniques” as serving “to legitimate disturbing dimensions of foreign policy.”¹⁸⁴

Such practices and modes of thinking help explain why in the United States there has not been, in Sutton and Norgaard’s terms, “greater public demand for governmental accountability when state officials perpetrate, authorize, or condone abuse.”¹⁸⁵ It is not the case, however, that the American people have never been in favor of accountability for crimes committed in the course of U.S. foreign policy. Indeed, as Glenn Greenwald

¹⁸¹ Barbara Sutton and Kari Marie Norgaard, “Cultures of Denial: Avoiding Knowledge of State Violations of Human Rights in Argentina and the United States,” *Sociological Forum* 28, no. 3 (September 2013): 500-501.

¹⁸² Sutton and Norgaard, 508.

¹⁸³ Sutton and Norgaard, 518.

¹⁸⁴ Sutton and Norgaard, 519.

¹⁸⁵ Sutton and Norgaard, 501.

notes in his book *With Liberty and Justice for Some*, a *CNN* poll before the 2006 midterm elections found 57 percent of respondents in favor of investigations into the conduct of Bush administration officials over the previous six years.¹⁸⁶ After the election of Barack Obama to the presidency, a *Washington Post/ABC News* poll found that 50 percent of Americans “said that the Obama administration should investigate whether the Bush administration’s treatment of detainees was illegal” and a *USA Today* poll found that almost two-thirds of Americans supported investigations into both the Bush administration’s torture program and the warrantless wiretapping of U.S. citizens.¹⁸⁷ Public support for such investigations only eroded after it “became clear that not only Republicans but also President Obama and the Democratic leadership opposed any inquiries into Bush-era lawbreaking” – a development consistent with the contention of elite cue theory that “when elites come to a common interpretation of a political reality, the public gives them great latitude.”¹⁸⁸

Thus, the public may be prone to inattention towards foreign policy, predominantly guided by elite opinion, and susceptible to practices that help excuse and minimize wrongdoing by the foreign policy elite, but they are not reflexively opposed to accountability. Indeed, the election of Barack Obama, and to a lesser extent, that of Donald Trump, can be seen as a rebuke of the foreign policy establishment.¹⁸⁹ However, when the elite has been steadfast and cohesive in resisting public desires for accountability, such desires have quickly passed.

¹⁸⁶ Glenn Greenwald, *With Liberty and Justice for Some: How the Law Is Used to Destroy Equality and Protect the Powerful*, 197.

¹⁸⁷ Greenwald, 199.

¹⁸⁸ Greenwald, 200. ; Berinsky, 124.

¹⁸⁹ Edward Luce, “How Trump Laundered the US Foreign Policy Elite’s Reputation,” *Financial Times*, December 13, 2018, <https://www.ft.com/content/b5855d2a-fedb-11e8-aebf-99e208d3e521>.

Elliott Abrams

"This snake's hard to kill." – Admiral William J. Crowe on Elliott Abrams, 1989.

In January 2019, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo named Elliott Abrams, a longtime stalwart of the neoconservative foreign policy community, as the Trump administration's "special envoy" for Venezuela, where the U.S. is seeking to oust the leftist president Nicolas Maduro in favor of an opposition leader and internationally-recognized "interim president."¹⁹⁰ Pompeo stated that Abrams "will have responsibility for all things related to our efforts to restore democracy" in Venezuela, and that "Elliott's passion for the rights and liberties of all peoples makes him a perfect fit and a valuable and timely addition" to this project.¹⁹¹

An examination of Elliott Abrams' actual record as a policymaker, however, calls Pompeo's assertions, and perhaps also U.S. aims in Venezuela, into question. In fact, Abrams' career has been marked by his support for utterly disastrous policies and ignominious abuses of human rights, most notably in Central America but also in the Middle East. Moreover, Abrams in 1991 pleaded guilty to two charges of misleading Congress on information related to the Iran-Contra scandal, in which members of the

¹⁹⁰ "Who Is Elliott Abrams, US Special Envoy for Venezuela?," *Al Jazeera*, February 12, 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/02/elliott-abrams-special-envoy-venezuela-190212012146896.html>

¹⁹¹ Jon Schwarz, "Elliott Abrams, Trump's Pick to Bring 'Democracy' to Venezuela, Has Spent His Life Crushing Democracy," *The Intercept*, January 30, 2019, <https://theintercept.com/2019/01/30/elliott-abrams-venezuela-coup/>; "Allan Nairn: Trump's Venezuela Envoy Elliott Abrams Is a War Criminal Who Has Abetted Genocide," *Democracy Now!*, January 30, 2019, https://www.democracynow.org/2019/1/30/allan_nairn_trump_s_venezuela_envoy.

Reagan administration provided military aid to the Nicaraguan “Contra” rebels in violation of U.S. law.¹⁹²

In a House Foreign Affairs Committee hearing in February 2019, Representative Ilhan Omar (D-MN) aired these concerns, saying:

Mr. Abrams, in 1991 you pleaded guilty to two counts of withholding information from Congress regarding the Iran-Contra affair, for which you were later pardoned by President George H.W. Bush. I fail to understand why members of this committee or the American people should find any testimony you give today to be truthful.

Omar went on to note that Abrams “dismissed as ‘communist propaganda’ reports about the massacre of El Mozote in which more than 800 civilians, including children as young as 2 years old, were brutally murdered by U.S.-trained troops.”¹⁹³ She then asked: “You later said the U.S. policy in El Salvador was a ‘fabulous achievement.’ ... Do you think that massacre was a ‘fabulous achievement?’”¹⁹⁴

Abrams refused to answer, calling the line of questioning “ridiculous.”¹⁹⁵ What ensued among the political commentariat and foreign policy elite was an impressive display of wagon-circling as others leapt to Abrams’ defense.

On *Twitter*, Jay Nordlinger of *National Review* said, of Omar, that “someone ought to have given her a clue who Elliott Abrams is. The guy has been championing freedom and human rights his entire life (and taking unholy sh** for it from the illiberal Left and Right).”¹⁹⁶ *Washington Post* columnist and Council on Foreign Relations Fellow

¹⁹² “Who Is Elliott Abrams, US Special Envoy for Venezuela?”

¹⁹³ Sarah Jones, “Area Criminal Shocked by Congresswoman Who Cites His Crimes Out Loud,” *Intelligencer*, February 13, 2019, <http://nymag.com/intelligencer/2019/02/criminal-shocked-when-congresswoman-says-his-crimes-out-loud.html>.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

Max Boot added the following: “Disgraceful ad hominem attacks by @IlhanMN on my @CFR_org colleague Elliott Abrams. She doesn't seem to realize he is a leading advocate of human rights and democracy--not a promoter of genocide! More evidence of the loony left I caution Democrats about.”¹⁹⁷

Nominally liberal foreign policy experts were quick to lend bipartisan credibility to Abrams’ defense. Kelly Magsamen, Vice President of the Center for American Progress, said in a since-deleted Tweet: “I worked for Elliott Abrams as a civil servant. He is a fierce advocate for human rights and democracy. Yes, he made serious professional mistakes and was held accountable. I’m a liberal but I’m also fair. We all have a lot of work to do together in Venezuela. We share goals.”¹⁹⁸

She was joined by Dave Harden, a former Assistant Administrator for the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), who added: “I was a career FSO [Foreign Service Officer] and later Obama appointee, Elliott Abrams was a kind, thoughtful, non-partisan mentor. Let's try to see the best – rather than the worst – in people.”¹⁹⁹ This was co-signed by Nicholas Burns, an ambassador under President Bill Clinton and Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs for President George W. Bush. Burns said: “Elliott Abrams is a devoted public servant who has contributed much of his professional life to our country. It’s time to build bridges in America and not tear people down.”²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁷ Jones, “Area Criminal Shocked by Congresswoman Who Cites His Crimes Out Loud.”

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Dave Harden. Twitter Post. February 13, 2019, 3:10 PM.
https://twitter.com/Dave_Harden/status/1095822572523003905

²⁰⁰ Nicholas Burns. Twitter Post. February 13, 2019, 4:00 PM.
<https://twitter.com/rnicholasburns/status/1095835155271503877?s=11>

These arguments share a common vocabulary and points of reference. For one, Harden, Magsamen, and Boot note that they know Abrams personally and like him, or that he has been personally nice to them. Boot states this even more plainly in an interview with *The New Yorker*. In explaining why he came to Abrams' defense, Boot says: "I know Elliott. He has been a colleague of mine at the Council on Foreign Relations, and I think that he is a very smart person. I think he is basically a good person and he is somebody who I don't see as terribly ideological."²⁰¹

Here several of Robert Putnam's "dimensions of elite integration" are on stark display. In rallying to Abrams' defense, these other members of the foreign policy elite are making a clear show of group solidarity. To explain this solidarity, they cite the extensive personal interaction they have had with Abrams. This personal interaction seems intended to bolster their credibility as authorities on Abrams' character. Additionally, however, it diverts the conversation from Abrams' policy record to his personal qualities and how he treats his peers, a wholly unrelated subject.

Their statements also reveal shared institutional context – several of these individuals have at times worked with or for Abrams. For Boot, this was at the Council on Foreign Relations, where they are both senior fellows, while for Harden and Magsamen, this was at the State Department.²⁰² Lastly, there is a nod to value consensus with Magsamen's assertion that "we share goals" and with the repeated contention that

²⁰¹ Isaac Chotiner, "Max Boot Defends Elliott Abrams's Account of U.S. Policy in El Salvador," *The New Yorker*, February 20, 2019, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/q-and-a/max-boot-defends-elliott-abrams-account-of-us-policy-in-el-salvador>.

²⁰² Ibid.

Elliott Abrams is a champion of democracy and human rights, a notion that will be addressed further later in this chapter.

Such a display of wagon-circling, or “group solidarity” is not an aberration in the world of the foreign policy elite. Indeed, it is likely the reason that Abrams still has any foreign policy career to speak of. These peculiar mechanisms of the foreign policy elite have sustained Abrams’ career for decades despite several potentially career-ending episodes.

Mr. Abrams Goes to Washington

As stated in his biography on the *Council on Foreign Relations* website, Elliott Abrams attained the sort of thoroughly prestigious education common to members of the foreign policy elite, attending Harvard College, the London School of Economics, and Harvard Law School.²⁰³ After two years of corporate law, Abrams joined the staff of Senator Henry M. Jackson (D-WA), a foreign policy hardliner who provided an early ideological home to what became the neoconservative movement.²⁰⁴ He went on to work for Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D-NY), eventually becoming his chief of staff. By the 1980 presidential campaign, Abrams found himself disillusioned with the Democratic Party, describing it as “wedded to a foreign policy that I could not accept.”²⁰⁵ Thus, Abrams worked on Ronald Reagan’s presidential campaign, and proceeded to be hired as Assistant Secretary of State for International Organization Affairs in the new

²⁰³ “Elliott Abrams,” Council on Foreign Relations, accessed March 13, 2019, <https://www.cfr.org/expert/elliott-abrams>.

²⁰⁴ Elliott Abrams, *Undue Process: A Story of How Political Differences Are Turned into Crimes* (New York: Free Press, 1993) 2.

²⁰⁵ Abrams, *Undue Process*, 2.

administration.²⁰⁶ Later, Abrams was moved to the position of Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs, after the previous nominee for the role, in Abrams words, “had to withdraw his name after running into a Senate buzz saw.”²⁰⁷ Abrams does not name the man, who was in fact Ernest W. Lefever, and the “buzz saw” Abrams refers to was the revelation by Lefever’s two brothers that he believed black people to be “inferior, intellectually speaking.”²⁰⁸

It was in this position and his next, as Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, that Abrams conducted his most controversial work. The day before he assumed the role of assistant secretary for human rights, the Atlacatl Battalion, a U.S.-trained unit of the Salvadoran military, massacred nearly 1,000 men, women, and children in and around the village of El Mozote. In the process, the soldiers also committed mass rapes (including of children) and other indescribable acts of brutality.²⁰⁹ This also happened to come just before the Reagan administration was required to certify whether the Salvadoran army was improving its conduct on human rights, a condition of military aid to the country.²¹⁰

Elliott Abrams testified to Congress that the massacre was “being significantly misused, at the very best, by the guerillas” and suggested that the timing of the publicity around the massacre, being just before the certification requirement, was suspicious.²¹¹

²⁰⁶ Abrams, 3.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Schwarz, “Elliott Abrams, Trump’s Pick to Bring ‘Democracy’ to Venezuela, Has Spent His Life Crushing Democracy.”

²⁰⁹ Schwarz.

²¹⁰ Clifford Krauss, “How U.S. Actions Helped Hide Salvador Human Rights Abuses,” *The New York Times*, March 21, 1993, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/1993/03/21/world/how-us-actions-helped-hide-salvador-human-rights-abuses.html>.

²¹¹ Branko Marcetic, “The Tragic Life of the War Criminal Elliott Abrams,” *Jacobin*, February 16, 2019, <https://jacobinmag.com/2019/02/the-tragic-life-of-the-war-criminal-elliott-abrams>.

Abrams and other administration officials continued to make these assertions despite investigations by U.S. embassy officials, as well as the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, which strongly indicated a massacre had occurred.

Abrams continuously misled Congress on the progress of human rights in El Salvador. In 1982, he told the House Committee on Foreign Affairs that several hundred Salvadoran officers had been “dismissed from the Armed Forces... or jailed” for terrorist activity or human rights violations, while a cable from the U.S. embassy in San Salvador sent that same month reported only 12 cases of Salvadoran officers facing discipline for human rights abuses.²¹² Abrams also denied that the U.S. government knew who was participating in and supporting right wing death squads in El Salvador, while at the same time the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence reported that “a number of prominent Salvadorans have supported, directed or engaged in death squad activities” including “officials in the civilian government, representatives of the private sector organizations, and various individuals associated with the traditional oligarchy of that country.”²¹³ Abrams additionally covered up the U.S. government’s knowledge that the right wing Salvadoran politician Roberto D’Aubuisson was responsible for the 1980 assassination of Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero, saying “Anybody who thinks you’re going to find a cable that says that Roberto D’Aubuisson murdered the archbishop is a fool.”²¹⁴ In truth, one 1980 cable from the U.S. embassy in El Salvador referred to D’Aubuisson as “the

²¹² Central America Crisis Monitoring Team, *In Contempt of Congress : The Reagan Record of Deceit & Illegality on Central America* (Washington, DC (1901 Q St., NW, Washington 20009) The Institute of Policy Studies, 1985), 33.

²¹³ Central America Crisis Monitoring Team, 36.

²¹⁴ Guy Gugliotta and Douglas Farah, “12 YEARS OF TORTURED TRUTH ON EL SALVADOR,” *The Washington Post*, March 21, 1992, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1993/03/21/12-years-of-tortured-truth-on-el-salvador/9432bb6f-fbd0-4b18-b254-29caa919dc98/?utm_term=.7a3e39b51c1a.

leader of the Romero plot” while another from the following year claimed that he chaired the meeting in which the murder was planned.²¹⁵

Ultimately, the civil war in El Salvador claimed around 75,000 lives, and a U.N.-backed truth commission found that 85 percent of this violence was carried out by the Salvadoran military and its associated death squads.²¹⁶

In Guatemala, where “civil war” had been raging since 1960, and would eventually claim 200,000 lives, Abrams repeatedly gave cover to military governments on human rights issues. Pressing for arms shipments to the Guatemalan military, Abrams credited the military dictatorship of Efraín Ríos Montt with “considerable progress” on human rights.²¹⁷ He added that under Ríos Montt, “there has been a tremendous change, especially in the attitude of the government toward the Indian population.”²¹⁸ Decades later, Ríos Montt was convicted of genocide against Guatemala’s Ixil Maya population.²¹⁹ In 1984, Abrams praised the regime of Oscar Mejía Victores, saying that the dictator had “continued a large number of the human rights improvements that Ríos Montt began.” Mejía was also eventually prosecuted in Guatemala for crimes against humanity, but was ruled unfit to stand trial after suffering a stroke.²²⁰ Abrams justified these obvious distortions by suggesting that they were necessary in order to have

²¹⁵ Gugliotta and Farah.

²¹⁶ Schwarz, “Elliott Abrams, Trump’s Pick to Bring ‘Democracy’ to Venezuela, Has Spent His Life Crushing Democracy”; “Truth Commission: El Salvador,” United States Institute of Peace, accessed March 28, 2019, <https://www.usip.org/publications/1992/07/truth-commission-el-salvador>.

²¹⁷ Schwarz.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ “The Guatemala Genocide Case – CJA,” accessed March 13, 2019, <https://cja.org/what-we-do/litigation/the-guatemala-genocide-case/>.

²²⁰ Harrison Smith, “Óscar Mejía Victores, Guatemalan Military Ruler of Mid-1980s, Dies at 85,” *The Washington Post*, February 2, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/oscar-mejia-victores-guatemalan-military-ruler-of-mid-1980s-dies-at-85/2016/02/02/39ee5d84-c9cc-11e5-88ff-e2d1b4289c2f_story.html?utm_term=.fdecf1f4a08d.

continued “influence over the behavior of the Guatemalan government and the Guatemalan military.”²²¹

Abrams’ most notorious actions in this period relate to the Reagan administration’s policies towards the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua. Central to these policies were the Contras, a guerilla force composed primarily of former officials and soldiers from the dictatorial regime of Anastasio Somoza, which the Sandinistas had overthrown.²²² The Contra forces, which were rather impotent without significant U.S. support, were originally conceived, according to Dario Moreno in his book *U.S. Policy in Central America*, “as a pressure tactic to compel the Sandinistas to stop their arms shipment to Salvadoran guerillas and to prevent Nicaragua from joining the Soviet bloc.”²²³ Under a cohort of hardline Reagan officials including Abrams, however, this policy shifted towards one of ousting the Sandinista government entirely.²²⁴ Abrams desired an even more aggressive policy. After the successful U.S. invasion of Grenada in 1983, he advocated for a similar invasion of Nicaragua to overthrow the Sandinistas, though this was not undertaken.²²⁵

Much like the U.S.-backed governments of El Salvador and Guatemala, the Contras were guilty of shocking human rights abuses. In just one instance, a large group of Contra fighters ambushed a truck carrying coffee-pickers in rural Nicaragua. They fired upon the truck, killing “twenty-one civilians, including a mother and her 5 year old

²²¹ Central America Crisis Monitoring Team, *In Contempt of Congress*.

²²² Theodore Draper, *A Very Thin Line: The Iran-Contra Affairs* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1991), 17.

²²³ Dario. Moreno, *U.S. Policy in Central America: The Endless Debate*. (Miami: Florida International University Press, 1990), 110.

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Schwarz.

child” before setting the truck on fire.²²⁶ Such acts were not just aberrations caused by rogue elements. In fact, a CIA manual produced for the Contras, entitled “Psychological Operations and Guerilla Warfare,” advised fighters on how to employ the “selective use of violence for propagandistic effects.”²²⁷ Abrams cannot claim the role of a passive bystander to the Contras’ tactics. In his book *Undue Process*, he describes his bureaucratic infighting with Alan Fiers at the CIA over “who would really, in the most intense and longest-fought contest of all, control the Contras?”²²⁸ This suggests, provided that Abrams had any success in this contest, that he had at least a measure of responsibility for the Contras’ actions.

These policies eventually led to the Iran-Contra affair, a covert operation in which Reagan officials illegally sold weapons to Iran at inflated prices and diverted the revenues from these sales towards funding the Contra rebels.²²⁹ Abrams’ role in the Contra side of this equation was significant. Most notably, it included a strange episode in which he, with the authorization of the Secretary of State, solicited funding for the Contras from the Sultan of Brunei.²³⁰ Acting under the codename “Mr. Kenilworth,” Abrams met with the Foreign Minister of Brunei to secure this donation. Because of a clerical error, however, Abrams provided an incorrect bank routing number to Brunei, causing the funds to be deposited in the wrong Swiss bank account.²³¹ Thus, the Contras

²²⁶ Central America Crisis Monitoring Team, *In Contempt of Congress*, 24.

²²⁷ Central America Crisis Monitoring Team, 22.

²²⁸ Abrams, *Undue Process*, 15.

²²⁹ Lawrence E. Walsh, *Firewall: The Iran-Contra Conspiracy and Cover-Up* (New York: Norton, 1997), xv.

²³⁰ Draper, *A Very Thin Line*, 367.

²³¹ *Ibid.*

never received the money and the government of Brunei had to publically seek to recover its donation.²³²

The Reagan administration's Nicaragua policy "ended in ruin" as the "Sandinistas continued to consolidate power successfully and the Contras suffered both military and political defeat."²³³ For this, Abrams blamed Congress for blocking some of the administration's efforts to support the Contras. During the administration of George H.W. Bush, however, with the U.S. no longer sabotaging a Central American-led peace process, the Sandinistas were successfully induced to open their regime and hold free elections.²³⁴

The policies pushed by Abrams elsewhere in Central America, beyond their ethical merits, were also of dubious success. As recently as this year, Abrams has called the Reagan administration's policies in El Salvador "a fabulous achievement," saying "from the day President Duarte was elected in a free election, to this day, El Salvador has been a democracy."²³⁵

It is difficult to accept that the election of Napoleon Duarte was truly "free" however, when a significant portion of El Salvador's population was at the time subject to repression and periodic massacres. Furthermore, while El Salvador and Guatemala are now electoral democracies, both countries still face severe social problems resulting from the U.S. policies of the 1980s.²³⁶ In the 2010s, the so-called "Northern Triangle"

²³² "The Sultan of Brunei Wants His \$10 Million Back...", *UPI*, accessed March 13, 2019, <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1987/06/02/The-sultan-of-Brunei-wants-his-10-million-back/5750549604800/>.

²³³ Moreno, *U.S. Policy in Central America*, 134.

²³⁴ Moreno, *U.S. Policy in Central America*, 137.

²³⁵ Jones.

²³⁶ Raymond Bonner, "America's Role in El Salvador's Deterioration," *The Atlantic*, January 20, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/01/trump-and-el-salvador/550955/>.

countries of Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador became some of the largest sources of unauthorized immigrants and asylum seekers arriving at the U.S. southern border.²³⁷

This echoes what happened during the civil wars that took place in these countries in the 1980s. From El Salvador in particular, tens of thousands fled to the United States for refuge during that time period. When in the 1990s, President Bill Clinton allowed the “temporary protected status” of Salvadorans to expire, thousands of young men with no prospects were forced back into Central America from the U.S., coming to form the core of the transnational gangs that have driven these countries’ homicide rates to among the highest in the world.²³⁸ It is worth noting that in Nicaragua, where the Reagan administration’s nightmare scenario of a leftist revolutionary government came to pass, the murder rate is among the lowest in the Western Hemisphere, and the number of refugees that have fled from Nicaragua to the U.S. is correspondingly lower.²³⁹

Mr. Abrams Goes to Court-Mandated Community Service

At the height of the Iran-Contra scandal, the Justice Department had appointed a special prosecutor, Lawrence Walsh, to head the Office of the Independent Counsel investigating the affair.²⁴⁰ In 1991, Walsh moved to indict Abrams for lying to Congress about Oliver North’s activities and “the foreign fund-raising for the contras.”²⁴¹

²³⁷ D’Vera Cohn, Jeffrey Passel, and Ana Gonzalez-Barrera, “Immigration From Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador Up,” Pew Research Center, December 7, 2017, <https://www.pewhispanic.org/2017/12/07/rise-in-u-s-immigrants-from-el-salvador-guatemala-and-honduras-outpaces-growth-from-elsewhere/>.

²³⁸ Bonner, “America’s Role in El Salvador’s Deterioration.”

²³⁹ Roberto Lovato, “What Explains Nicaragua’s Surprisingly Low Murder Rate?,” *The Boston Globe*, January 12, 2018, <https://www.bostonglobe.com/ideas/2018/01/12/what-explains-nicaragua-surprisingly-low-murder-rate/GTL3T5Ps1KwbbOdUMgB26I/story.html>.

²⁴⁰ Greenwald, 27.

²⁴¹ Walsh, *Firewall*, 305.

According to Walsh, Abrams had “unquestionably misled three congressional committees” after the Hasenfus incident in which a U.S. citizen flying a supply route for the Contras was shot down in Nicaragua. Before the Senate foreign relations committee, Abrams insisted of this supply network:

It is not our supply system... we have been careful not to get closely involved with it and to stay away from it. We do not encourage people to do this..., we don't have conversations, we don't tell them to do this, we don't ask them to do it. But I think it is quite clear... that the attitude of the administration is that these people are doing a very good thing... But that is without any encouragement and coordination from us, other than a public speech by the president.²⁴²

Abram's made this assertion despite the fact that North had outlined his activities in support of the Contras at least two meetings of the “Restricted Interagency Group” on Central America, of which Abrams was chairman.²⁴³ Secondly, he told Congress that “we're not in the fundraising business” and that he was “fairly confident that there was no foreign government contributing” to the Contras.²⁴⁴ He testified to this despite having personally solicited funding from the Sultan of Brunei, and having assured Oliver North that the funds were on their way.²⁴⁵ In Abrams' defense, the Contras had not actually received these funds as he had provided Brunei with the wrong bank account number.

For this Abrams eventually pled guilty to two misdemeanors for withholding information from Congress. He apologized, and stated, “I take full responsibility for my actions, for my failure to make full disclosure to Congress in 1986.”²⁴⁶ He was placed on probation for two years and assigned 100 hours of community service.²⁴⁷ Before he could

²⁴² Walsh, 306.

²⁴³ Walsh, 308.

²⁴⁴ Walsh, 309.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Walsh, 310.

complete this sentence, President George H.W. Bush, during his last month in office, pardoned Abrams.²⁴⁸

One does not need to read far into *Undue Process*, Abrams' self-exculpatory book about his prosecution, to see that he neither considers himself guilty nor is apologetic for his actions. Abrams notes, first of all, that when he had arrived in Washington 16 years earlier, he had neither intended nor expected to be convicted of crimes. "I could not even have contemplated a criminal conviction," he says, "I would have considered it ludicrous, impossible, insane."²⁴⁹

He recounts how anticipation of his indictment made it impossible for him to enjoy a book part for his friend Gertrude Himmelfarb, and in an internal monologue, he refers to his prosecutors as "you miserable, filthy bastards, you bloodsuckers."²⁵⁰ Later, he (again, internally) implores Lawrence Walsh to "drop dead. Do something useful."²⁵¹ The most vitriolic words he chooses to include are those of his wife, Rachel. She refers to the Office of the Independent Counsel as "those fucking animals, those vermin."²⁵² Abrams also devotes the better part of one chapter to a letter from Rachel to her friend, in which she says of the charges against her husband:

This is all about withholding information from the abominable, bloated, check-kiting, drunken, eelish, foul, greedy, hypocritical, ignorant, jelly-legged, knee-hauling, lying, mindless, nictitating, obtuse, pusillanimous, quaking, ruthless, simpering, treacherous, useless, vile, whoring, xenophobic, yellow-bellied, zeros who populate Congress. What? Only withhold information from them? Arrest them! Manacle them! Hang them! Electrocute them!²⁵³

²⁴⁸ Greenwald, *With Liberty and Justice for Some*.

²⁴⁹ Abrams, *Undue Process*, 1.

²⁵⁰ Abrams, 44, 77.

²⁵¹ Abrams, 92.

²⁵² Abrams, 129.

²⁵³ Abrams, 177.

Abrams argues throughout *Undue Process* that he was a victim of prosecutorial overreach, and of a process through which petty political differences were turned into serious crimes.²⁵⁴ He weakens his case, perhaps, by arguing that “for most Americans, the federal criminal justice system is filled with safeguards” but that “the legal system established by Congress to pursue senior officials of the Executive Branch bears no resemblance to this at all.”²⁵⁵ The charge that Executive Branch officials are uniquely persecuted by the U.S. criminal justice system rings hollow, especially considering that Abrams was pardoned before he even served his relatively light sentence of probation and community service.

Some did find Abrams’ defense persuasive. Robert Novak, a conservative journalist on whose show Abrams appeared to offer misleading information about the Hasenfus incident, explicitly calls Abrams’ prosecution “Kafkaesque,” comparing his ordeal to that of a Kafka character who is executed for crimes that are never revealed to him.²⁵⁶ Novak further asserts that Abrams’ prosecution “recalls the excesses of state power that peaked in Berlin and Moscow.”²⁵⁷ Overall, Novak seems to endorse Abrams’ assessment that the case against him was pursued out of political spite by liberals out for revenge against Reaganite Republicans.

In his own book, Abrams describes finding such media reactions gratifying, saying that he gained “satisfaction reading the editorials that praised my work and denounced the prosecution.”²⁵⁸ Novak’s assessment was not unique. *The Wall Street*

²⁵⁴ Abrams, x.

²⁵⁵ Abrams, 210.

²⁵⁶ Robert D. Novak, “Abrams and the Special Prosecutor,” *The National Interest*, no. 29 (1992): 76.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Abrams, 232.

Journal's editorial at the time of Abrams' guilty plea declared the prosecution to be "character assassination."²⁵⁹ This basic characterization of Abrams' prosecution by his defenders persists to today. In 2017, an opinion piece by Hudson Institute adjunct fellow Ronald Radosh, supporting Abrams' consideration for the post of Deputy Secretary of State in the Trump administration, declared Abrams' "trial and conviction was nothing but a witch hunt."²⁶⁰

There is one contention made by Abrams and his defenders that even some of his most ardent critics support. Robert Novak called the charges to which Abrams' pled guilty "trivial to the point of absurdity" – in Abrams' words, they were "Mickey Mouse crap."²⁶¹ Speaking to *Democracy Now!*, investigative journalist Allan Nairn stated:

What Abrams was charged with and pled guilty to was the most trivial aspect of both the Contra operation and the whole U.S. policy in Central America... he was never charged by the U.S. prosecutors with providing weapons to terrorists, which is what the Salvadoran army and the Guatemalan army and the CIA-backed, U.S.-created Contras were behaving as, at the time. He was not charged with that. He was not charged with abetting crimes against humanity or genocide.²⁶²

When Nairn confronted Abrams with this same argument – that he ought to be tried for abetting crimes against humanity – during an appearance on *Charlie Rose* in 1995, Abrams responded: "Yes, right, we'll put all the American officials who won the Cold War in the dock."²⁶³ This might be persuasive if one accepts that the overthrow of the Sandinistas and the survival of brutal regimes in El Salvador and Guatemala were

²⁵⁹ Baltimore Sun, "Abrams Pleads Guilty," *The Baltimore Sun*, accessed April 4, 2019, <https://www.baltimoresun.com/news/bs-xpm-1991-10-10-1991283134-story.html>.

²⁶⁰ Ronald Radosh, "Elliott Abrams Doesn't Deserve Attacks From the Right," Hudson Institute, accessed April 4, 2019, <http://www.hudson.org/research/13332-elliott-abrams-doesn-t-deserve-attacks-from-the-right>.

²⁶¹ Novak, "Abrams and the Special Prosecutor" 76; Abrams, *Undue Process*, 45.

²⁶² "Allan Nairn: Trump's Venezuela Envoy Elliott Abrams Is a War Criminal Who Has Abetted Genocide."

²⁶³ *Ibid.*

vital to winning the Cold War, or to the ultimate collapse of the Soviet Union. However, as Nairn says, although U.S. Central America policy “was being portrayed by Abrams and others at the time as a battle to prevent El Salvador and Guatemala and Nicaragua from becoming wings of the Soviet Union, anyone familiar with the facts on the ground knew that that was ridiculous. That was not at all what was at stake.”²⁶⁴ Instead, “what was at stake was a battle between local oligarchies” and “the poor peasant and small working-class majorities.”²⁶⁵

Abrams in the Second Bush Administration

After Elliott Abrams pleaded guilty to withholding information from Congress, even some of his firm supporters expressed doubts that he would be able to return to a government career. Robert Novak, in 1992, declared it “too late to ease the pain or save the public career of Elliott Abrams.”²⁶⁶ As it turned out, this was not the case.

After the election of President George W. Bush in 2000, Abrams was appointed as “special assistant to the president and senior director of the National Security Council for democracy, human rights, and international organizations.”²⁶⁷ Probably anticipating that Abrams’ guilty plea would make it hard for him to be confirmed by the Senate, the Bush administration chose to place him in a series of roles at the National Security Council, where positions do not require the Senate’s approval.²⁶⁸ After this first role,

²⁶⁴ “Allan Nairn: Trump’s Venezuela Envoy Elliott Abrams Is a War Criminal Who Has Abetted Genocide.”

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ Novak, “Abrams and the Special Prosecutor.”

²⁶⁷ “Elliott Abrams.”

²⁶⁸ Schwarz, “Elliott Abrams, Trump’s Pick to Bring ‘Democracy’ to Venezuela, Has Spent His Life Crushing Democracy.”

Abrams also served as “special assistant to the president and senior director of the National Security Council for Near East and North African Affairs,” and later, “deputy assistant to the president and deputy national security advisor for global democracy strategy.”²⁶⁹

Less information is available on Abrams’ specific actions in these various roles, as they have not been subject to the same level of investigation as Iran-Contra and the Reagan administration’s Central America policy, and much more information remains classified. However, Abrams nonetheless managed to associate himself at least in some way with several major blunders during his second period in government.

First, in 2002, there was an unsuccessful coup attempt against then-president of Venezuela Hugo Chavez.²⁷⁰ Chavez was briefly pushed out of power before being restored on the basis of both popular support and support from the Venezuelan military.²⁷¹ The extent of U.S. involvement in and backing of the coup is not yet known, but at the time, the *London Observer* named Abrams as “the crucial figure around the coup” and claimed that he “gave a nod” to the plot.²⁷²

Abrams also may have played a role in blocking a peace proposal from Iran to the U.S. in 2003. The proposal was sent by fax, and based on the chain of command in the National Security Council, it should have been received by Abrams and then transferred to National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice.²⁷³ However, Rice never received it.

²⁶⁹ “Elliott Abrams.”

²⁷⁰ Schwarz, “Elliott Abrams, Trump’s Pick to Bring ‘Democracy’ to Venezuela, Has Spent His Life Crushing Democracy.”

²⁷¹ Ibid.

²⁷² Ed Vulliamy, “Venezuela Coup Linked to Bush Team,” *The Guardian*, April 21, 2002, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2002/apr/21/usa.venezuela>.

²⁷³ Schwarz.

Most notably, Abrams played a key role in the course of U.S. policy action that led to the Islamist political party and insurgent group Hamas taking full control of the Gaza strip in Palestine.

After Bush took office in 2000, his administration advocated for new Palestinian legislative elections.²⁷⁴ According to a *Vanity Fair* report, Palestinian officials warned the Bush administration that the ruling party, Fatah, was unprepared for elections scheduled for January 2006, as it struggled against public perceptions of corruption and inept rule. President Bush nonetheless insisted that the elections go forward, and when they did, Hamas won 56 percent of seats in the Palestinian parliament.²⁷⁵

Per *Vanity Fair*, “few within the U.S. administration had predicted the result, and there was no contingency plan to deal with it.”²⁷⁶ Administration officials were left baffled by their own policy decision, with one Department of Defense official asking “who the fuck recommended this?”²⁷⁷ Abrams himself admitted that the administration’s lack of concern for Fatah’s prospects was “condescending, suggesting that we thought Arabs, or Palestinian Arabs, could not really be expected to have honest public institutions.”²⁷⁸ At this point, some analysts suggested the Hamas’s moderate elements could be bolstered and that it could be drawn into the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. The administration quickly took a different tack, however, reversing its support for Palestinian democracy and attempting to push the Hamas government out of power.

²⁷⁴ David Rose, “The Gaza Bombshell,” *Vanity Fair*, April 2008, accessed March 13, 2019, <https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2008/04/gaza200804>.

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

²⁷⁸ Daniel Byman, “Is Hamas Winning?,” *The Washington Quarterly* 36, no. 3 (August 2013): 63–76, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2013.825550>.

What resulted was a “covert initiative, approved by Bush and implemented by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Deputy National Security Adviser Elliott Abrams, to provoke a Palestinian civil war.”²⁷⁹ The U.S. opposed Abbas’s efforts to form a unity government with Hamas, and instead pushed him to dissolve the Hamas-controlled parliament and form an emergency government, a move of dubious legality under the Palestinian constitution.²⁸⁰

Anticipating that this kind of presidential coup would trigger an uprising from Hamas, the U.S. moved to strengthen Fatah’s security forces. A “dirty war” ensued between Fatah and Hamas’ forces in Gaza, “with both sides committing atrocities” such as torture, kidnapping, and assassinations.²⁸¹ With echoes of Iran-Contra, U.S. officials looked to covert means to supply Fatah with weapons and funds to pay security personnel, reaching out to the leadership of Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates to do so.²⁸² As Egyptian-trained-and-equipped Fatah fighters arrived in Gaza, Hamas responded by ramping up its attacks on Fatah. Hamas first moved to expel one particularly brutal branch of Fatah’s security apparatus, but after early success seized on the opportunity to gain more control.²⁸³ After five days of fighting, Fatah forces were completely expelled from Gaza, leaving Hamas in total control of the strip.

Hamas’ leadership insists that they would not have seized control “if Fatah had not provoked it.”²⁸⁴ Hamas spokesman Fawzi Barhoum told *Vanity Fair*: “if we had let them stay loose in Gaza, there would have been more violence.” One former Bush

²⁷⁹ Byman, “Is Hamas Winning?”

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

²⁸¹ Rose, “The Gaza Bombshell.”

²⁸² Ibid.

²⁸³ Ibid.

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

administration official, David Wurmser, agreed, saying that “it looks to me that what happened wasn’t so much a coup by Hamas but an attempted coup by Fatah that was preempted before it could happen.”²⁸⁵

Abrams’ exact role in this series of U.S. actions is not entirely clear. However, Yezid Sayigh, a scholar of Middle East studies, asserts that Abrams was the most prominent ‘hardliner’ in the Bush administration pushing for a “hard coup” against Hamas.²⁸⁶ This assertion is supported by Beverley Milton-Edwards, who states that Abrams “made no secret that the U.S. government was determined to ensure that Hamas failed in government,” and that he “worked covertly to provoke armed confrontation between Fatah and Hamas.”²⁸⁷

Ultimately, as David Rose, author of the aforementioned *Vanity Fair* exposé, notes, “it is impossible to say for sure whether the outcome in Gaza would have been any better – for the Palestinian people, for the Israelis, and for America’s allies in Fatah – if the Bush administration had pursued a different policy. One thing, however, seems certain: it could not be any worse.”²⁸⁸

Some have speculated that the outcome in Gaza was not as bad for policymakers like Elliott Abrams as it may appear. Said one Fatah commander: “We can only conclude that having Hamas in control serves their overall strategy, because their policy was so crazy otherwise.”²⁸⁹ This speculation is not unfounded. As Professor Glenn Robinson

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

²⁸⁶ Yezid Sayigh, “Inducing a Failed State in Palestine,” *Survival* 49, no. 3 (October 1, 2007): 7–39, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396330701564786>.

²⁸⁷ Beverley Milton-Edwards, “The Ascendance of Political Islam: Hamas and Consolidation in the Gaza Strip,” *Third World Quarterly* 29, no. 8 (December 1, 2008): 1585–99, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436590802528739>.

²⁸⁸ Rose, “The Gaza Bombshell.”

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

notes, Abrams was “widely seen as opposed to any substantive peace effort.”²⁹⁰ In fact, Abrams referred to the Bush administration’s peace efforts as “just process to keep the Europeans and moderate Arabs on the team.”²⁹¹ For one opposed to the creation of a viable Palestinian state, the existence of two competing Palestinian governments is certainly an asset.

Abrams Outside of Government

Like many policymakers who are political appointees rather than career civil servants, Elliot Abrams has been periodically forced to exit public service when a Democrat occupies the presidency. In these interim periods, Abrams has, buttressed by his personal connections, enjoyed a number of sinecures and honorific positions that have helped maintain his status as a member of the foreign policy elite in good standing.

His Council on Foreign Relations biography puts these positions on proud display, and is notable for what it includes and omits. This biography mentions Abrams receipt of the “Secretary of State’s Distinguished Service Award” from his boss in the Reagan administration, George Shultz.²⁹² It also notes that he was granted the “Scholar-Statesman Award” from the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, a think tank whose Board of Advisers includes such prominent members of the political elite as Henry Kissinger, George Shultz, former Senator Joseph Lieberman, former U.S. admiral James

²⁹⁰ Glenn E. Robinson, “The Fragmentation of Palestine,” *Current History*; Philadelphia, December 2007.

²⁹¹ Ibid.

²⁹² “Elliott Abrams.” Council on Foreign Relations.

Stavridis, and former Director of Central Intelligence James Woolsey.²⁹³ It does not mention that he pleaded guilty for withholding information from Congress.

After the end of the Reagan administration, Abrams was named a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute, a conservative foreign policy think tank where he wrote on the future of U.S. foreign policy.²⁹⁴ Such partisan sinecures offer relief for policymakers whose actions in government have made them at least temporarily toxic to more mainstream institutions. In 1996, Abrams became president of the “Ethics and Public Policy Center,” another conservative think tank. If this seems ironic given his criminal conviction, it should also be noted that the Ethics and Public Policy Center was founded by one Ernest Lefever – the same man who would have had what became Abrams’ post of Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs had the former’s white supremacist views not been exposed.²⁹⁵

If Abrams was briefly toxic to mainstream foreign policy organizations, this did not last. In 1999, Abrams was appointed by then-Speaker of the House of Representatives Newt Gingrich to the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, a bipartisan federal government commission “dedicated to defending the universal right to freedom of religion or belief abroad.”²⁹⁶ He was appointed to this position again in 2012 by then-Speaker John Boehner.²⁹⁷ From 2009 to 2016, Abrams was a member of the U.S.

²⁹³ “Board of Advisors - The Washington Institute for Near East Policy,” accessed April 7, 2019, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/about/board-of-advisors>.

²⁹⁴ Abrams, *Undue Process*. ix.

²⁹⁵ “About,” *Ethics & Public Policy Center*, accessed April 7, 2019, <https://eppc.org/about/>.

²⁹⁶ “Former Commissioners,” United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, April 11, 2008, <https://www.uscirf.gov/about-uscirf/former-commissioners>; “About USCIRF,” United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, February 6, 2008, <https://www.uscirf.gov/about-uscirf>.

²⁹⁷ “Elliott Abrams Named to Religious Freedom Commission,” *The Times of Israel*, May 28, 2012, <http://www.timesofisrael.com/elliott-abrams-named-to-religious-freedom-commission/>.

Holocaust Memorial Council, the governing body of the U.S. Holocaust Museum.²⁹⁸ He is currently a member of the Museum’s “Committee on Conscience,” a position he shares with, among others, the former diplomat Nicholas Burns, who recently defended Abrams as “a devoted public servant” on Twitter.²⁹⁹ Abrams is currently on leave from the board of the National Endowment for Democracy, a U.S. government-backed non-profit which mostly supports pro-American civil society groups abroad.³⁰⁰ He is also an adjunct professor at the Georgetown School of Foreign Service.³⁰¹

Perhaps most notably, Abrams was hired as a “Senior Fellow for Middle Eastern Studies” at the Council on Foreign Relations in 2009. In its hiring statement, CFR, which is purported to be the preeminent membership organization of the U.S. foreign policy community, called Abrams “an expert in U.S. policy in the Middle East, Israeli-Palestinian affairs, and democracy promotion,” failing to mention how he actually employed this “expertise.”³⁰²

Khaldoun Khelil, a political risk adviser and security policy expert, described on Twitter his experience at CFR at the time Abrams was hired there. Abrams was appointed a fellow, Khelil asserts, because CFR President Richard Haass “saw him as a mentor.”³⁰³ He describes Abrams’ hire as “a contentious decision, but not uncommon in the

²⁹⁸ “Elliott Abrams.” Council on Foreign Relations.

²⁹⁹ “Committee on Conscience,” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, accessed April 7, 2019, <https://www.ushmm.org/confront-genocide/about/committee-on-conscience-members>.

³⁰⁰ “Elliott Abrams”; Stephen Kinzer, “Trump Is Gutting the National Endowment for Democracy, and That’s a Good Thing,” *BostonGlobe.com*, March 14, 2018, <https://www.bostonglobe.com/opinion/2018/03/14/trump-gutting-national-endowment-for-democracy-and-that-good-thing/fKxkRFVIC6F9wLIw4WsUzL/story.html>.

³⁰¹ “Elliott Abrams.” Council on Foreign Relations.

³⁰² “James Lindsay Returns to CFR as Director of Studies; Elliott Abrams, Evan Feigenbaum, Among New Scholars,” Council on Foreign Relations, accessed April 7, 2019, <https://www.cfr.org/news-releases/james-lindsay-returns-cfr-director-studies-elliott-abrams-evan-feigenbaum-among-new>.

³⁰³ Khaldoun Khelil. Twitter Post. February 13, 2019, 9:32 PM. <https://twitter.com/kkhelil/status/1095918743983517697?s=20>

consequence-free world of policy analysis.”³⁰⁴ CFR members who protested Abrams’ appointment – according to Khelil, some would “dramatically leave the room when Abrams began to speak on Syria or other matters” or “openly mocked or laughed at him when he was on panels” – risked reprimand from Haass. Khelil says: “Haass even upbraided a good friend of mine at a cocktail party for embarrassing his friend Elliott Abrams, threatening a mutual friend of ours as being ‘on thin ice’ in the organization.”³⁰⁵ If Khelil is to be believed, then it was Abrams’ friendship with Richard Haass more than his professional record that protected his job at CFR.

In 2013, Abrams drew backlash on the Council when, in an appearance on NPR where he was arguing against the confirmation of Senator Chuck Hagel to lead the Department of Defense, he alleged that Hagel “seems to have some kind of problem with Jews.”³⁰⁶ Others in the foreign policy community called this accusation “baseless” and prominent Israelis and American Jews defended Hagel.³⁰⁷ This led to Haass rebuking Abrams’ attack and distancing the Council from it, calling it “over the line.”³⁰⁸ Some called on Haass to ask Abrams to apologize, and fire him from the Council if he

³⁰⁴ Khaldoun Khelil. Twitter Post.

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

³⁰⁶ Audie Cornish and Melissa Block, “Hagel Critic: ‘He Seems To Have Some Kind Of Problem With Jews,’” *All Things Considered* (NPR, January 7, 2013), <https://www.npr.org/2013/01/07/168817789/hagel-critic-he-seems-to-have-some-kind-of-problem-with-jews>.

³⁰⁷ Stephen M. Walt, “On Hagel, Abrams, and Haass: Why Richard Haass Should Tell Elliott Abrams to Apologize,” *Foreign Policy*, January 14, 2013, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2013/01/14/on-hagel-abrams-and-haass-why-richard-haass-should-tell-elliott-abrams-to-apologize/>.

³⁰⁸ Ben Arbuster, “Think Tank President Rebukes Senior Fellow’s Claims That Chuck Hagel Is Anti-Semitic,” *Think Progress* (blog), January 13, 2013, <https://thinkprogress.org/think-tank-president-rebukes-senior-fellows-claims-that-chuck-hagel-is-anti-semitic-6c78b0d6d08/>.

refused.³⁰⁹ Instead, Abrams essentially stood by his attack, and even doubled-down on it.³¹⁰ He retained his post.

Elliott Abrams thus makes a fine poster child for the integration of the U.S. foreign policy elite, and for the impunity it engenders. Abrams' career exhibits almost every one of Putnam's dimensions of elite cohesion to a striking degree. He is a beneficiary of the "common patterns of recruitment" of the foreign policy elite, having attended Harvard both as an undergraduate and for law school. He began his professional career as a Senate staffer before moving to the State Department, exemplifying the lateral mobility common to the career paths of foreign policy elites. Furthermore, as he worked for Democrats in the Senate, albeit conservative ones, he was given a modicum of bipartisan credentials. Having occupied prominent roles in different American foreign policy institutions, both inside and outside of government, for the past four decades, Abrams' career highlights the "institutional context" of the foreign policy elite.

The factor of integration most strikingly demonstrated by Abrams is "extensive personal interaction." Abrams embodies the importance of this in numerous ways, as seemingly every relationship in his life represents yet another connection to members of the foreign policy elite. Even through marriage, he is related to the neoconservative writers and editors Midge Decter, John Podhoretz, and Norman Podhoretz.

These personal interactions beget group solidarity, which begets impunity. Richard Haass and the varied members of the foreign policy elite whose defenses of

³⁰⁹ Walt, "On Hagel, Abrams, and Haass: Why Richard Haass Should Tell Elliott Abrams to Apologize."

³¹⁰ Hayes Brown, "Facing Backlash, Elliott Abrams Clings To Charge That Hagel Is Anti-Semitic," *Think Progress* (blog), January 14, 2013, <https://thinkprogress.org/facing-backlash-elliott-abrams-clings-to-charge-that-hagel-is-anti-semitic-d2a07cd9ecc0/>.

Abrams were mentioned at the beginning of this chapter were all inclined to support their friend, mentor, boss, or colleague in spite of so much in his career that is plainly indefensible. It is a function of this phenomenon more than anything else that enables Abrams to have a thriving career in foreign policy today.

Henry Kissinger

“The illegal we do immediately; the unconstitutional takes a little longer” – Henry Kissinger to the foreign minister of Turkey, 1975.

Henry Kissinger lays claim to a number of superlatives in the history of American foreign policy. He is very likely America’s most famous diplomat, and one of its most widely celebrated. Indeed, in 1973, when he became the United States Secretary of State, a Gallup poll found him to be the most admired person in America.³¹¹ In the words of Walter Isaacson, author of *Kissinger: A Biography*, he was “one of the most unlikely celebrities ever to capture the world’s imagination.”³¹²

Through the policies he implemented, he also amassed what is surely one of the largest body counts of any director of U.S. foreign policy. According to historian Greg Grandin, “a back-of-the-envelope count would attribute 3, maybe 4 million deaths to Kissinger’s actions, but that number probably undercounts his victims in southern Africa.”³¹³ While Kissinger’s involvement in most of these deaths was quite indirect – most were carried out by foreign actors he supported, not by U.S. personnel that he or the presidents he served could command – this has made him among the most despised figures in American foreign policy history, and perhaps in contemporary American history at large. According to Isaacson, “large segments of the American public, ranging

³¹¹ Walter. Isaacson, *Kissinger: A Biography* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992) 13.

³¹² Isaacson, 14.

³¹³ Greg Grandin, “Henry Kissinger, Hillary Clinton’s Tutor in War and Peace,” *The Nation*, February 5, 2016, <https://www.thenation.com/article/henry-kissinger-hillary-clintons-tutor-in-war-and-peace/>.

from liberal intellectuals to conservative activists” view Kissinger as a “power manipulator dangerously devoid of moral principles.”³¹⁴

This view of Kissinger as a deeply amoral man stems from his famously “realist” worldview and his alleged practice of “realpolitik.” The realist tradition in foreign affairs, as Isaacson describes it, is “based on a pessimistic view of human nature.”³¹⁵ Under this paradigm, power is the central concern of international relations. Nations have interests that are often at odds with one another, and protecting these interests takes precedence over pursuing goals of justice or human welfare. To a realist like Kissinger, “the goal of statecraft” is “stability, best achieved through unsentimental alliances, a carefully tended balance of power, and competing spheres of influence.”³¹⁶ To pursue these goals, states must be willing to deploy military force. He also placed a great emphasis on “credibility,” or the perceptions on the part of other states that the U.S. is willing and able to exert force to defend its interests abroad.³¹⁷

Thus Kissinger saw himself in conflict with the prevailing tradition of Wilsonian idealism in American foreign policy, which declared goals such as making the world “safe for democracy.”³¹⁸ He blamed this idealism for America’s tendency “to lurch over the years between isolationism and idealism” and to “embark on crusades, and then to recoil into self-conscious withdrawal.”³¹⁹ While some policymakers, activists, and pundits wanted the U.S. to advocate for democratization on the part of its allies and adversaries alike, Kissinger would ask “why is it our business how they govern

³¹⁴ Isaacson, 14.

³¹⁵ Isaacson, 653.

³¹⁶ Isaacson, 654.

³¹⁷ Isaacson, 656.

³¹⁸ Ibid.

³¹⁹ Isaacson, 655.

themselves?”³²⁰ In a striking example of this attitude, he privately declared: “if they put Jews into gas chambers in the Soviet Union, it is not an American concern. Maybe a humanitarian concern.”³²¹

This worldview contributed to Kissinger’s unique approach to foreign policy, and to highly disparate policy outcomes. On the one hand, his more rational assessment of states like the People’s Republic of China and the Soviet Union as adversaries rather than embodiments of a monolithic evil enabled him to strike impressive diplomatic achievements with both of those countries.³²² He recognized that nuclear weapons necessitated stable relationships with both of these nations, despite the underlying antagonism of their values to those of the United States.³²³ On the other hand, his lack of moral concerns and tendency to see every event abroad as either “a gain for the Soviets or for the West” led him to involve U.S. support and resources in conflicts that were probably peripheral to vital national interests, at great cost to human life and sometimes, to the success of U.S. foreign relations.³²⁴

Kissinger’s Early Life

Henry Kissinger’s early life distinguishes him from most of the men who ran U.S. foreign policy before him, and from the men and women who would come to run it after him. He was born as Heinz Kissinger in Fürth, a small town in Bavaria, in 1923.³²⁵ As a

³²⁰ Isaacson, 656.

³²¹ Gary J. Bass, “Indefensible Kissinger,” *POLITICO Magazine*, January 13, 2014, <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2014/01/indefensible-kissinger-102123.html>.

³²² Zack Beauchamp, “The Obama Administration Is Honoring Henry Kissinger Today. It Shouldn’t Be,” *Vox*, May 9, 2016, <https://www.vox.com/2016/5/9/11640562/kissinger-pentagon-award>.

³²³ Isaacson, 660.

³²⁴ Isaacson, 656.

³²⁵ Isaacson, 17.

Jew growing up during the rise of the Nazi regime in Germany, he was subject to debasement and discrimination.³²⁶ He might have been subjected to much more had his family not left Germany for New York in 1938, when Kissinger was 15 years old; at least 13 of his close relatives were killed in the Holocaust.³²⁷

Kissinger tends to minimize the impact growing up in Nazi Germany had on him, claiming that “it was not a lifelong trauma.”³²⁸ Those who knew him well, however, have argued that the experience shaped him, instilling in him “an instinctive aversion to revolutionary change” and an equal aversion to anything perceived as disorder. As a foreign policy philosophy, this manifested in his “realist, realpolitik approach that sought to preserve order through balances of power and a willingness to use force as a tool of diplomacy.”³²⁹

In 1943, as a relatively recent immigrant, Kissinger was drafted into the U.S. Army. Thanks to the support of a higher officer named Fritz Kraemer, he was moved from an infantry unit into the Army Counter-Intelligence Corps.³³⁰ In this role, as a municipal administrator for the post-war occupation of Germany, he “purged Nazis from municipal posts” and “distinguished himself as an intelligence agent, identifying, arresting, and interrogating Gestapo officers and securing confidential informants.”³³¹

In Kissinger’s academic career and early professional life after the war, the importance of Robert Putnam’s dimensions of elite integration in his advancement into

³²⁶ Isaacson, 26.

³²⁷ Isaacson, 28.

³²⁸ Isaacson, 29.

³²⁹ Isaacson, 31.

³³⁰ Isaacson, 47.

³³¹ Greg Grandin, *Kissinger’s Shadow: The Long Reach of America’s Most Controversial Statesman*, First edition. (New York: Metropolitan Books/Henry Holt and Company, 2015).

the upper ranks of the foreign policy establishment is highly apparent. First, he entered one of the common “pathways of recruitment” to the elite: Harvard College. At Harvard, he forged key personal connections. As a student of government and philosophy, he benefited from the patronage of Professor William Yandell Elliott, just as he did from the support of Fritz Kraemer in the Army. Elliott helped him advance “both as an undergraduate and later in his quest to become a tenured professor.”³³²

With Elliott’s support, Kissinger started the Harvard International Seminar, a summer program that invited young leaders – “men and women in elective office, civil service jobs, or journalism” – to Harvard for a lecture series.³³³ This program connected Kissinger with influential professors and public figures, along with donors like the Rockefeller and Ford Foundation. Among the participants, several went on to become important foreign leaders, including Mahathir Mohammad, longtime prime minister of Malaysia.³³⁴ Shortly after, Kissinger founded and edited a journal of international affairs called *Confluence* that helped him “build a network of intellectuals and politicians, including Hannah Arendt, Sidney Hook, Arthur Schlesinger, Daniel Ellsberg, and Reinhold Niebuhr.”³³⁵ Isaacson called this journal “more a method of self-aggrandizement by Kissinger and his contributors than a true addition to the literature of foreign affairs.”³³⁶ This impression was supported by Professor Thomas Schelling, a contemporary at Harvard, who said that the journal was “primarily an enterprise designed to make Henry known to great people around the world.”³³⁷

³³² Isaacson, 63.

³³³ Isaacson, 70.

³³⁴ Ibid.

³³⁵ Grandin, 24.

³³⁶ Isaacson, 73.

³³⁷ Ibid.

Through his relationship with Arthur Schlesinger, Kissinger came to write a piece for *Foreign Affairs* that led to his employment at the Council on Foreign Relations as director of a study group on nuclear weapons and foreign policy beginning in 1954.³³⁸ This position further embedded Kissinger within the “institutional context” of the foreign policy elite, and in this capacity he was able to advise the prominent liberal Republican politician Nelson Rockefeller, and to maintain “his contacts in the military intelligence community.”³³⁹ He concurrently served on “government committees related to covert operations and psychological warfare,” including the Operations Research Office, the Psychological Strategy Board, and the Operations Coordinating Board.³⁴⁰

In the 1957 book he produced in his CFR role, entitled *Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy*, he advanced a critique of the Eisenhower administration’s containment doctrine that would gain some purchase in later administrations. For one, Kissinger pushed back against the doctrine of massive retaliation because he believed it fostered a reluctance to use nuclear weapons at all.³⁴¹ He also suggested that the United States ought to “demonstrate a willingness to fight ‘little wars’ in the world’s ‘grey areas,’” including regions considered marginal at the time. This directly referenced Southeast Asia, including Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, where the United States, and Kissinger himself, would soon become embroiled.

Kissinger returned to Harvard, and in 1959 became a tenured professor there. In this role he was noted for his abrasive and conspiratorial interpersonal style – Leslie Gelb

³³⁸ Isaacson, 84.

³³⁹ Grandin, 25.

³⁴⁰ Ibid.

³⁴¹ Grandin, 26.

described him as “devious with his peers, domineering with his subordinates, obsequious to his superiors.”³⁴² From 1961 to 1968, Kissinger remained at Harvard while working on the periphery of government. He continued to advise Nelson Rockefeller, and also served as a consultant on foreign policy to the administrations of John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson.

In 1968, when Rockefeller lost the Republican nomination for president to Richard Nixon, Kissinger was despondent. He declared Nixon “not fit to be president” and after seeing the chaos of the Democratic National Convention that same year, lamented “I’ll never serve in government again.”³⁴³ In true realist fashion, however, he quickly changed course. He was advising the Johnson administration on ongoing peace talks between the U.S. and Vietnam, the success of which might have tipped the balance against Nixon winning the upcoming presidential election. Kissinger reached out to Nixon’s staff, offering to keep them informed on the progress of the talks. When a breakthrough occurred, he informed the Nixon campaign, which through a backchannel contact encouraged the South Vietnamese government to scuttle the talks, promising more favorable terms after Nixon took office.³⁴⁴ These efforts succeeded; the talks fell apart, and Nixon won. On the basis of this assistance, Nixon asked Kissinger to take control of a newly-empowered National Security Council as National Security Adviser. Under Nixon, Kissinger would help center foreign policymaking in the White House, and therefore in his own office. Thus began Kissinger’s tumultuous and controversial decade at the reigns of American foreign policy.

³⁴² Isaacson, 100.

³⁴³ Grandin, 42.

³⁴⁴ Grandin, 44.

The Successes of Realpolitik

As National Security Adviser, Kissinger was immediately able to put his theories of realpolitik to the test. He could pursue policies based on the goals of protecting America's national interests and maintaining global balances of power, and eschew moral and idealistic crusades. In a few key areas, this approach led to massive diplomatic successes that cannot be ignored: most notably, the opening of relations with communist China, and the policy of detente with the Soviet Union.

The former is perhaps Kissinger's most famous diplomatic achievement.³⁴⁵ Kissinger had been advocating for a dialogue with China since before joining Nixon's staff through speeches for Nelson Rockefeller suggesting a "subtle triangle" of relations between the U.S., China, and the Soviet Union.³⁴⁶ Come 1969, President Nixon reached the same position. Both he and Kissinger suspected that the Soviet Union and China "were more afraid of each other than they were of the United States."³⁴⁷ Both Nixon and Kissinger recognized that conflict between the two communist powers could pressure them to seek improved relations with the U.S.³⁴⁸

After attempting to reach out to China via backchannel messages through 1969, Nixon and Kissinger succeeded in making contact through Pakistani President Yahya Khan, and both sides conveyed interest in a high-level meeting.³⁴⁹ This led to Kissinger's secret 1971 trip to China, in which he met with Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai and the two agreed that President Nixon would visit China for a summit the next year.³⁵⁰

³⁴⁵ Beauchamp, "The Obama Administration Is Honoring Henry Kissinger Today. It Shouldn't Be."

³⁴⁶ Isaacson, 334.

³⁴⁷ Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 722.

³⁴⁸ Kissinger, 723.

³⁴⁹ Isaacson, 338.

³⁵⁰ Isaacson, 349.

This meeting led to the reopening of relations between the U.S. and China, and to a joint communique tacitly opposing Soviet aggression in the Asia-Pacific region.³⁵¹

Thanks to this development, the “pattern of international relations changed dramatically.”³⁵² This assessment by Kissinger is supported by former U.S. ambassador Robert Blackwill, who describes this development as “no less than a fundamental restructuring of the global balance of power and world order in America’s favor.”³⁵³ Robert Kaplan, senior fellow at the Center for a New American security, further notes that this realignment can be credited for humanitarian benefits, as, by “providing assurances” against Soviet aggression and “an economically resurgent Japan” China had the security “to devote itself to peaceful economic development” which helped bring around one billion people out of poverty.³⁵⁴

Furthermore, as Kissinger noted, the Soviet Union now “faced challenges on two fronts – NATO in the West, and China in the East.”³⁵⁵ This made Soviet confrontation with either adversary more risky, and thus “the Soviet Union’s best option became seeking its own relaxation of tensions with the United States.”³⁵⁶ The normalization of relations with China therefore helped pave the way for the successes of detente.

The term “detente” describes a broad policy direction in which the U.S. sought to ease tensions with the Soviet Union and in Isaacson’s terms, “to modulate their global competition by pursuing areas of mutual interest and indulging in occasional displays of

³⁵¹ Kissinger, 728.

³⁵² Kissinger, 729.

³⁵³ Robert D. Blackwill, “In Defense of Kissinger,” *The National Interest*, January 2, 2014, <https://nationalinterest.org/article/defense-kissinger-9642>.

³⁵⁴ Robert D. Kaplan, “In Defense of Henry Kissinger,” *The Atlantic*, April 24, 2013, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2013/05/the-statesman/309283/>.

³⁵⁵ Kissinger, 730.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

friendship.”³⁵⁷ Kissinger recognized that the realities of nuclear weapons made it vital for the U.S. and Soviet Union to “seek a more productive and stable relationship despite the basic antagonism of our values.”³⁵⁸ There was also a long-term strategy underlying Kissinger’s support for detente. He assessed that the Soviet Union was too weak to directly challenge the United States, and that merely by maintaining a stable relationship between the two nuclear powers, the U.S. could allow the Soviets’ vulnerabilities to deepen:

Soviet strength is uneven, the weaknesses and frustrations of the Soviet system are glaring and have been clearly documented. Despite the inevitable increase in its power, the Soviet Union remains far behind us and our allies in any overall assessment of military, economic, and technological strength; it would be reckless in the extreme for the Soviet Union to challenge the industrial democracies. And Soviet society is no longer insulated from the influences and attractions of the outside world or impervious to the need for external contacts.³⁵⁹

Therefore, Kissinger’s policy sought to manage areas that threatened to destabilize this bilateral relationship, namely in the construction and deployment of strategic arms and in issues of borders and security in Europe.

The first of these two issues was addressed in a series of arms control agreements struck during Nixon’s visit to Moscow in 1972 and in Kissinger’s secret trip there that preceded it. These visits resulted in the Antiballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, and the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT I).³⁶⁰ These two treaties successfully linked the issue of defensive weaponry, where the United States had an edge on the Soviet Union, with that of offensive weaponry, where the Soviet Union had the advantage.³⁶¹ Both sides

³⁵⁷ Isaacson, 437.

³⁵⁸ Isaacson, 660.

³⁵⁹ Kissinger, 747.

³⁶⁰ Kissinger, 748

³⁶¹ Kissinger, 748.

agreed to limit ABM defense to two sites, effectively neutralizing its purpose and ensuring that the deterrent logic of nuclear weapons was maintained.³⁶² Regarding offensive missile forces, the two parties agreed to freeze their stocks of missiles at “agreed levels.”³⁶³ This included missiles deployed on submarines, but did not include bombers, where the U.S. had the advantage.³⁶⁴

These treaties were not without drawbacks – namely, they permitted missiles to be equipped with multiple warheads, which created a loophole for buildup in strategic weaponry that both nations exploited.³⁶⁵ In reality the, SALT “had little effect on the world’s nuclear arsenals.”³⁶⁶ The real significance of the agreements was, as Isaacson emphasizes, “the development of a working relationship with Moscow” and the mutual recognition that “an unrestrained arms race was futile, costly, and dangerous.” Together, these advances made the arms control agreement “an achievement of enormous historic magnitude.”³⁶⁷

The second great achievement of detente came in 1975, when Kissinger was Secretary of State for the administration of President Gerald Ford. This was the fulfillment of a European security conference, long-desired by the Soviet Union, which resulted in the Helsinki Accords.³⁶⁸ The Soviets hoped that such a conference could confirm the legitimacy of post-World War II borders in Eastern Europe, securing Soviet control over its territories and giving widespread recognition to the borders of its satellite

³⁶² Isaacson, 429.

³⁶³ Kissinger, 748.

³⁶⁴ Isaacson, 429; Kissinger, 749.

³⁶⁵ Isaacson, 436.

³⁶⁶ Ibid.

³⁶⁷ Ibid.

³⁶⁸ Isaacson, 660.

states.³⁶⁹ To some extent, this had already been achieved by peace treaties at the end of the war, and by West Germany's agreements with its neighbors made a few years earlier.³⁷⁰ Ultimately, the "security basket" of the Helsinki Accords was not terribly consequential. "Recognition" of existing borders was limited to, in Kissinger's terms, "an obligation not to change them by force."³⁷¹

The Accords' provisions on human rights, though initially seen as mere rhetoric, proved more significant. These provisions "obliged all signatories to practice and foster certain enumerated basic human rights."³⁷² They resulted in the formation, around the Eastern bloc, of "Helsinki groups," made up of political dissidents who demanded that "communist governments honor the phrases about freedom and human rights."³⁷³ These dissidents included Vaclav Havel in Czechoslovakia and Lech Walesa in Poland, who successfully used the Accords to pressure their communist governments, and eventually to achieve independence and democracy in their respective states. Thus, as Isaacson says, Helsinki "would eventually turn out to be a step on the way toward the West's ultimate victory in Europe."³⁷⁴

This is not an exhaustive list of what can be considered Henry Kissinger's positive achievements in American diplomacy. He is also widely credited with the successes of "shuttle diplomacy" in the Middle East, especially his work in making peace between Israel and Egypt and drawing the latter into the Western political bloc.³⁷⁵ Nor

³⁶⁹ Kissinger, 758.

³⁷⁰ Ibid.

³⁷¹ Kissinger, 759.

³⁷² Ibid.

³⁷³ Isaacson, 663.

³⁷⁴ Ibid.

³⁷⁵ Michael Howard, "The World According to Henry: From Metternich to Me," ed. Henry Kissinger, *Foreign Affairs* 73, no. 3 (1994): 132–40, <https://doi.org/10.2307/20046663>.

are these successes without caveats. On Helsinki, some have criticized Kissinger for taking credit for the successes of provisions on human rights that he had once opposed.³⁷⁶ On SALT, Kissinger alienated key U.S. officials throughout the negotiating process.³⁷⁷ He marginalized technical experts despite his own imperfect understanding of some issues addressed by the treaty, which resulted, in at least one case, in the Soviets securing provisions more favorable to themselves.³⁷⁸ Isaacson asserts that the secrecy and duplicity with which Kissinger conducted these negotiations “undermined future support for SALT.”³⁷⁹ This conduct was largely unnecessary for the success of the treaties, and instead, as Kissinger himself admits, was influenced by his “vanity and desire to control the final negotiation.”³⁸⁰

Nonetheless, Kissinger’s role in detente and in the diplomatic opening to China are significant accomplishments that played a role in stabilizing U.S. relations with the communist world, thus making the world safer. Furthermore, there is reason to believe that these policies at least contributed to the eventual collapse of the Soviet Union and the American “victory” in the Cold War. As Blackwill argues in *The National Interest*, detente “reduced the risk of superpower confrontation even while creating conditions that helped undermine the Soviet Union’s moral and geopolitical claims and bring about its destruction.”³⁸¹ These successes can therefore be viewed as vindications for Kissinger’s realist worldview and its applicability in policymaking.

³⁷⁶ Grandin, 213.

³⁷⁷ Isaacson, 429.

³⁷⁸ Isaacson, 431.

³⁷⁹ Isaacson, 432.

³⁸⁰ Isaacson, 433.

³⁸¹ Blackwill, “In Defense of Kissinger.”

The Dark Side of Kissinger's Realism

Kissinger's aforementioned achievements offer only a partial picture of his years as America's top foreign policy official. An examination of his full record leads to much less generous conclusions, both in terms of its moral outcomes and its implications for the United States' long-term interests. A 1973 *New Yorker* article stated that there were "two Henry Kissingers."³⁸² On the one hand, Kissinger "established relations with China, improved our relations with Russia, and successfully completed the first phase of SALT" – but on the other, this was the man who "planned the undisclosed bombing of Cambodia" along with the invasion of that country a year later; who wiretapped journalists and his own staff, and who greenlit repression and genocidal behavior by U.S. clients around the world.³⁸³ This was the Kissinger whose policies accumulated the three to four million-person body count estimated by Greg Grandin, and ultimately, the legacy of this second Kissinger outweighs that of the first.

Henry Kissinger's "original sin" in policymaking was his aforementioned role in extending the Vietnam War. By 1965, well before he was in a government role, Kissinger recognized that the war in Vietnam was essentially unwinnable. He noticed that "Washington was relying on corrupt, unpopular, and incompetent Saigon allies," and that "North Vietnamese sanctuaries in Laos and Cambodia made a military solution impossible."³⁸⁴ Additionally, the bombing of North Vietnam, viewed as the primary tool of leverage against the communists, was "enough to mobilize world opinion against us

³⁸² Grandin, 114.

³⁸³ Grandin, 115.

³⁸⁴ Grandin, 33.

but too half-hearted and gradual to be decisive.”³⁸⁵ Kissinger privately conveyed these conclusions to officials in the Johnson administration, but continued to publicly support the war and even push for its escalation.³⁸⁶ Isaacson paraphrases Kissinger’s rationale for maintaining the futile war effort: abandoning Vietnam would “strengthen the hand of America’s adversaries, demoralize allies, lessen the credibility of the U.S. around the world, and cause other nations to consider shifting their allegiance to the Soviet Union.”³⁸⁷

Thus, after the 1968 election, the U.S. war in Vietnam continued for what Grandin calls “five more pointless years.”³⁸⁸ By the war’s end in 1973, Kissinger secured a peace agreement that, according to historians Edward Crapol and Robert Schulzinger, was “comparable to one they could have obtained in 1969.”³⁸⁹ In search of a face-saving withdrawal from Vietnam, Kissinger and Nixon implemented a strategy of removing U.S. troops while escalating bombing against the North.³⁹⁰ In 1972, as the Paris Peace Accords progressed, the U.S. accepted North Vietnamese demands “on almost every major point,” according to historian Larry Berman.³⁹¹ Kissinger himself privately remarked “we bombed them into letting us accept their terms.”³⁹² In October 1972, Arthur Schlesinger said of the preliminary agreement with North Vietnam: “What is most obvious is the spectacular and unprecedented concessions we have made... What is

³⁸⁵ Isaacson, 118.

³⁸⁶ Grandin, 34.

³⁸⁷ Isaacson, 120.

³⁸⁸ Grandin, “Henry Kissinger, Hillary Clinton’s Tutor in War and Peace.”

³⁸⁹ Edward P. Crapol, “Review of Kissinger: Doctor of Diplomacy/Professor of Hype,” *Reviews in American History* 19, no. 2 (1991): 264, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2703081>.

³⁹⁰ Grandin, 88.

³⁹¹ Larry Berman, *No Peace, No Honor: Nixon, Kissinger, and Betrayal in Vietnam* (New York: Free Press, 2001), 123. <http://catdir.loc.gov/catdir/enhancements/fy0705/2001023904-t.html>.

³⁹² Grandin, 90.

saddest of all is that if Nixonger had been willing to make these concessions in 1969, we could have had the settlement then; and 20,000 Americans and God knows how many Vietnamese, now dead, would be alive.”³⁹³ In a last ditch effort to wring some concessions from the North Vietnamese, Kissinger initiated the so-called “Christmas Bombing” of Hanoi, which targeted “civilian buildings, including hospitals.”³⁹⁴ This killed over one thousand Vietnamese, to little effect – the final treaty signed a month later “was nearly exactly the same as what was on the table at the beginning of December.”³⁹⁵

But Nixon and Kissinger had other concerns. For one, there were U.S. domestic politics, and the goal of protecting Nixon’s 1972 re-election. In 1971, regarding what both men then saw as an inevitable South Vietnamese collapse, Kissinger declared: “we can’t have it knocked over brutally, to put it brutally, before the election.”³⁹⁶ This suggests a departure from Kissinger’s professed realism, as he prioritized his boss’s continued political career over some “objective” conception of American national interests. And then there was “credibility.” Kissinger’s most ardent defenders, including Robert Kaplan, argue that the extension of the war was necessary to “prevent complete American humiliation.”³⁹⁷ Further, Kaplan says, “this preservation of America’s global standing enabled the president and secretary of state to manage a historic reconciliation with China, which helped provide the requisite leverage for a landmark strategic arms pact with the Soviet Union.”³⁹⁸ The causal reasoning here is unclear. It is not obvious how extending a brutal and futile war for several years just to accept most of the enemy’s

³⁹³ Ibid.

³⁹⁴ Ibid.

³⁹⁵ Ibid.

³⁹⁶ Grandin, 87.

³⁹⁷ Kaplan, “In Defense of Henry Kissinger.”

³⁹⁸ Kaplan, “In Defense of Henry Kissinger.”

peace terms might have helped preserve America's reputation abroad. Even if this benefit to U.S. credibility were demonstrable or quantifiable, it would have to be weighed against the tens of thousands of American lives, and hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Laotian lives that it cost.

In light of this dismal result in Vietnam, Kissinger's actions towards neighboring Cambodia become even more unjustifiable. Just a month after Nixon's first inauguration, Kissinger and other officials began planning "Operation Menu," the secret bombing of Cambodia.³⁹⁹ Initially, these bombings were meant to target only those North Vietnamese outposts that Kissinger had years earlier recognized as making an American victory in Vietnam impossible. Kissinger planned both the bombings themselves and the tactics that kept this incursion secret from Congress, the Department of Defense, and the public.⁴⁰⁰ For no apparent military reason, he would revise targets in Cambodia that had been selected for strikes.⁴⁰¹ In fact, his micromanagement of the operation was extensive – a 1973 Pentagon report revealed that "Kissinger approved each of the 3,875 Cambodia bombing raids in 1969 and 1970 as well as the methods for keeping them out of the newspapers."⁴⁰²

By the spring of 1970, Kissinger was pushing for an escalation in Cambodia with a ground invasion and a broader, public bombing campaign. Nixon approved both, and for the next two years, American bombing raids "spread to cover nearly all of Cambodia, targeting the fast-growing rebellion and devastating the country."⁴⁰³

³⁹⁹ Grandin, 53.

⁴⁰⁰ Grandin, 54.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid.

⁴⁰² Grandin, 63.

⁴⁰³ Grandin, 65.

As made clear earlier in this section, neither the bombing campaign nor the ground invasion had a significant impact on the outcome of the war with Vietnam. As Grandin notes, “Hanoi never budged on Kissinger’s most important demand – that it withdraw troops from South Vietnam – nor was its ability to conduct military operations in Vietnam seriously damaged.”⁴⁰⁴ Where the U.S. incursion did have great effects, however, was in Cambodia itself, and these results were both morally and strategically hideous.

Throughout the length of the bombing campaign, the U.S. dropped, at the very least, 500,000 tons of explosives on Cambodia. This is roughly the same tonnage of bombs the U.S. dropped in the Pacific theater in the entirety of the Second World War (in neighboring Laos, the U.S. also dropped 2.5 million tons of bombs).⁴⁰⁵ The number of Cambodian civilians killed in these raids was at least 50,000, though estimates range as high as 150,000.⁴⁰⁶ Much of this bombing, including its most intense phase, occurred after the Paris Peace Accords were signed with Vietnam in 1973.⁴⁰⁷

Far more Cambodians would be killed by the political destabilization that this bombing wrought. The bombing served to weaken the government of Prince Norodom Sihanouk, who was contending with the communist insurgency of the Khmer Rouge as well as the divergent interests of Vietnam, China, and the U.S. within his country.⁴⁰⁸ The Khmer Rouge and its genocidal aims predated U.S. intervention in Cambodia, and would

⁴⁰⁴ Grandin, 68.

⁴⁰⁵ Brett S. Morris, “Nixon and the Cambodian Genocide,” Magazine, *Jacobin*, April 27, 2015, <https://jacobinmag.com/2015/04/khmer-rouge-cambodian-genocide-united-states/>; Grandin, 69.

⁴⁰⁶ Ben. Kiernan, *How Pol Pot Came to Power: A History of Communism in Kampuchea, 1930-1975* (London: Verso, 1985), xxiii.

⁴⁰⁷ Grandin, 176.

⁴⁰⁸ Morris, “Nixon and the Cambodian Genocide.”

have been a factor without this action.⁴⁰⁹ However, per Ben Kiernan, a prominent historian of the Cambodian genocide, “Pol Pot’s revolution would not have won power without U.S. economic and military destabilization of Cambodia.”⁴¹⁰ As Brett Morris writes, “at the beginning of the [U.S.] escalation, KR fighters numbered less than 10,000, but by 1973, the force had grown to over 200,000 troops and militia.”⁴¹¹ Interviews by Ben Kiernan depict how U.S. bombings, the rationale for which was incomprehensible to Cambodian civilians, became the Khmer Rouge’s most effective recruiting tool: “it was because of their dissatisfaction with the bombing that they kept on cooperating with the Khmer Rouge, joining up with the Khmer Rouge, sending their children off to go with them” said one Khmer Rouge cadre.⁴¹² Another witness expressed that “people in our village were furious with the Americans, they did not know why the Americans had bombed them.”⁴¹³

In 1970, Prince Sihanouk was overthrown in a coup by the right-wing general Lon Nol.⁴¹⁴ While a direct U.S. role in the coup is not proven, evidence compiled by William Blum in his book *Killing Hope* suggests that the U.S. was likely complicit and at least supportive of the move.⁴¹⁵ This coup helped further shape conditions for the benefit of the Khmer Rouge. Supporters of Sihanouk, along with North Vietnam, aligned themselves with the Khmer Rouge against Lon Nol.⁴¹⁶ At the same time, continued U.S.

⁴⁰⁹ Grandin, 181.

⁴¹⁰ Ben Kiernan, *The Pol Pot Regime : Race, Power, and Genocide in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge, 1975-79* (New Haven [Conn.] : Yale University Press, 2008), 16.

⁴¹¹ Morris.

⁴¹² Grandin, 179.

⁴¹³ Ibid.

⁴¹⁴ Morris.

⁴¹⁵ William. Blum, *Killing Hope: U.S. Military and CIA Interventions since World War II* (Monroe, Me.: Common Courage Press, 1995), 137.

⁴¹⁶ Morris, “Nixon and the Cambodian Genocide.”

bombing slowed this opposition and weakened its moderate elements, ensuring that by the time of its victory in 1975, the most radical faction of this insurgency, led by Pol Pot, “had come to dominate the Khmer Rouge,” and thus, Cambodia’s new government.⁴¹⁷

Curiously, this led to Kissinger and the U.S. pivoting towards support of the Khmer Rouge, seeing an independent, if communist, Cambodia as a potential “counterweight to North Vietnam.”⁴¹⁸ In 1975, Kissinger told the Thai foreign minister to tell the Khmer Rouge “that we bear no hostility towards them... tell the Cambodians that we will be friends with them. They are murderous thugs, but we won’t let that stand in our way. We are prepared to improve relations with them.”⁴¹⁹

The Khmer Rouge were apparently not all that receptive, and “would largely chart an isolationist course, concentrating instead on its project of building a self-sufficient, agrarian society that ended in mass murder.”⁴²⁰ By 1979, when the Khmer Rouge was toppled by a Vietnamese invasion, “as many as two million people had been murdered or had died – of starvation, exhaustion, disease, and denial of medical care.”⁴²¹ In the interest of isolating Vietnam, subsequent U.S. administrations continued to support a Khmer Rouge insurgency against the Vietnamese-backed government in Cambodia. The Carter administration “helped arrange Chinese aid” to the Khmer Rouge, while through the 1980s, the U.S. funded Khmer Rouge-aligned guerrillas, recognized the insurgency as “the legitimate government of Cambodia,” and secured for it Cambodia’s seat at the United Nations.⁴²²

⁴¹⁷ Grandin, 180.

⁴¹⁸ Morris.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid.

⁴²⁰ Morris.

⁴²¹ Grandin, 181.

⁴²² Morris, “Nixon and the Cambodian Genocide.”

Grandin argues that Kissinger's actions in Cambodia are distinct from his policies elsewhere that draw similar criticism. Unlike the atrocities he supported in other contexts, the policy towards Cambodia could not be "justified by reason of state."⁴²³ In other words, this was not merely an act of supporting or tolerating atrocities by a U.S. client, but instead involved the U.S. directly committing atrocities in order to "bend peasant-poor countries like Cambodia to their will."⁴²⁴

Nonetheless, Kissinger's policies elsewhere also bear mentioning here. Another one of Kissinger's most famous episodes of atrocity was his support for Pakistan's "bloody crackdown on its restive Bengali population in 1971," described by Gary J. Bass in his book *The Blood Telegram*.⁴²⁵ Throughout this period, "Kissinger stood behind Pakistan... even as it swept away the results of a democratic election, killed horrific numbers of Bengalis, and targeted the Hindu minority among Bengalis."⁴²⁶

In 1970, after free elections in what was then East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) were won by Bengali separatists, the breakdown of negotiations between separatists and the military government in West Pakistan led to a violent onslaught by the Pakistani army against Bengali civilians. According to Bass, senior officials in the White House and State Department warned Nixon and Kissinger "that a military crackdown would fail and result in Pakistan splitting in two, hurting U.S. strategic interests."⁴²⁷ Archer Blood, the U.S. consul general in Dhaka, East Pakistan, argued that U.S. support for Pakistan would drive India, and upon its independence, Bangladesh, closer to the Soviet Union.⁴²⁸

⁴²³ Grandin, 175.

⁴²⁴ Grandin, 176.

⁴²⁵ Bass, "Indefensible Kissinger."

⁴²⁶ Bass.

⁴²⁷ Bass.

⁴²⁸ Ibid.

Kissinger's own aide, Harold Saunders, noted that in terms of balance of power, it would be preferable for the U.S. to align itself with "the 600 million people of India and East Pakistan" against the comparatively smaller and weaker West Pakistan.⁴²⁹

Kissinger did not heed these concerns, and he and Nixon gave Pakistan blank check support. He did nothing to warn the Pakistani leadership against its killing campaign in Bangladesh, despite warnings that it would backfire. As India invaded Bangladesh to stop the slaughter of Bengalis and halt the flows of millions of refugees over its borders, Kissinger and Nixon initiated "illegal arms transfers" to the Pakistani military, despite Kissinger's admission to the president that this would be against U.S. law.⁴³⁰ Finally, after India defeated Pakistan and ejected their forces from the East, "Nixon and Kissinger sent an aircraft carrier group into the Bay of Bengal to threaten India."⁴³¹ This brought U.S.-India relations to a nadir. Kissinger then encouraged China to move troops towards its border with India. The Chinese leadership refused, but this action could have drawn in the Soviet Union to support India, and escalated the war into a nuclear crisis.⁴³²

In an article for *The National Interest*, former U.S. ambassador to India Robert Blackwill defends Kissinger and criticizes Bass's account of this episode. His defense hinges on the importance of Pakistan as a backchannel to China, and the fear that India, triumphant in East Pakistan, might choose to invade the western part of the country and crush the Pakistani military.⁴³³ There are a few obvious issues with this rationale. For

⁴²⁹ Ibid.

⁴³⁰ Ibid.

⁴³¹ Ibid.

⁴³² Ibid.

⁴³³ Blackwill, "In Defense of Kissinger."

one, by the time India and Pakistan were at war in December 1971, Kissinger had already made his secret trip to China, and the two countries were in contact independently of Pakistan – not to mention that Pakistan was only one of a few avenues through which the administration had reached out to Beijing.⁴³⁴ Furthermore, given China’s hesitance to support Pakistan by moving its troops toward India, there is little indication that less-robust support of Pakistan by the U.S. would have caused China to break off nascent relations with America, considering its much larger concerns over Soviet aggression. Lastly, the U.S. could have deterred India from aggression against West Pakistan without supporting Pakistan’s crackdown in Bangladesh. For instance, an aircraft carrier group could have been sent to West Pakistani waters in the Arabian Sea, rather than Indian and East Pakistani waters in the Bay of Bengal.

Bass notes some further ironies in response to Blackwill’s critique; for one, that it was written in *The National Interest*, which is published by the think tank “Center for the National Interest,” where Henry Kissinger is an honorary chairman. To top this off, Blackwill also happens to be the “Henry A. Kissinger Senior Fellow” at the Council on Foreign Relations.⁴³⁵

All told, somewhere between 300,000 and 500,000 people were killed in Pakistan’s crackdown in Bangladesh.⁴³⁶ In absolute fairness, this included some tens of thousands of civilians killed by supporters of the Bengali-nationalist Awami League, but

⁴³⁴ Bass.

⁴³⁵ Bass.

⁴³⁶ Mark Dummett, “How One Newspaper Report Changed World History,” *BBC News*, December 16, 2011, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-16207201>.

this was ultimately dwarfed by East Pakistan's response, which targeted the Bengali population as a whole, not just violent separatists.⁴³⁷

It is true that these atrocities could have occurred without additional U.S. arms, or despite public or private criticism of the Pakistani leadership by Nixon and Kissinger.⁴³⁸ But beyond warnings to Pakistan against the potential consequences of refugee flows to India, the pair made few efforts.⁴³⁹ It would be easier to defend this as cool-headed realpolitik were it not for Kissinger and Nixon's repeated statements showing open contempt for the lives of Indians and Bengalis. Kissinger called the Indian prime minister, Indira Gandhi, "a bitch" and Indians themselves "bastards," while dismissing a potential independent Bangladesh as yet another Soviet proxy, saying that Bengalis are "by nature left."⁴⁴⁰ He also mocked Americans who "bleed" for "the dying Bengalis," while Nixon, for his part, called Indians "no goddamn good" and questioned "why the hell anybody would reproduce in that country."⁴⁴¹

Elsewhere, Kissinger's support for atrocities by U.S. clients was much the same. In 1975, Kissinger and Ford gave Indonesian military dictator Suharto "the go-ahead to invade East Timor."⁴⁴² Kissinger said only that, "it is important that whatever you do succeeds quickly."⁴⁴³ Fueled by a continued supply of U.S. arms, the resulting Indonesian invasion and occupation killed 102,800 Timorese "out of a population of less than 700,000."⁴⁴⁴

⁴³⁷ Ibid.

⁴³⁸ Grandin, 176.

⁴³⁹ Blackwill, "In Defense of Kissinger."

⁴⁴⁰ Grandin, 118.

⁴⁴¹ Bass.

⁴⁴² Grandin, 116.

⁴⁴³ Grandin, 117.

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid.

In Southern Africa, Kissinger pursued what was called “the tar baby option.”⁴⁴⁵ This consisted of “strengthening ties to the white supremacist nations of South Africa and Rhodesia, expanding arms sales to their militaries, and establishing clandestine networks to conduct covert operations to counter liberation movements.”⁴⁴⁶ In the face of collapsing colonial regimes, Kissinger saw Southern Africa as an opportunity to “demonstrate that events in Southeast Asia have not lessened our determination to protect our interests.”⁴⁴⁷ This pitted him against “area experts” at the CIA and State Department, including “both Washington’s consul general in Angola and the CIA’s station chief,” who believed that the popular left-wing MPLA “was the best qualified movement to govern Angola.”⁴⁴⁸ Against this counsel, Kissinger “stepped up covert aid to a pro-American insurgency in Angola” and “urged South African mercenaries and the apartheid regime’s regular forces to invade.”⁴⁴⁹ In response, Fidel Castro’s Cuba sent its army to fight with the MPLA, “routing the U.S.-backed invaders.”⁴⁵⁰ Thus, in an attempt to demonstrate American resolve and oust left-wing regimes, Kissinger elevated the conflict in Angola to a Cold War proxy conflict, and gave Cuba an opportunity to enhance its own international prestige.

Fear of Cuban victories against other right-wing regimes, such as that of Rhodesia, prompted Kissinger to reverse course. He took a goodwill tour of Africa, and “helped negotiate the surrender of Rhodesia’s white supremacist government.”⁴⁵¹ It was

⁴⁴⁵ Grandin, 118.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁷ Grandin, 119.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁹ Grandin, 120.

⁴⁵⁰ Grandin, 121.

⁴⁵¹ Grandin, 122.

too late to reverse the damage done by the earlier policy, however. Pro-U.S. insurgencies like that of Jonas Savimbi in Angola, “cultivated” and funded by Kissinger’s covert operations, continued to wreak havoc on their countries.⁴⁵² All told, Savimbi’s insurgency cost 400,000 lives, while “historians guess that these wars killed as many as two million Angolans and Mozambicans.”⁴⁵³

In Latin America, Kissinger saw a risk that countries in the U.S. “backyard” would fall to Cuban-inspired revolutions and align themselves with the Soviet bloc. He worked to preempt this by supporting, both covertly and diplomatically, military coups and right-wing dictatorships across the continent.⁴⁵⁴ Between 1971 and 1976, the governments of Bolivia, Uruguay, Chile, Peru, Ecuador, and Argentina fell to military coups.⁴⁵⁵ These coups were primarily the result of the internal dynamics of left-right conflict within each nation, but Kissinger supported the anti-democratic right at every turn, encouraging military dictators to view themselves as the vanguard in the global fight against communism.⁴⁵⁶ Furthermore, he was at the very least aware of Operation Condor, a U.S.-supported communications network that allowed Latin American regimes to coordinate assassinations and kidnappings of dissidents, both violent and non-violent, at home and abroad. One result of this operation was the murder of Orlando Letelier, an official in the pre-coup Chilean government, who was killed along with his assistant (a U.S. citizen) in a car bombing in Washington, D.C. Five days before this act, Kissinger

⁴⁵² Ibid.

⁴⁵³ Grandin, 123.

⁴⁵⁴ Grandin, 146.

⁴⁵⁵ Grandin, 147.

⁴⁵⁶ Grandin, 149.

rescinded a diplomatic cable that would have warned Latin American leaders against the “assassination of subversives, politicians, and prominent figures... abroad.”⁴⁵⁷

Kissinger assured leaders like Augusto Pinochet that they could ignore even mild criticism of their human rights abuses.⁴⁵⁸ In some cases, he even greenlit such abuses ahead of time. A recently-declassified State Department memo from 1977 describes a conversation between Kissinger and the foreign minister of the Argentinian junta:

The Argentines were very worried that Kissinger would lecture to them on human rights. Guzzetti and Kissinger had a very long breakfast but the Secretary did not raise the subject. Finally Guzzetti did. Kissinger asked how long will it take you (the Argentines) to clean up the problem. Guzzetti replied that it would be done by the end of the year. Kissinger approved.⁴⁵⁹

The “problem” at hand was what the Argentinian junta called “terrorism,” a label that apparently included non-violent student activism and trade union activity.⁴⁶⁰ As many as 30,000 Argentinians were killed or “disappeared” in the resulting crackdown.⁴⁶¹ Tens of thousands more were murdered, and as many tortured, by U.S.-backed governments around the continent.⁴⁶²

As with the earlier examination of Kissinger’s successes, this list is not exhaustive. Among other things, he also authorized the FBI to conduct illegal wiretaps of journalists, government officials, and members of his own staff.⁴⁶³ For this Kissinger

⁴⁵⁷ Grandin, 152.

⁴⁵⁸ Grandin, 150.

⁴⁵⁹ David Corn, “New Memo: Kissinger Gave the ‘Green Light’ for Argentina’s Dirty War,” *Mother Jones*, January 14, 2014, <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2014/01/new-memo-kissinger-gave-green-light-argentina-dirty-war/>.

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁶¹ Ibid.

⁴⁶² Grandin, 152.

⁴⁶³ Isaacson, 217.

faced a decades-long civil lawsuit from one of his former aides, which was dropped after Kissinger issued an apology for the act.⁴⁶⁴

Acts such as these were the dark side of Kissinger's realism, but in many ways they were its natural conclusion. In the words of Edward Crapol, "geopolitics... allowed Kissinger to escape the necessity of understanding or worrying about the internal nature of another state. In a geopolitical context, the only thing that mattered was how the other state behaved beyond its own borders."⁴⁶⁵ Thus, when Kissinger looked at Angola, he saw not popular anti-colonialists fighting white supremacists and genocidaires, but a Soviet-proxy in waiting. In Cambodia, he saw not hundreds of thousands of innocent people whose lives would be destroyed by American bombs, but a means to a peace settlement in Vietnam that preserved American prestige, and therefore power.

Any of these episodes on its own would be a black mark on the record of a prominent U.S. foreign policy official. The bombing and invasion of Cambodia alone would make a solid case for charges of crimes against humanity. Taken together, these acts constitute one of the most destructive legacies of any American foreign policy-maker ever. So how, in the four decades since he left government, has Henry Kissinger become America's most vaunted elder statesman?

Henry Kissinger, Honorary Harlem Globetrotter

Even the most cursory examination of Henry Kissinger's post-government life immediately brings to mind two of Robert Putnam's dimensions of elite integration:

⁴⁶⁴ Martin Tolchin, "Kissinger Issues Wiretap Apology," *The New York Times*, November 13, 1992, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/1992/11/13/us/kissinger-issues-wiretap-apology.html>.

⁴⁶⁵ Crapol, "Kissinger," 262.

institutional context, and extensive personal interaction. As a private citizen, Kissinger's institutional relationships have blossomed as he has collected board seats, honorary chairmanships, consultancies, part-time professorships, and senior fellowships. His personal relationships with other members of America's political, economic, and social elite are so numerous as to render a full catalogue of them pointless, especially in a paper of this length. Suffice to say, they provide some vindication for C. Wright Mills' conception of the power elite, insofar as he described an incredibly tight, intermingling network of political, economic, and social elites.

At the time of his exit from the office of Secretary of State in 1976, that Kissinger would not return to a high government post was hardly certain. Indeed, on several occasions he came close to reviving his government career – first in 1980, when he flirted with making a bid for the Republican nomination for U.S. Senator in New York, and again that same year when he attempted to broker an arrangement to make Gerald Ford running mate to Ronald Reagan, which might have seen him back in the position of Secretary of State.⁴⁶⁶ Kissinger's return to government was hampered by the fact that not all of his relationships with other powerful figures were positive – indeed, hostility between himself and President Carter's national security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski, and later with President George H.W. Bush, kept him out of two administrations.⁴⁶⁷

Kissinger expressed fear that his absence from the halls of power would reduce his prestige, saying in 1980: "I have ten years of capital left to my reputation. Each year it will diminish. Soon I'll be forgotten unless I replenish it."⁴⁶⁸ This fear turned out to be

⁴⁶⁶ Isaacson, 717.

⁴⁶⁷ Isaacson, 720.

⁴⁶⁸ Isaacson, 717.

unfounded. In the Reagan administration, Kissinger was eventually appointed to head the bipartisan commission on Central America, which sought to galvanize broader support for Reagan's hardline anti-communist policies in Central America.⁴⁶⁹ In the first Bush administration, he retained access to the highest levels of government through the appointment of his former aide, Brent Scowcroft, as national security adviser.⁴⁷⁰

Kissinger's positions in the private sector, however, were equally important in maintaining his influence. In the early 80s, he began writing a syndicated column in the *Los Angeles Times* that was re-published in *The Washington Post* and *The New York Post*, among others.⁴⁷¹ He became a television commentator, first signing a \$200,000 annual contract with NBC before moving to ABC, and, in 1989, joining the board of CBS.⁴⁷²

His primary post-government occupation, starting in 1982, became his consulting firm, Kissinger Associates. In this capacity, he served as "a statesman for hire, one who would, for a hefty fee, purvey foreign policy expertise to private corporations, undertake diplomatic assignments for them, and serve as a national security adviser to their chairmen."⁴⁷³ His clients have included American Express, AIG, Anheuser-Busch, Bell Telephone, Chase Manhattan Bank, Coca-Cola, Fiat, H.J. Heinz, Merck Pharmaceutical, Revlon, Trust Company of the West, and Volvo, among many others.⁴⁷⁴

In this capacity Kissinger garnered criticism for profiting off of relationships and policies he made while in government. In Latin America, Kissinger and his clients

⁴⁶⁹ Isaacson, 723.

⁴⁷⁰ Isaacson, 727.

⁴⁷¹ Isaacson, 710.

⁴⁷² Isaacson, 709, 711.

⁴⁷³ Isaacson, 732.

⁴⁷⁴ Isaacson, 734.

profited from privatization programs implemented by governments he had supported.⁴⁷⁵

As Secretary of State, Kissinger helped the chemical company Union Carbide set up a plant in India. Just over a decade later, as a consultant for Union Carbide, his firm helped to arrange a “paltry” settlement for the victims of a spill at that same plant, which killed four thousand people and “exposed another half million people to toxic gases.”⁴⁷⁶ In places such as Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore, he was able to leverage the personal relationships he had developed with foreign leaders as a diplomat to gain commercial access for his clients.⁴⁷⁷

Kissinger was also criticized for using his platform as an opinion-maker to push policies that benefited himself and his clients. After the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989, Kissinger used the platform of his column and TV appearances to oppose economic sanctions on China, while at the same time pursuing business ventures there.⁴⁷⁸ This is not to say that his opposition to sanctions stemmed from the goal of protecting personal profits – as one liberal congressman quipped, “Dr. Kissinger has always defended oppressive dictatorships whether or not he had a financial stake in them.”⁴⁷⁹ Nonetheless, this demonstrates how Kissinger’s roles in different sectors – as an opinion-maker, business elite, and former policymaker – were mutually reinforcing in ways that redounded to his benefit.

Henry Kissinger’s other institutional affiliations range from the weighty to the ridiculous. He is a member of the Bilderberg Group and the Bohemian Grove, two

⁴⁷⁵ Isaacson, 738 ; Grandin, “Henry Kissinger, Hillary Clinton’s Tutor in War and Peace.”

⁴⁷⁶ Grandin, 225.

⁴⁷⁷ Isaacson, 740.

⁴⁷⁸ Isaacson, 748.

⁴⁷⁹ Isaacson, 750.

shadowy groups that are the subject of numerous conspiracy theories. The former is a secretive group in which leaders from Europe and the United States meet annually for the purpose of strengthening the Atlantic alliance.⁴⁸⁰ The latter is a secretive all-male group known for its annual retreat to the California redwoods, at which “American tycoons and power brokers amuse themselves by singing silly songs, performing skits, listening to lectures, drinking, and relieving themselves on tree trunks.” At this gathering, Henry Kissinger “was famous for performing in the skits.”⁴⁸¹

Immediately upon leaving government, he was named an honorary member of the Harlem Globetrotters basketball team.⁴⁸² He worked as a part-time professor at Georgetown University, a senior fellow at the Aspen Institute, and a consultant to Goldman Sachs.⁴⁸³ Between 2001 and 2016, he was a member of the Department of Defense’s Defense Policy Board.⁴⁸⁴ According to Kissinger’s personal website, he is also “a member of the International Council of J.P. Morgan Chase & Co.; a Counselor to and Trustee of the Center for Strategic and International Studies; an Honorary Governor of the Foreign Policy Association; and an Honor Member of the International Olympic Committee.”⁴⁸⁵ The same biography states that he was a member of the Board of Directors of ContiGroup Companies, Inc. from 1988 to 2014 (he remains an Advisor to the Board) and he is also “a Trustee Emeritus of the Metropolitan Museum of Art; a

⁴⁸⁰ Isaacson, 756.

⁴⁸¹ Isaacson, 755.

⁴⁸² Judith Miller, “- Kissinger Co.,” *The New York Times*, May 27, 1979, sec. Archives, <https://www.nytimes.com/1979/05/27/archives/kissinger-co-kissinger-co.html>.

⁴⁸³ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁴ “Henry A. Kissinger,” Henry A. Kissinger, accessed April 17, 2019, <https://www.henryakissinger.com/>.

⁴⁸⁵ “Henry A. Kissinger,” Henry A. Kissinger.

Director Emeritus of Freeport-McMoRan Copper and Gold Inc.; and a Director of the International Rescue Committee.”⁴⁸⁶

Perhaps for lack of space, or because such a resume strains one’s memory, this biography omits Kissinger’s roles as executive vice chair of the “National Committee on U.S.-China Relations,” co-founder of “Rubikon Partners,” honorary chairman of the Center for the National Interest, and his brief tenure as head of the “9/11 Commission.”⁴⁸⁷ Probably by dint of embarrassment, it also omits his role as member of the board of directors of “Theranos,” a blood-testing startup that has been exposed as a reckless fraud.⁴⁸⁸

Similar reasons may motivate the exclusion of his tenure as a board member of the Council on Foreign Relations, from 1977 to 1981.⁴⁸⁹ Kissinger’s time on the board ended when, with nine candidates vying for eight seats, CFR’s three thousand members voted him off the board.⁴⁹⁰ This unusual event was “cast as a rejection of Kissinger by the heart of the American establishment.”⁴⁹¹ If it was so meaningful, however, then it was

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁷ “Henry A. Kissinger, Executive Vice Chair | National Committee on United States - China Relations,” accessed April 17, 2019, <https://www.ncuscr.org/about/board/henry-a-kissinger> ; “Henry Alfred Kissinger: Executive Profile & Biography - Bloomberg,” accessed April 17, 2019, <https://www.bloomberg.com/research/stocks/private/person.asp?personId=588711&privcapId=273607> ; “Board of Directors – Center for the National Interest,” accessed April 17, 2019, <https://cftni.org/about/board-of-directors/> ; “CNN.Com - Kissinger Resigns as Head of 9/11 Commission,” December 13, 2002, <https://web.archive.org/web/20060427145915/http://archives.cnn.com/2002/ALLPOLITICS/12/13/kissinger.resigns/>.

⁴⁸⁸ Maya Kosoff, “Theranos Does Damage Control, Takes Henry Kissinger Off Its Board,” *The Hive*, December 2, 2016, <https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2016/12/theranos-does-damage-control-takes-henry-kissinger-off-its-board>.

⁴⁸⁹ “Henry A. Kissinger Chair for U.S. Foreign Policy,” Council on Foreign Relations, accessed April 17, 2019, <https://www.cfr.org/henry-kissinger-chair-us-foreign-policy>.

⁴⁹⁰ Isaacson, 711.

⁴⁹¹ Isaacson, 712.

an aberration, as in years since, Kissinger has consolidated his position as that establishment's most prominent figurehead.

In recent years, his role in that regard has taken on something of a ceremonial nature, as, at 95, he is too old to be given a substantive, functional position. While again, an actual catalog of his ongoing relationships with prominent members of the American elite would be hopelessly long, his birthday parties offer an illustrative picture. At his 90th birthday gala in 2014, guests included Bill and Hillary Clinton, Donald Rumsfeld, Condoleezza Rice, Barbara Walters, John Kerry, and John McCain. Guests at his 62nd birthday included such figures as Barbara Walters, Katharine Graham of the Washington Post, neoconservative writers Norman Podhoretz and Midge Decter, Robert McNamara, the deposed empress of Iran, and the fashion designer Oscar de la Renta. Guests at his 60th birthday two years prior included five men he had once wiretapped.⁴⁹²

Among this clique are some of the most powerful figures in American foreign policy of the last two decades. Kissinger's relationships with them has maintained his reputation as an elder statesman and ensured his continued influence over the course of U.S. foreign policy. His friendship with Hillary Clinton offers one such example.

In a primary debate, Clinton declared that she "was very flattered when Henry Kissinger said I ran the State Department better than anybody had run it in a long time."⁴⁹³ Perhaps to Clinton's surprise, this invocation of Kissinger became controversial in the primary, and brought renewed criticism of her foreign policy views and record. It was, however, an honest expression of her relationship with her predecessor.

⁴⁹² Isaacson, 714.

⁴⁹³ Grandin, "Henry Kissinger, Hillary Clinton's Tutor in War and Peace."

In a highly positive review of Kissinger's 2014 book *World Order*, Clinton praises the work as "vintage Kissinger, with his singular combination of breadth and acuity along with his knack for connecting headlines to trend lines" and calls Kissinger's writing "surprisingly idealistic."⁴⁹⁴ More importantly, she states that "Kissinger is a friend, and I relied on his counsel when I served as secretary of state. He checked in with me regularly, sharing astute observations about foreign leaders and sending me written reports on his travels."⁴⁹⁵

This description of their relationship is borne out by leaked communications between the two figures, in which Kissinger says to Clinton "I greatly admire the skill and aplomb with which you conduct our foreign policy" and Clinton questions how her relationship with then-President Barack Obama compares with that of Kissinger and Nixon.⁴⁹⁶

This embrace of the hardcore realist Henry Kissinger may seem odd for Hillary Clinton, a liberal internationalist and humanitarian interventionist who during the 2016 primaries was seeking to bolster her progressive credentials. But this is not the only embrace of Kissinger by someone with these views, nor the most unlikely.

In 2014, Obama's ambassador to the United Nations, Samantha Power, attended a baseball game with Kissinger, in part of what Grandin describes as "a ritual among our political class to seek out Kissinger and engage in some form of public banter with

⁴⁹⁴ Hillary Clinton, "Hillary Clinton Reviews Henry Kissinger's 'World Order,'" *The Washington Post*, September 4, 2014, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/hillary-clinton-reviews-henry-kissingers-world-order/2014/09/04/b280c654-31ea-11e4-8f02-03c644b2d7d0_story.html?utm_term=.681e5840bc7a.

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁶ Ben Norton and Jared Flanery, "Emails Expose Close Ties between Hillary Clinton and Accused War Criminal Henry Kissinger," *Salon*, January 12, 2016, https://www.salon.com/2016/01/12/emails_expose_close_ties_between_hillary_clinton_and_accused_war_criminal_henry_kissinger/.

him.”⁴⁹⁷ This encounter was especially ironic given that Power’s elevation into the foreign policy elite was in significant part the result of her book *A Problem from Hell: America and the Age of Genocide*, which details at length Kissinger’s complicity in the Khmer Rouge genocide in Cambodia and the mass killings of Kurds by Saddam Hussein in Iraq, as well as his greenlighting of the Indonesian invasion of East Timor.⁴⁹⁸ Two years later, Kissinger presented Power with the American Academy of Berlin’s Henry A. Kissinger Prize.⁴⁹⁹

As with Elliott Abrams, Kissinger’s career in foreign policy has been sustained by his extensive personal relationships and institutional involvements. These naturally lead to group solidarity for his benefit, as displayed by his reliable defenses from other policymakers like Robert Blackwill, and from members of the commentariat like Robert Kaplan and Niall Ferguson.⁵⁰⁰

Kissinger’s treatment, however, demands more explanation. As meticulously argued by Christopher Hitchens in his book *The Trial of Henry Kissinger*, Kissinger is a man who could easily be tried and convicted for crimes against humanity if a court with proper jurisdiction were to take up the case (in 2004, a federal court dismissed a civil lawsuit against Kissinger by the family of a Chilean military officer murdered in the lead-up to the 1973 coup on the grounds that it did not have jurisdiction to litigate foreign

⁴⁹⁷ Grandin, 226n.

⁴⁹⁸ Zaid Jilani, “Samantha Power to Receive Prize From Henry Kissinger, Whom She Once Harshly Criticized,” *The Intercept*, May 29, 2016, <https://theintercept.com/2016/05/29/samantha-power-to-receive-prize-from-henry-kissinger-whom-she-once-harshly-criticized/>.

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁰ Blackwill, “In Defense of Kissinger”; Kaplan, “In Defense of Henry Kissinger”; Politico Magazine, “Henry Kissinger: Good or Evil?,” POLITICO Magazine, October 10, 2015, <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2015/10/henry-kissinger-history-legacy-213237>.

policy decisions).⁵⁰¹ How, then, can so much of the foreign policy elite refuse to concede the deleterious and immoral outcomes of so many of Kissinger's policies?

Hints can be found in the words of Kissinger's defenders. In his article *In Defense of Henry Kissinger*, Robert Blackwill pushes back on the notion that Kissinger was "complicit" in Pakistani atrocities in Bangladesh:

This issue of private U.S. admonitions versus public condemnations of other governments is, of course, familiar. Similar questions have loomed over America's recent attempts to moderate political upheavals in friendly countries such as Bahrain and Egypt (both with American-trained and -supplied armed forces responding, at times brutally, to what they regarded as existential internal crises). But these are policy dilemmas, not crimes. Under Bass's definition of "complicity" with atrocities, few practitioners of American foreign policy would escape unindicted.⁵⁰²

The problem with Blackwill's argument is that it doesn't so much prove that Kissinger was not complicit in atrocities as it does suggest that other members of the U.S. foreign policy elite have been complicit in atrocities as well. This is not a defense of Kissinger but an indictment of U.S. foreign policy at large. This explains the vehemence of Blackwill, Kaplan, and Kissinger's other defenders. To accept the notion that Kissinger was an immoral and sometimes ineffectual policymaker who helped get millions killed and destabilized entire regions would undermine the elite's key conceptions of America's role in the world.

This problem is highlighted by another quote from Clinton's review of *World Order*, regarding Kissinger:

Though we have often seen the world and some of our challenges quite differently, and advocated different responses now and in the past, what comes through clearly in this new book is a conviction that we, and President Obama,

⁵⁰¹ Christopher Hitchens, "The Case against Henry Kissinger," *Harper's Magazine*, February 2001, <https://harpers.org/archive/2001/02/the-case-against-henry-kissinger-2/>. ; Grandin, 223.

⁵⁰² Blackwill, "In Defense of Henry Kissinger."

share: a belief in the indispensability of continued American leadership in service of a just and liberal order.⁵⁰³

This suggests another one of Putnam's dimensions of elite integration: value consensus. Kissinger and Clinton may disagree on the merits or morality of specific policies, but they firmly agree on the premise that American hegemony must be maintained to uphold a liberal world order. The issue with this premise is that the imperatives of hegemony often contradict those of the liberal order, such as international law.

In a column for *The Week*, Damon Linker asserts that members of the U.S. foreign policy elite tend to hold two conflicting convictions. The first is that the United States is "a righteous country" and that "our ends are noble, our principles pure, and decent people everywhere benefit enormously from our leadership." In this vein, "the liberal international order that encourages rule-following and negotiation while fostering peace and prosperity among nations is our handiwork."⁵⁰⁴ On the other hand, these elites believe we must be "tough, ruthless, hard-nosed, realistic about the ugly ways of the world," and that "in such a world, the ends often justify the means."⁵⁰⁵

The contradiction of these two beliefs is exposed in Cambodia, for one example. International law may prohibit bombing a neutral country, or dropping cluster munitions on civilians. But Kissinger deemed these actions necessary for the end of maintaining

⁵⁰³ Clinton, "Hillary Clinton Reviews Henry Kissinger's 'World Order.'"

⁵⁰⁴ Damon Linker, "Elliot Abrams and the Absurd Paradoxes of American Foreign Policy," *The Week*, February 15, 2019, <https://theweek.com/articles/823801/elliott-abrams-absurd-paradoxes-american-foreign-policy>.

⁵⁰⁵ Linker, "Elliot Abrams and the Absurd Paradoxes of American Foreign Policy."

American hegemony. In Cambodia, as in so many other cases, the demands of hegemony were placed above the constraints of the liberal international order.

Yet many in the foreign policy community continue to hold these beliefs in tandem. And when one believes both these things, Linker says, “a whole range of wondrous things become possible, including magical thinking about the malleability of the world and the capacity to evade responsibility for both morally treacherous behavior and outright failure.”⁵⁰⁶

One such wondrous thing that becomes possible under these conditions is the career of Henry Kissinger. To accept Kissinger as a destructive force is to accept the inherent conflict between American hegemony and liberal order. Most of the U.S. foreign policy elite is deeply committed to the notion that these things are in fact mutually dependent, and thus to his death Henry Kissinger will remain vaunted in America’s highest circles, his reputation mostly intact.

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid.

Conclusion

“In most professions, such a litany of errors would prompt a soul-searching. Heads would roll. Schools of thought would close down.” – Edward Luce, *Financial Times*, 2018.

In his *Financial Times* column quoted above, Edward Luce argues that the presidency of Donald Trump has helped launder the reputations of America’s foreign policy elite. Despite the litany of errors this clique has broadly supported in the 21st century – most notably the invasion of Iraq and the global War on Terror – they have regained their esteem by defining themselves in opposition to Trump’s caustic and reckless approach to foreign affairs.⁵⁰⁷

This may well be true. In their campaigns for president, both Trump and his predecessor, Barack Obama, to some extent ran against the foreign policy elite. In office, Obama corrected against his own predecessor’s worst instincts, but failed to provide a fully-articulated alternative model of foreign policy. Trump, for his part, rhetorically repudiated the elite while relying on some of its worst members to staff his administration, and generally conducting foreign policy with the incoherence, belligerence, and self-interest with which he pursues all things.

But the impunity of the foreign policy elite predates Trump, Obama, and the Iraq War. It has persisted through drastic changes in the geopolitical landscape, and with no regard to which party controls the executive branch. The central aim of this paper has

⁵⁰⁷ Luce, “How Trump Laundered the US Foreign Policy Elite’s Reputation.”

been to explain why and how members of the foreign policy elite exist above accountability for their actions – be it professional accountability for mistakes and policy failures, or legal accountability for serious crimes.

Presented here are several different explanations for this phenomenon. First, there are Robert Putnam’s “dimensions of elite integration,” including social homogeneity, common patterns of recruitment, institutional context, extensive personal interaction, group solidarity, and value consensus. These conditions, displayed prominently by the U.S. foreign policy elite, have helped make that elite a self-perpetuating and self-interested group that protects its members regardless of deed or merit. Each of these factors (with the exception of social homogeneity, which would require empirical data that is not currently available) can be demonstrated to have played a role in sustaining the careers of two of the U.S. foreign policy elite’s most flagrantly destructive members, Elliott Abrams and Henry Kissinger.

Furthermore, this elite resistance to accountability is enabled by a marginalized and passive Congress, and a disengaged and persuadable public. But this examination has raised almost as many questions as it has answered. For one, there is the question of whether, or to what degree, this is inevitable. As mentioned in the introduction, Robert Michels advanced the argument that in any organization that necessarily delegates decisions to a bureaucratic leadership, that leadership will eventually, invariably, operate as an oligarchy. There is also the realist perspective on state behavior, which posits that states behave in whatever way maximizes their power in the international system. In this paradigm, the broad contours of a state’s foreign policy are structurally determined, and

thus the views and merits of individual policymakers, and whether those policymakers are rewarded for success and punished for failures, are of marginal importance.

Total acceptance of this proposition would render this paper meaningless. But the case studies included here, particularly that of Henry Kissinger, go a long way in disproving it. Kissinger's "geopolitical," outlook, his most unique and salient feature as a policymaker, led him to pursue the diplomatic opening to the People's Republic of China as well as to execute a secret and illegal bombing campaign of Cambodia for the sake of American "credibility." The first act is famous because it was bold and unexpected, and went against the conventional wisdom of much of the Cold War foreign policy establishment, seemingly revealing Kissinger's diplomatic genius. The second is infamous because it revealed his worst tendencies as a policymaker – depravity in service of an obviously misguided rationale.

In short, individuals do matter in the creation of U.S. foreign policy. Moreover, it matters how policymakers are selected into, promoted within, and removed from the higher circles of the U.S. foreign policy community. In a well-functioning, meritocratic elite, policymakers would rise with their policy successes and fall with policy failures. In a more arbitrary and oligarchic elite, policymakers rise by virtue of reputation and relationships, and rarely fall. When, as is the case for the U.S. foreign policy elite, professional advancement is divorced from success or failure, a problem of moral hazard appears.

In *Twilight of the Elites*, Christopher Hayes states that "a society in which cheaters, shirkers, and incompetents face no sanction, where bad behavior meets reward,

is a morally hazardous one.”⁵⁰⁸ Here moral hazard describes “the perverse incentives that can arise when agents are insulated from the cost of their actions.”⁵⁰⁹ This is the problem produced by the impunity of the foreign policy elite. If elite policymakers are confident that they will not face consequences for abysmal failures of policy, or even for criminal wrongdoings, they are encouraged to behave more recklessly. This initiates a positive feedback cycle, as each case of impunity lowers the perceived consequences of such recklessness. A future policymaker, having seen Henry Kissinger commit crimes against humanity and policy disasters only to become America’s most celebrated elder statesman, would at the very least not be disincentivized against acting in a similar way.

Ben Rhodes, former Deputy National Security Adviser to President Obama, concurs:

“On a general level, the United States resists accountability for foreign policy mistakes... there is a club-like element to the foreign policy establishment: when people leave government, they often work at think tanks or in corporate positions with other people who previously served in government, and then when the revolving door turns – for instance, after an election – those people help one another move back into government. The result, in my view, is a group think that not only resists accountability for mistakes, but also condemns us too often to repeating them.”⁵¹⁰

Another question raised by this paper that demands further study is that of the legal impunity granted to members of the foreign policy elite. While a number of high-level U.S. officials have faced prosecution for crimes like perjury or obstruction of justice – though their actual punishments are often negligible – graver crimes, such as human rights abuses, crimes against humanity, and violations of international law, uniformly go

⁵⁰⁸ Hayes, 71.

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁵¹⁰ Ben Rhodes. Interview by Sam Fraser. Email interview. Claremont, CA, April 28, 2019.

unpunished. This is attributable to a number of legal, social, and political factors that this paper has not explored.

Among the legal obstacles to accountability is the refusal of U.S. courts to assert jurisdiction over what they deem foreign policy decisions. This was demonstrated by a 2004 lawsuit against Henry Kissinger “filed against him by the family of a Chilean military officer who was killed in an attempted kidnapping that Kissinger helped organize.”⁵¹¹ The judge asserted that “second-guessing the methods by which the Executive Branch chose to deal with a new Socialist regime in Chile in the 1970s vis a vis their effect on foreign citizens... is not the proper role of this court” and that “the Court lacks judicially discoverable and manageable standards to resolve inherently political questions.”⁵¹²

This last point – that crimes involving “inherently political questions” cannot be punished – is regularly trotted out in defense of elite impunity. When Scooter Libby, an aide to Vice President Dick Cheney, was prosecuted for perjury and obstruction of justice, Richard Cohen of the *Washington Post* wrote in his defense, saying that government officials should not be held to “account for practicing the dark art of politics.”⁵¹³ Conversely, in 2007, MSNBC host Chris Matthews dismissed the idea that the Democratic Congress should initiate investigations into potential criminal wrongdoing in the Bush White House, suggesting such investigations “would be perceived as politics.”⁵¹⁴ Thus, with a Kafkaesque twist of logic, crimes committed by

⁵¹¹ Grandin, 223.

⁵¹² Grandin, 258.

⁵¹³ Glenn Greenwald, *With Liberty and Justice for Some*, 45.

⁵¹⁴ Greenwald, 197.

policymakers are “politics” and should therefore be tolerated, while investigations into those crimes would be “politics” and are therefore intolerable.

Lastly, there are nebulous social factors operating against accountability for the foreign policy elite. In his article “The Case Against Henry Kissinger,” Christopher Hitchens wrote, “The United States believes that it alone pursues and indicts war criminals and ‘international terrorists’; nothing in its political or journalistic culture yet allows for the thought that it might be harboring and sheltering such a senior one.”⁵¹⁵ What Hitchens is describing is a political culture in which elites are extremely hesitant to describe U.S. officials as war criminals, even if their actions plainly meet the legal definition of war crimes. If elite politicians and journalists refuse to acknowledge that U.S. officials can even be war criminals, it is almost impossible to build public support for war crimes trials against them. Such a political culture is the product of complex social factors that this paper does not fully address. Like the other political and legal obstacles to accountability for elite crimes, this demands further examination.

A Bipartisan Problem

The two figures examined in the case studies happen to be, despite heterodox politics in their early lives, Republicans who performed the vast majority of their government service in Republican administrations. This is not to suggest that Republican policymakers alone are guilty of policy failures or crimes in office, nor that they are unique in being unaccountable for such acts. It may be the case, as the Republican Party since the Second World War has largely been the party of aggressive foreign policy, that

⁵¹⁵ Christopher Hitchens, “The Case against Henry Kissinger.”

Republican policymakers tend to lay claim to the most egregious acts in the annals of U.S. foreign affairs. Democrats, however, have their share of blame for the impunity of the foreign policy elite, and some prominent Democratic policymakers have benefited from this impunity.

In some cases, Democratic administrations have perpetuated this lack of accountability by failing to investigate serious potential wrongdoings that occurred under their predecessors. During his 1992 campaign against George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton “argued that there was serious wrongdoing requiring urgent investigation and possibly prosecution,” regarding both the Iran-Contra affair and another scandal called “Iraqgate” in which Bush and Reagan officials were alleged to have “secretly and illegally supplied Saddam Hussein with large amounts of money, weapons technology, training, military intelligence, and even nuclear components.”⁵¹⁶ Once in office, however, Clinton failed to conduct serious investigations into these issues and even “took steps to suppress any real inquiries into Iraqgate.”⁵¹⁷ The administration justified this on the grounds that it wanted to look forward instead of backwards, and because such investigations could potentially undermine the support of congressional Republicans for other presidential initiatives.

Similarly, during his own campaign for president in 2008, Barack Obama declared his intention to investigate possible crimes related to the George W. Bush administration’s illegal mass surveillance and torture programs.⁵¹⁸ Like Clinton, however, Obama reversed himself after his election. His administration failed to investigate or prosecute Bush officials, “despite considerable evidence that President

⁵¹⁶ Greenwald, 35.

⁵¹⁷ Ibid.

⁵¹⁸ Greenwald, 158.

Bush and Vice President Cheney authorized torture” in violation of U.S. and international law.⁵¹⁹ This decision, Stephen Walt says, “makes future recurrences more likely and casts doubt on America’s professed commitment to defend human rights and the rule of law.”⁵²⁰

Additionally, prominent Democratic foreign policy stalwarts have created their own share of policy disasters and atrocities. Zbigniew Brzezinski, the National Security Adviser to President Jimmy Carter who is often portrayed as Kissinger’s principal Democratic rival and counterpart, failed to anticipate the 1979 Iranian Revolution that overthrew the U.S.-backed Shah.⁵²¹ He sought, unsuccessfully, to forestall the revolution “by instigating a military coup in Tehran,” which, had it been attempted and failed, could have made the Shah’s overthrow even more of a disaster for the U.S.⁵²² Brzezinski subsequently chose to “deepen” and “overtly militarize” U.S. involvement around the Persian Gulf.⁵²³ Among other things, this helped create the conditions that would lead to the first and second Gulf Wars, and by placing U.S. forces in Saudi Arabia, helped inspire Al-Qaeda and Osama bin Laden to attack the United States.⁵²⁴

During the Clinton administration, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and UN Ambassador Richard Holbrooke were both instrumental in promoting and implementing the international sanctions regime against Iraq that was intended to force Saddam Hussein into complying with UN resolutions on weapons of mass destruction, and to contain his

⁵¹⁹ Walt, 190.

⁵²⁰ Ibid.

⁵²¹ Andrew J. Bacevich, “Zbigniew Brzezinski’s Cold War,” November 21, 2018, <https://www.thenation.com/article/zbigniew-brzezinski-cold-war-biography/>.

⁵²² Ibid.

⁵²³ Ibid.

⁵²⁴ Bacevich, “Zbigniew Brzezinski’s Cold War.”

military capacity.⁵²⁵ The sanctions regime could be considered successful in that Iraq's military was weakened and Hussein did not develop weapons of mass destruction, but it failed to achieve Iraqi compliance with U.N. resolutions. More importantly, the economic devastation and deprivation caused by the sanctions killed an estimated 500,000 Iraqi children, to which Albright famously said, "we think the price is worth it."⁵²⁶

Madeleine Albright remains a Democratic foreign policy mandarin up to today, and a fixture of the Washington think tank world, as did Holbrooke and Brzezinski up to their deaths in 2010 and 2017, respectively.⁵²⁷ In fairness, Albright's glib remark about the deaths of Iraqi children was something of an aberration; she has since consistently spoken of the issue with much more nuance and gravity.⁵²⁸ Furthermore, each of these officials has meaningful accomplishments to his or her name: for Brzezinski, the Panama Canal Treaty, the Camp David Accords, and improved relations for China, for Holbrooke, the Dayton Accords that ended the Yugoslav War, and for Albright, the resolution of the Kosovo Crisis.⁵²⁹ But each was also responsible for significant disasters and even atrocities for which they indisputably have not faced meaningful consequences.

Likewise, the Clinton and Obama administrations also indulged in the habit of staffing foreign policy positions with officials with dismal policy records. For his team to manage the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, Clinton selected three officials who had worked on this issue for the first Bush administration – Dennis Ross, Aaron David Miller,

⁵²⁵ David Rieff, "Were Sanctions Right?," *The New York Times*, July 27, 2003, <https://www.nytimes.com/2003/07/27/magazine/were-sanctions-right.html>.

⁵²⁶ Ibid.

⁵²⁷ Toni Johnson, "Foreign Policy Brain Trusts: Clinton Advisers," Council on Foreign Relations, June 20, 2008, <https://www.cfr.org/background/foreign-policy-brain-trusts-clinton-advisers>; Bacevich, "Zbigniew Brzezinski's Cold War."

⁵²⁸ David Rieff, "Were Sanctions Right?"

⁵²⁹ Bacevich, "Zbigniew Brzezinski's Cold War"; Johnson, "Foreign Policy Brain Trusts."

and Daniel Kurtzer – whom Walt faults for failing to “halt Israeli settlement construction or begin direct talks for a formal peace deal.”⁵³⁰ With the addition of Martin Indyk and Robert Malley, Clinton’s own team was “responsible for the fruitless effort to achieve a final status agreement between 1993 and 2000.”⁵³¹

Despite this, Ross was hired by Obama’s 2008 campaign and then joined the National Security Council in Obama first term. In this position, he clashed with other Obama officials over the Israel-Palestine issue, and expressed doubts that a nuclear agreement could be reached with Iran – a measure that was successfully concluded only after he left the administration.⁵³² In 2013, Secretary of State John Kerry chose Martin Indyk to head an effort at reviving the peace process, which failed. One Clinton official who was not brought back to work on Israel-Palestine was Robert Malley, who had been “the most skeptical of the traditional U.S. approach to the issue.”⁵³³

The Obama administration’s most flagrant embrace of impunity for the foreign policy elite was demonstrated by its choice of intelligence officials. Director of National Intelligence James Clapper told Congress in 2013 that “the NSA was not willingly collecting data on U.S. citizens.”⁵³⁴ This was revealed to be false by Edward Snowden’s whistleblowing, and Clapper admitted as much, effectively confessing to the crime of lying to Congress. The Obama administration chose to protect Clapper, with the president declaring that he had “full confidence” in him.⁵³⁵

⁵³⁰ Walt, 193.

⁵³¹ Walt, 193.

⁵³² Walt, 194.

⁵³³ Ibid.

⁵³⁴ Walt, 196.

⁵³⁵ Ibid.

Former CIA director John Brennan received similar treatment from the Obama administration. He joined the White House staff in 2009 because the administration believed that his past involvement in Bush's interrogation and detention programs would make the Senate unlikely to confirm him as CIA director. On the White House staff, he was in charge of the administration's so-called "kill list" targeting individuals for drone strikes. In this role he defended the drone strike policy, claiming in 2011 that "for nearly the past year there hasn't been a single collateral death" from such strikes. Credible evidence suggested he was lying, as just three months before that statement, a drone strike had killed 42 people at a tribal meeting in Pakistan.⁵³⁶

Despite this deceit, Brennan was appointed and confirmed to the post of CIA director in 2013. Later, the CIA under Brennan was revealed to be spying on congressional staffers who were investigating the Bush era torture and detention programs. Brennan denied that this had occurred until the CIA's inspector general confirmed it, but the Obama administration maintained its "full confidence" in him.

Thus, while the Republican Party may boast the most flagrant exemplars of impunity in the foreign policy elite, there are certainly more than a few prominent Democratic members of the elite who also fit this mold, and Democratic political leaders have shown little will to address this lack of accountability.

The Opinion-makers

The role of opinion-makers and media figures in protecting members of the foreign policy elite against accountability has come up numerous times in this paper.

⁵³⁶ Walt, 197.

Prominent opinion leaders seem to reflexively leap to the defense of members of the foreign policy elite, shielding them against questions on their competence, the success of their policy records, or their morals. These opinion-makers are often eager to let the public know of their friendships with the policymakers they are defending, and seem to view their personal relationships with these powerful people as a testament to their credibility and not a conflict of interest.

In one particularly ridiculous example, Richard Cohen of the *Washington Post* expresses his pleasure at seeing Caspar Weinberger, former Secretary of Defense in the Reagan administration, pardoned by George H.W. Bush before he was set to go to trial for perjury and obstruction of justice.⁵³⁷ Cohen bases his support of Weinberger's pardon at least in part on the fact that the two men had enjoyed friendly social encounters at a Safeway grocery store: "based on my Safeway encounters, I came to think of Weinberger as a basic sort of guy, candid and no nonsense – which is the way much of official Washington saw him. Cap, my Safeway buddy, walks, and that's all right with me."⁵³⁸ What Weinberger's personality, or his habit of shopping for his own groceries, has to do with his guilt or innocence is not clear.

Additionally, media positions offer soft landings for former government officials, even those who should be thoroughly discredited. As Ben Rhodes describes, "our media... for reasons I've never really understood, offers platforms like newspaper columns and television slots to people based on their government service; sometimes, in a quest for "balance," they'll hire people simply because of the position they held in the

⁵³⁷ Greenwald, 28.

⁵³⁸ Greenwald, 30.

Administration of a particular party.”⁵³⁹ This phenomenon often enables failed policymakers to continue to influence U.S. policy discourse, and to advance the same ideas that they implemented while in government. It also gives them a platform to defend their friends and former colleagues who may still be in policymaking.

Beyond serving as guardians of elite impunity, opinion-makers in the foreign policy world benefit from a similar lack of accountability. Instead, prominent pundits and media figures are able to advocate one disastrous policy after another without seeing any impact on their careers; in many cases, they continue to advance upwards.

This was well-illustrated by the Iraq War. In the months preceding the invasion, both the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* published false stories supporting the Bush administration’s narrative on Iraq’s fictional WMD program.⁵⁴⁰ Individual journalists such as Jeffrey Goldberg also played a prominent role, as Goldberg wrote a “lengthy article” for *The New Yorker* “describing supposed links between Osama bin Laden and the Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein.”⁵⁴¹ These “links” also turned out to be fictitious, but Goldberg was nonetheless promoted to become editor-in-chief of *The Atlantic* in 2016.⁵⁴²

The *Washington Post* offers an especially flagrant example of impunity in media. Under the leadership of Fred Hiatt in the run-up to the invasion of Iraq, the *Post* editorial board ran “twenty seven separate editorials advocating the war.”⁵⁴³ In the decade-plus since the Iraq War began, most of these writers who hyped up the war have held onto

⁵³⁹ Rhodes, Interview by Sam Fraser

⁵⁴⁰ Walt, 206

⁵⁴¹ Walt, 206.

⁵⁴² Walt, 207.

⁵⁴³ Ibid.

their positions at the *Post*, despite continuing to be severely wrong about other foreign policy issues.⁵⁴⁴

Moreover, the *Post*'s leadership has seen no reason to significantly diversify its editorial page to include more who opposed the war or correctly guessed that it would be a disaster. A 2018 study by the media watchdog group FAIR found that “Of the 23 current staff columnists who had a clear opinion on the Iraq War either before or in the aftermath of the invasion, 21 supported it.”⁵⁴⁵ Of the *Post*'s 46 staff columnists in 2018, three had actually worked for the Bush administration, meaning that the *Post* has more columnists who were employed by the administration than opposed its invasion of Iraq.⁵⁴⁶

In February 2018, the *Washington Post* saw fit to add to its stable of pro-Iraq War columnists by hiring the neoconservative writer Max Boot. Boot, like many neoconservatives, is a member of the “Never Trump” movement, a group that mostly exists in political magazines and on the opinion pages of America's elite newspapers.⁵⁴⁷ The same year he was hired by the *Post*, Boot published a book entitled *The Corrosion of Conservatism: Why I Left the Right*. The book, according to a review by Peter Maass of *The Intercept*, mostly consists of Boot “apologizing for nearly everything he has done and abided.”⁵⁴⁸ This includes the Iraq War, which he calls “a chastening lesson on the

⁵⁴⁴ Walt, 208.

⁵⁴⁵ Adam Johnson, “Another Warmonger Rewarded for Being Wrong on Iraq War,” *FAIR*, February 1, 2018, <https://fair.org/home/another-warmonger-rewarded-for-being-wrong-on-iraq-war/>.

⁵⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴⁷ Matthew Walther, “A New Anti-Trump Publication Is the Last Thing Conservative Media Needs,” *The Nation*, March 1, 2019, <https://theweek.com/articles/826437/new-antitrump-publication-last-thing-conservative-media-needs>.

⁵⁴⁸ Peter Maass, “Max Boot Is Very Sorry for Backing the GOP and the Iraq Invasion. Why Is He Being Praised for This?,” *The Intercept*, October 13, 2018, <https://theintercept.com/2018/10/13/max-boot-book/>.

limits of American power.”⁵⁴⁹ It is unclear, however, just how chastened Max Boot is. In a January 2019, Boot used his new column in the *Washington Post* to advocate that the U.S. should drop any pretenses of seeking victory in Iraq and Syria, but leave its troops deployed there. These conflicts, he said, should be viewed as open-ended engagements that may take decades or even centuries to resolve. In a tweet accompanying the article, he wrote:

“We need to think of these deployments in much the same way as we thought of our Indian Wars, which lasted roughly 300 years, or as the British thought about their deployment on the North West Frontier, which lasted 100 years. U.S. troops are policing the frontiers of the Pax Americana.”⁵⁵⁰

After many on Twitter took issue with the seemingly favorable comparison to a genocidal war, Boot blessed *Washington Post* readers with another insightful column, this one entitled, “On Wednesday, the Twitter Mob Came for Me.”⁵⁵¹

In *The Corrosion of Conservatism*, Boot laments that some of his left-wing critics will never accept his mea culpa, and instead demand his “ritual suicide.”⁵⁵² With this hyperbole, Boot casts accountability in the media as a ridiculous proposition. But his actual critics propose more measured consequences. Maass, for his part, suggests that Boot follow the lead of Paul Bremer, who, a few years after his disastrous tenure as

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁰ Max Boot, “Why Winning and Losing Are Irrelevant in Syria and Afghanistan,” *The Washington Post*, January 30, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/global-opinions/the-us-cant-win-the-wars-in-afghanistan-and-syria-but-we-can-lose-them/2019/01/30/e440c54e-23ea-11e9-90cd-dedb0c92dc17_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.b9d8cb23998f.

⁵⁵¹ Max Boot, “On Wednesday, the Twitter Mob Came for Me,” *The Washington Post*, January 31, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2019/01/31/wednesday-twitter-mob-came-me/?utm_term=.762b09ee5c0b.

⁵⁵² Maass, “Max Boot Is Very Sorry for Backing the GOP and the Iraq Invasion. Why Is He Being Praised for This?”

civilian overseer of the American occupation in Iraq, took up painting and moved to Vermont to become a ski instructor.⁵⁵³

Boot's case is not an exception among U.S. media figures, nor is he the most prominent example of a pundit failing upwards. Thomas Friedman, longtime political columnist for the *New York Times*, is among the most chronically incorrect men in the American media. Friedman is famous for his reliance on blunt and inaccurate cultural stereotypes, worn clichés like the cab driver conversation, and inscrutable mixed metaphors.⁵⁵⁴ See, for example, a 2014 column entitled “Playing Hockey with Putin,” in which Friedman writes:

Shortly before the Sochi Olympics, Russian President Vladimir Putin played in an exhibition hockey game there. In retrospect, he was clearly warming up for his takeover of Crimea. Putin doesn't strike me as a chess player, in geopolitical terms. He prefers hockey, without a referee, so elbowing, tripping and cross-checking are all permitted. Never go to a hockey game with Putin and expect to play by the rules of touch football. The struggle over Ukraine is a hockey game, with no referee. If we're going to play—we, the Europeans and the pro-Western Ukrainians need to be serious.⁵⁵⁵

Friedman has not always felt this way about Vladimir Putin; in 2001, he advised readers to “keep rootin’ for Putin,” calling him “Russia’s first Deng Xiaoping.”⁵⁵⁶ This pattern – an assessment that turns out to be wildly incorrect, followed by a glib reversal years later – is common in Friedman’s work. In an interview with *Motherboard*,

⁵⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁴ Michael Arria, “Why Thomas Friedman Is Always Wrong: An Interview With Journalist Belen Fernandez,” *Motherboard*, April 20, 2012, https://motherboard.vice.com/en_us/article/mgg4ga/why-thomas-friedman-is-always-wrong-an-interview-with-journalist-belen-fernandez ; Liz Cox Barret, “Friedman’s French Friend Stages Intervention,” *Columbia Journalism Review*, November 1, 2006, https://www.cjr.org/behind_the_news/friedmans_french_friend_stages.php.

⁵⁵⁵ Thomas L. Friedman, “Opinion | Playing Hockey With Putin,” *The New York Times*, April 8, 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/09/opinion/friedman-playing-hockey-with-putin.html>.

⁵⁵⁶ Thomas L. Friedman, “Russia’s Last Line,” *The New York Times*, December 23, 2001, <https://www.nytimes.com/2001/12/23/opinion/russia-s-last-line.html>.

journalist Belen Fernandez detailed how in 2003, Friedman went from saying that the Iraq War was partly about oil, to claiming that only apologists for Saddam Hussein thought the war was about oil, to blaming the war on Americans who drive gas-guzzling SUVs, all in the span of about a year.⁵⁵⁷

Friedman's most famous statement on Iraq, however, came in a 2003 interview with Charlie Rose, when he explained that the purpose of the Iraq War was to teach some kind of cultural lesson, not to Iraq specifically, but to Muslims and Middle Easterners in general:

What they needed to see was American boys and girls going house to house, from Basra to Baghdad, and basically saying: 'Which part of this sentence don't you understand? You don't think, you know, we care about our open society, you think this bubble fantasy, we're just gonna to let it grow? Well, Suck. On. This.' That, Charlie, is what this war is about. We could have hit Saudi Arabia; it was part of that bubble. Could have hit Pakistan. We hit Iraq because we could.⁵⁵⁸

More recently, Friedman raised eyebrows with his cheerleading of the Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. Friedman hyped the crown prince as a religious reformer and social modernizer in a column entitled "Saudi Arabia's Arab Spring, At Last."⁵⁵⁹ Less than a year later, the Saudi writer Jamal Khashoggi, a moderate critic of the regime, was murdered and butchered in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul, most likely on the orders of the crown prince himself.⁵⁶⁰ Friedman expressed horror at Khashoggi's murder, and skepticism that it could have occurred without the crown prince's approval. But he defended his prior enthusiasm for Prince Mohammed with characteristic glibness:

⁵⁵⁷ Arria, "Why Thomas Friedman Is Always Wrong."

⁵⁵⁸ Norman Solomon, "Thomas Friedman Claims It's 'Stupid and Obnoxious' to Say He Was a Cheerleader for the Iraq War," *HuffPost*, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/thomas-friedman-claims-it_b_3473444.

⁵⁵⁹ Thomas L. Friedman, "Opinion | Saudi Arabia's Arab Spring, at Last," *The New York Times*, November 23, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/23/opinion/saudi-prince-mbs-arab-spring.html>.

⁵⁶⁰ Jen Kirby, "Saudi Arabia Begins Trial for 11 Suspects in Khashoggi Murder," *Vox*, January 3, 2019, <https://www.vox.com/2019/1/3/18166689/khashoggi-trial-saudi-arabia-mbs>.

“I always knew that M.B.S.’s reform agenda was a long shot to succeed, but I was rooting for its success... It had nothing to do with M.B.S. personally. Personally, I don’t care if Saudi Arabia is ruled by M.B.S., S.O.S. or K.F.C.”⁵⁶¹ He followed this up by asserting that America’s greatest national interest in the Islamic world is “Islamic religious reform, which can come only from Saudi Arabia, the home of Islam’s holiest cities, Mecca and Medina.” The necessity of such reform aside, the notion that it could only come from Saudi Arabia would be absurd to anyone with a basic knowledge of the histories of Islam or Saudi Arabia.

Based on this record, it is unsurprising that Friedman is the subject of much derision in his own field. The late writer Alexander Cockburn called him “the silliest man on the planet.”⁵⁶² A whole cottage industry has sprung up around deconstructing and mocking Friedman’s latest columns and his writing style, displayed in semi-regular round-ups by the *Columbia Journalism Review*.⁵⁶³ In 2013, Daniel Drezner, a figure well within the mainstream, centrist foreign policy elite, wrote an “open letter” to the *New York Times* in which he asserted that a recent Friedman column had “migrated from the merely foolish to the ill-considered and dangerous” and said that “Friedman clearly needs a sabbatical from the rigors of column-writing to get his head back in the game.”⁵⁶⁴

⁵⁶¹ Thomas L. Friedman, “Opinion | America’s Dilemma: Censuring M.B.S. and Not Halting Saudi Reforms,” *The New York Times*, October 26, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/16/opinion/jamal-khashoggi-saudi-mohammed-bin-salman.html>.

⁵⁶² Arria, “Why Thomas Friedman Is Always Wrong.”

⁵⁶³ Greg Marx, “Tom Friedman’s ‘Radical’ Wrongness,” *Columbia Journalism Review*, July 25, 2011, https://www.cjr.org/campaign_desk/tom_friedmans_radical_wrongnes.php; Greg Marx, “Tom Friedman: Still Wrong,” *Columbia Journalism Review*, July 25, 2011, https://www.cjr.org/campaign_desk/tom_friedman_still_wrong.php; Erika Fry, “Tom Friedman Needs A Factchecker,” *Columbia Journalism Review*, October 7, 2011, https://www.cjr.org/the_kicker/tom_friedman_needs_a_factcheck.php.

⁵⁶⁴ Daniel W. Drezner, “An Open Letter to the New York Times Concerning Thomas Friedman,” *Foreign Policy*, January 23, 2013, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2013/01/23/an-open-letter-to-the-new-york-times-concerning-thomas-friedman/>.

Drezner ended his letter with a plea to the *Times*: “in the interest of raising our country’s foreign policy discourse, I beg you to put him on leave.”⁵⁶⁵

Yet Friedman retains one of the most prestigious political writing posts in the United States, with a massive platform to inform the public on foreign policy issues. As for the U.S. (and global) political and economic elite, Friedman still commands, if not their respect, at least their frequent attention. He is a regular speaker at the World Economic Forum in Davos, and in 2014, he was granted a rare hour-long sit down interview with then-President Obama.⁵⁶⁶

Unlike men such as Elliott Abrams and Henry Kissinger, nothing in Friedman’s record can plausibly be described as criminal, and he certainly does not bear direct responsibility for anyone’s death (at least, from what information is publicly available). But his career starkly demonstrates the lack of professional accountability among foreign policy opinion-makers; no matter how many times his prognostications prove wildly wrong, no matter how many times and by how many people his columns are exposed as ridiculous, he retains his enviable post, and with it the ear of some of the world’s most powerful people.

Solutions

The problems set forth in this paper clearly demand a response. The challenge, however, is figuring out exactly how to address the complex cultural, political, and

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁶ Thomas L. Friedman, “Opinion | President Obama Talks to Thomas L. Friedman About Iraq, Putin and Israel,” *The New York Times*, August 8, 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/09/opinion/president-obama-thomas-l-friedman-iraq-and-world-affairs.html>.

economic factors that sustain elite impunity. The foreign policy elite is spread across numerous institutions, both private and public, so no simple mechanism or rule change can be put in place to facilitate accountability. Instead, what is needed is a broad, multi-faceted effort to make both structural changes in the realm of policymaking, and cultural changes that extend to the private sector. Due to various factors, including the necessity for secrecy in some policymaking and the importance that policymakers be given leeway to take reasonable risks, creating conditions in which the foreign policy elite is perfectly accountable will not be possible. However, it can be moved in the right direction, and the worst instances of impunity can be mitigated.

The simplest institutional fixes to bring accountability to foreign policy making would involve restoring Congressional authority and oversight over foreign policy. This can come in a number of ways. Congress, as described in the second chapter, has the sole constitutional power to declare war. In theory, this should mean that Congress has to give its approval when American forces are deployed into a new country in a new conflict against a new enemy. For almost two decades, however, the Authorization for the Use of Military Force, originally passed to allow the president to pursue the perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks, has acted a vehicle for unrestricted expansion of the War on Terror, as under its authority presidents of both parties have deployed troops and air forces in numerous countries and against new adversaries without a congressional vote, or in some cases, without congressional or public knowledge. This raises the likelihood that executive branch officials will be able to take overly risky or destructive actions while helping to remove national security issues from the public debate. Congress could repeal the AUMF and replace it with a new authorization that defines which foreign militant groups

actually necessitate the use of American military force, limits the geographical scope of the War on Terror, and includes sunset clauses so that it does not permanently delegate war-making power to the presidency. This would ensure that the ongoing necessity of the War on Terror would at least periodically be a point of public debate, and not fade into the background.

Congress can also make use of its authority under the War Powers Act of 1973 and pass resolutions to end U.S. involvement in military conflicts which it opposes.⁵⁶⁷ In 2019, Congress attempted to do this for the first time in the Act's history with a resolution to end U.S. military support for the Saudi-led war in Yemen. The resolution was vetoed by President Trump and thus did not extricate the U.S. from the conflict, but did send a powerful message reasserting the voice of congress in foreign affairs.⁵⁶⁸

Additionally, both houses of Congress can act to build their diminished capacity in foreign affairs by increasing the staff budgets of their foreign policy-focused committees.⁵⁶⁹ Congress could also establish a research body to gather information and help educate members on matters of foreign relations, a role similar to that played by Congressional Budget Office for budgetary issues. Both of these steps would make Congress better equipped to address questions of foreign policy and challenge the president and his officials when necessary.

Another institution that needs to be reformed if foreign policymakers are to be held more accountable is the National Security Council. Since the NSC's creation, it has

⁵⁶⁷ "How War Powers Act Works," *The New York Times*, March 29, 1984, <https://www.nytimes.com/1984/03/29/world/how-war-powers-act-works.html>.

⁵⁶⁸ Scott R. Anderson, "Where Trump's Veto Leaves the Yemen Resolution," *Brookings*, April 18, 2019, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2019/04/18/where-trumps-veto-leaves-the-yemen-resolution/>.

⁵⁶⁹ Goldgeier and Saunders.

been used by presidents, especially after Nixon, to concentrate foreign policy formulation in the White House, away from oversight by Congress, and it has grown in size with each successive administration.⁵⁷⁰ The NSC has also become a tool for presidents to bring officials with controversial or ignominious records into their administrations without congressional approval.⁵⁷¹ In some cases, however, the extra secrecy afforded by the NSC has been used to positive ends, as it was during the Obama administration's efforts to restore diplomatic relations with Cuba.⁵⁷² Congress should therefore look to rein in the role of the Council or gain some oversight on its personnel and activities without totally foreclosing its more advantageous uses. To do so, Congress could amend the 1947 National Security Act to reduce the size and budget of the Council, and force more policy decisions back into the Departments of State and Defense. Alternatively, Congress could amend the National Security Act to require Senate confirmation for top NSC officials.⁵⁷³ The latter act especially could ensure that the Council is not used as a tool of impunity to bring discredited policymakers back into government, as it was with Elliott Abrams or more recently, with Michael Flynn.

Congress, however, is most responsive to political demands, and is therefore unlikely to take up this cause on its own. Furthermore, private institutions that fuel elite impunity, like think tanks and the media, would not be affected by any of these changes.

⁵⁷⁰ "Milestones: 1945–1952 - National Security Act of 1947," Office of the Historian – United States Department of State, accessed April 25, 2019, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1945-1952/national-security-act>.

⁵⁷¹ Josh Magness, "A Few Things to Know about Steve Bannon's Ascension to the National Security Council," *McClatchy*, January 31, 2016, <https://www.mcclatchydc.com/news/nation-world/national/national-security/article129795364.html>.

⁵⁷² Ben Rhodes, *The World As It Is: A Memoir of the Obama White House* (New York: Random House, 2018), 210.

⁵⁷³ "H.R.4909 - 114th Congress (2015-2016): National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017," webpage, Congress.gov, May 26, 2016, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/house-bill/4909>.

In order to push Congress to act, and to encourage such private entities to embrace accountability, a great deal of public pressure would be required.

Theoretically, a broad social movement could take shape to demand an end to elite impunity, pressuring Congress to conduct more diligent and critical oversight of foreign policy officials, and even pressuring think tanks and media organizations to let go of discredited figures like Thomas Friedman, or at least to balance those figures with fresh, critical voices and different perspectives on foreign policy. Such an effort could follow the mold of successful pro-democracy and anti-corruption movements in other countries, such as *Otpor!* in Serbia.

Truth be told, it is hard to see this succeeding, or even being strongly attempted, in the United States. Such pressure is unlikely to come from a public as disengaged from foreign affairs as Americans are. Furthermore, polarization makes accountability more politicized, as segments of the public are inclined to rally behind elites whom they perceive to be on their side; one need only look to how after the Iran-Contra scandal revealed his extensive criminal activities, Oliver North became a cause célèbre of the American right. If the invasion of Iraq and the disastrous occupation that followed were not enough to create a massive public backlash against the foreign policy elite, it is difficult to imagine what would.

In reality, any effort to make members of the foreign policy officials more accountable could only occur in the context of a broader national dialogue about the deep-rooted problems in America's foreign policy direction since the Second World War. The story of the foreign policy elite is not simply one of individuals making grave errors because they are incompetent or immoral, though that is certainly a factor in some cases.

The reason that this elite seems to constantly produce failed and criminal policies is that it is pursuing two inherently contradictory objectives that its members almost uniformly insist are in fact mutually dependent: American global hegemony and a liberal international order.

Led by willing and able members of the political elite, the American public can reckon with this contradiction and the specific disasters it has produced. Such a dialogue could determine whether the United States will seek a more humble foreign policy and accept the constraints of the liberal international order it claims to uphold, or drop the pretenses of this order in pursuit of power and national interest. In the former case, instances of grave failure or crime requiring consequences would hopefully be reduced; in the latter, by dropping the veneers of legalism and moral authority, impunity could be openly embraced and justified by reason of state.

Such an extensive democratic re-evaluation of a nation's foreign policy would be unprecedented in human history. For that reason it may be considered unlikely to succeed. At least one current presidential candidate, however, has hinted at trying to start something like this.⁵⁷⁴ Its prospects may be slim, but if the United States is to have a foreign policy elite that is both more effective and more accountable, it must at least be tried.

⁵⁷⁴ Benjamin Wallace-Wells, "Bernie Sanders Imagines a Progressive New Approach to Foreign Policy," *The New Yorker*, April 13, 2019, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/the-political-scene/bernie-sanders-imagines-a-progressive-new-approach-to-foreign-policy>.

Bibliography

- “About.” *Ethics & Public Policy Center*. Accessed April 7, 2019. <https://eppc.org/about/>.
- “About USCIRF.” United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, February 6, 2008. <https://www.uscirf.gov/about-uscirf>.
- Abrams, Elliott. *Undue Process : A Story of How Political Differences Are Turned into Crimes*. New York: Free Press, 1993.
- “Allan Nairn: Trump’s Venezuela Envoy Elliott Abrams Is a War Criminal Who Has Abetted Genocide.” *Democracy Now!*, January 30, 2019. https://www.democracynow.org/2019/1/30/allan_nairn_trump_s_venezuela_envoy.
- Alterman, Eric. “A Democratic Foreign Policy.” *World Policy Journal* 13, no. 2 (1996): 23–35.
- Anderson, Scott R. “Where Trump’s Veto Leaves the Yemen Resolution.” *Brookings*, April 18, 2019. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2019/04/18/where-trumps-veto-leaves-the-yemen-resolution/>.
- Arria, Michael. “Why Thomas Friedman Is Always Wrong: An Interview With Journalist Belen Fernandez.” *Motherboard*, April 20, 2012. https://motherboard.vice.com/en_us/article/mgg4ga/why-thomas-friedman-is-always-wrong-an-interview-with-journalist-belen-fernandez.
- Bacevich, Andrew J. “Zbigniew Brzezinski’s Cold War,” *The Nation*. November 21, 2018. <https://www.thenation.com/article/zbigniew-brzezinski-cold-war-biography/>.
- Bachrach, Peter. *The Theory of Democratic Elitism: A Critique*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1967.
- Bass, Gary J. “Indefensible Kissinger.” *POLITICO Magazine*, January 13, 2014. <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2014/01/indefensible-kissinger-102123.html>.
- Beauchamp, Zack. “The Obama Administration Is Honoring Henry Kissinger Today. It Shouldn’t Be.” *Vox*, May 9, 2016. <https://www.vox.com/2016/5/9/11640562/kissinger-pentagon-award>.
- . “Watch Rep. Ilhan Omar Grill Elliott Abrams, Trump’s Venezuela Envoy, over His Dubious Past.” *Vox*, February 13, 2019. <https://www.vox.com/latest-news/2019/2/13/18223744/ilhan-omar-elliott-abrams-el-salvador-venezuela>.
- Beaumont, Peter. “The Observer Profile: Robert Kagan.” *The Guardian*, April 26, 2008, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/apr/27/usa>.
- Berinsky, Adam J. “Events, Elites, and American Public Support for Military Conflict.” In *The Domestic Sources of American Foreign Policy : Insights and Evidence*, edited by James M. McCormick. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2012.
- Berman, Larry. *No Peace, No Honor: Nixon, Kissinger, and Betrayal in Vietnam*. New York: Free Press, 2001. <http://catdir.loc.gov/catdir/enhancements/fy0705/2001023904-t.html>.

- Blackwill, Robert D. "In Defense of Kissinger." *The National Interest*, January 2, 2014. <https://nationalinterest.org/article/defense-kissinger-9642>.
- Blum, William. *Killing Hope: U.S. Military and CIA Interventions since World War II*. Monroe, Me.: Common Courage Press, 1995.
- "Board of Advisors - The Washington Institute for Near East Policy." Accessed April 7, 2019. <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/about/board-of-advisors>.
- "Board of Directors – Center for the National Interest." Accessed April 17, 2019. <https://cftni.org/about/board-of-directors/>.
- Bonner, Raymond. "America's Role in El Salvador's Deterioration." *The Atlantic*, January 20, 2018. <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/01/trump-and-el-salvador/550955/>.
- Boot, Max. "On Wednesday, the Twitter Mob Came for Me." *The Washington Post*, January 31, 2019. https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2019/01/31/wednesday-twitter-mob-came-me/?utm_term=.762b09ee5c0b.
- . "Why Winning and Losing Are Irrelevant in Syria and Afghanistan." *The Washington Post*, January 30, 2019. https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/global-opinions/the-us-cant-win-the-wars-in-afghanistan-and-syria--but-we-can-lose-them/2019/01/30/e440c54e-23ea-11e9-90cd-dedb0c92dc17_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.658cbd5d6013.
- Bouie, Jamelle. "Brett Kavanaugh Is the Culmination of a Political Movement Devoted to the Status Quo." *Slate Magazine*, September 19, 2018. <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2018/09/brett-kavanaugh-christine-blasey-ford-elite-power.html>.
- Broboske, Alexander. "Reforming the National Security Council." American Action Forum, December 21, 2016. <https://www.americanactionforum.org/research/reforming-national-security-council/>.
- Brown, Barrett. "Thomas Friedman's Five Worst Predictions." *The Hive*. Accessed April 24, 2019. <https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2009/03/friedmans-follies>.
- Burns, Nicholas. Twitter Post. February 13, 2019, 4:00 PM. <https://twitter.com/rnicholasburns/status/1095835155271503877?s=11>
- Busby, Joshua W., and Jonathan Monten. "Without Heirs? Assessing the Decline of Establishment Internationalism in U.S. Foreign Policy." *Perspectives on Politics* 6, no. 3 (September 2008): 451–72. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S153759270808122X>.
- Byman, Daniel. "Is Hamas Winning?" *The Washington Quarterly* 36, no. 3 (August 2013): 63–76. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2013.825550>.
- Carter, Zach. "Brett Kavanaugh Is A Poster Child For The American Aristocracy." *HuffPost*, September 19, 2018. https://www.huffpost.com/entry/brett-kavanaugh-american-aristocracy_n_5ba2cc8de4b0375f8f99c5d2.
- "Casualty Status as of 10 a.m. EDT April 25, 2019." U.S. Department of Defense. Accessed April 26, 2019. <https://dod.defense.gov/News/Casualty-Status/>.
- Central America Crisis Monitoring Team. *In Contempt of Congress : The Reagan Record of Deceit & Illegality on Central America*. Washington, DC: The Institute for Policy Studies, 1985.

- Chotiner, Isaac. "Max Boot Defends Elliott Abrams's Account of U.S. Policy in El Salvador," *The New Yorker*, February 20, 2019.
<https://www.newyorker.com/news/q-and-a/max-boot-defends-elliott-abrams-account-of-us-policy-in-el-salvador>.
- Clinton, Hillary. "Hillary Clinton Reviews Henry Kissinger's 'World Order.'" *The Washington Post*, September 4, 2014.
https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/hillary-clinton-reviews-henry-kissingers-world-order/2014/09/04/b280c654-31ea-11e4-8f02-03c644b2d7d0_story.html?utm_term=.681e5840bc7a.
- Clough, Michael. "Grass-Roots Policymaking: Say Good-Bye to the 'Wise Men.'" *Foreign Affairs* 73, no. 1 (1994): 2. <https://doi.org/10.2307/20045885>.
- "Kissinger Resigns as Head of 9/11 Commission," *CNN*, December 13, 2002.
<https://web.archive.org/web/20060427145915/http://archives.cnn.com/2002/ALLPOLITICS/12/13/kissinger.resigns/>.
- Cohan, William D. "How Wall Street's Bankers Stayed Out of Jail." *The Atlantic*, August 10, 2015. <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/09/how-wall-streets-bankers-stayed-out-of-jail/399368/>.
- Cohn, D'Vera, Jeffrey Passel, and Ana Gonzalez-Barrera. "Immigration From Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador Up." Pew Research Center, December 7, 2017.
<https://www.pewhispanic.org/2017/12/07/rise-in-u-s-immigrants-from-el-salvador-guatemala-and-honduras-outpaces-growth-from-elsewhere/>.
- "Committee on Conscience." United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Accessed April 7, 2019. <https://www.ushmm.org/confront-genocide/about/committee-on-conscience-members>.
- "Confidence in Institutions." Gallup. Accessed April 26, 2019.
<https://news.gallup.com/poll/1597/Confidence-Institutions.aspx>.
- Cook, Nancy. "'Bushies' Creep into Trump's Administration." *POLITICO*, December 23, 2018. <https://politi.co/2QQW6wV>.
- Corn, David. "Elliott Abrams: It's Back!," *The Nation*, June 14, 2001.
<https://www.thenation.com/article/elliott-abrams-its-back/>.
- . "New Memo: Kissinger Gave the 'Green Light' for Argentina's Dirty War." *Mother Jones*, January 14, 2014.
<https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2014/01/new-memo-kissinger-gave-green-light-argentina-dirty-war/>.
- . "Richard Holbrooke's Unfinished Business." *Mother Jones*, December 14, 2010.
<https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2010/12/richard-holbrooke-death-afghanistan/>.
- Costopoulos, Philip J. "Jefferson, Adams, and the Natural Aristocracy." *First Things*, May 1990. <https://www.firstthings.com/article/1990/05/jefferson-adams-and-the-natural-aristocracy>.
- Cox Barret, Liz. "Friedman's French Friend Stages Intervention." *Columbia Journalism Review*, November 1, 2006.
https://www.cjr.org/behind_the_news/friedmans_french_friend_stages.php.

- Crapol, Edward P. "Review of Kissinger: Doctor of Diplomacy/Professor of Hype." *Reviews in American History* 19, no. 2 (1991): 260–65. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2703081>.
- Draper, Theodore. *A Very Thin Line: The Iran-Contra Affairs*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1991.
- Drezner, Daniel W. "An Open Letter to the New York Times Concerning Thomas Friedman." *Foreign Policy*, January 23, 2013. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2013/01/23/an-open-letter-to-the-new-york-times-concerning-thomas-friedman/>.
- Dummett, Mark. "How One Newspaper Report Changed World History." *BBC News*, December 16, 201. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-16207201>.
- "Elliott Abrams." Council on Foreign Relations. Accessed March 13, 2019. <https://www.cfr.org/expert/elliott-abrams>.
- "Elliott Abrams Named to Religious Freedom Commission." *The Times of Israel*, May 28, 2012. <http://www.timesofisrael.com/elliott-abrams-named-to-religious-freedom-commission/>.
- Farrell, John A. "The Real Parallel between Nixon and Trump: Backdoor Pre-Election Contacts with a Foreign Power." *Vox*, July 19, 2017. <https://www.vox.com/the-big-idea/2017/7/19/15994924/nixon-trump-vietnam-russia-historical-parallels>.
- "Former Commissioners." United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, April 11, 2008. <https://www.uscirf.gov/about-uscirf/former-commissioners>.
- Friedman, Thomas L. "Foreign Affairs; Terrorist Software." *The New York Times*, November 23, 2001, <https://www.nytimes.com/2001/11/23/opinion/foreign-affairs-terrorist-software.html>.
- . "Opinion | Playing Hockey With Putin." *The New York Times*, April 8, 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/09/opinion/friedman-playing-hockey-with-putin.html>.
- . "Opinion | President Obama Talks to Thomas L. Friedman About Iraq, Putin and Israel." *The New York Times*, August 8, 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/09/opinion/president-obama-thomas-l-friedman-iraq-and-world-affairs.html>.
- . "Opinion | Saudi Arabia's Arab Spring, at Last." *The New York Times*, November 23, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/23/opinion/saudi-prince-mbs-arab-spring.html>.
- . "Russia's Last Line." *The New York Times*, December 23, 2001, <https://www.nytimes.com/2001/12/23/opinion/russia-s-last-line.html>.
- "From Brexit to Zika: What Do Americans Know?" Pew Research Center, July 25, 2017. <http://www.people-press.org/2017/07/25/from-brexit-to-zika-what-do-americans-know/>.
- "FRONTLINE/WORLD. Cambodia - Pol Pot's Shadow. Chronicle of Survival . 1969-1974: Caught in the Crossfire" *PBS*. Accessed April 13, 2019. <http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/stories/cambodia/tl02.html>.

- Froomkin, Dan. "Henry Kissinger's War Crimes Are Central to the Divide Between Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders." *The Intercept*, February 12, 2016. <https://theintercept.com/2016/02/12/henry-kissingers-war-crimes-are-central-to-the-divide-between-hillary-clinton-and-bernie-sanders/>.
- Fry, Erika. "Tom Friedman Needs A Factchecker." *Columbia Journalism Review*, October 7, 2011. https://www.cjr.org/the_kicker/tom_friedman_needs_a_factcheck.php.
- Goldenberg, Suzanne. "US Plotted to Overthrow Hamas after Election Victory." *The Guardian*, March 4, 2008. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/mar/04/usa.israelandthepalestinians>.
- Goldgeier, James M., and Elizabeth N. Saunders. "The Unconstrained Presidency: Checks and Balances Eroded Long Before Trump." Council on Foreign Relations, August 14, 2018. <https://www.cfr.org/article/unconstrained-presidency-checks-and-balances-eroded-long-trump>.
- Grandin, Greg. "Henry Kissinger, Hillary Clinton's Tutor in War and Peace," *The Nation*, February 5, 2016. <https://www.thenation.com/article/henry-kissinger-hillary-clintons-tutor-in-war-and-peace/>.
- . *Kissinger's Shadow: The Long Reach of America's Most Controversial Statesman*. First edition. New York: Metropolitan Books/Henry Holt and Company, 2015.
- Greenwald, Glenn. *With Liberty and Justice for Some: How the Law Is Used to Destroy Equality and Protect the Powerful*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2013.
- Gugliotta, Guy, and Douglas Farah. "12 YEARS OF TORTURED TRUTH ON EL SALVADOR." *The Washington Post*, March 21, 1992. https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1993/03/21/12-years-of-tortured-truth-on-el-salvador/9432bb6f-fbd0-4b18-b254-29caa919dc98/?utm_term=.7a3e39b51c1a.
- Gulbrandsen, Trygve. "Elite Integration – An Empirical Study." *Historical Social Research / Historische Sozialforschung* 37, no. 1 (139) (2012): 148–66.
- Halper, Stephen, and Jonathan Clarke, *The Silence of the Rational Center: Why American Foreign Policy is Failing*. New York: Basic Books, 2007.
- Hamilton, Alexander, James Madison, and John Jay. "Federalist 10." In *The Federalist Papers*, edited by Lawrence Goldman. Oxford ; Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Harden, Dave. Twitter Post. February 13, 2019, 3:10 PM. https://twitter.com/Dave_Harden/status/1095822572523003905
- Hayes, Christopher. *Twilight of the Elites: America after Meritocracy*. 1st pbk. ed. New York: Broadway Books, 2013.
- Hayes, Danny, and Matt Guardino. "Whose Views Made the News? Media Coverage and the March to War in Iraq." *Political Communication* 27, no. 1 (January 29, 2010): 59–87. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584600903502615>.
- Heilbrunn, Jacob. "Trump Is Trampling Over the GOP's Corpse." *POLITICO Magazine*, February 16, 2016. <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2016/02/donald-trump-2016-gop-republican-party-213642>.
- "Henry A. Kissinger." Henry A. Kissinger. Accessed April 17, 2019. <https://www.henryakissinger.com/>.

- “Henry A. Kissinger.” Accessed April 17, 2019. <https://www.csis.org/people/henry-kissinger>.
- “Henry A. Kissinger Chair for U.S. Foreign Policy.” Council on Foreign Relations. Accessed April 17, 2019. <https://www.cfr.org/henry-kissinger-chair-us-foreign-policy>.
- “Henry A. Kissinger, Executive Vice Chair | National Committee on United States - China Relations.” Accessed April 17, 2019. <https://www.ncuscr.org/about/board/henry-a-kissinger>.
- “Henry Alfred Kissinger: Executive Profile & Biography - Bloomberg.” Accessed April 17, 2019. <https://www.bloomberg.com/research/stocks/private/person.asp?personId=588711&privcapId=273607>.
- Higley, John, Ursula Hoffmann-Lange, Charles Kadushin, and Gwen Moore. “Elite Integration in Stable Democracies: A Reconsideration*.” *European Sociological Review* 7, no. 1 (May 1991): 35–53. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordjournals.esr.a036576>.
- Higley, John, and Gwen Moore. “Elite Integration in the United States and Australia.” *American Political Science Review* 75, no. 03 (September 1981): 581–97. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1960954>.
- Hirsh, Michael. “Richard Holbrooke’s Decline and Fall, as Told in Clinton Emails.” *POLITICO*, July 1, 2015. <https://www.politico.com/story/2015/07/richard-holbrookes-hillary-clinton-emails-119649.html>.
- Hitchens, Christopher. “The Case against Henry Kissinger.” *Harper’s Magazine*, February 2001. <https://harpers.org/archive/2001/02/the-case-against-henry-kissinger-2/>.
- “How War Powers Act Works.” *The New York Times*, March 29, 1984, sec. World. <https://www.nytimes.com/1984/03/29/world/how-war-powers-act-works.html>.
- Howard, Michael. “The World According to Henry: From Metternich to Me.” *Foreign Affairs* 73, no. 3 (1994): 132–40. <https://doi.org/10.2307/20046663>.
- “H.R.4909 - 114th Congress (2015-2016): National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017.” Webpage. congress.gov, May 26, 2016. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/house-bill/4909>.
- “Iraq War ‘Left Half a Million Dead.’” *BBC News*, October 16, 2013. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-24547256>.
- Isaacson, Walter. *Kissinger: A Biography*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992.
- “James Lindsay Returns to CFR as Director of Studies; Elliott Abrams, Evan Feigenbaum, Among New Scholars.” Council on Foreign Relations. Accessed April 7, 2019. <https://www.cfr.org/news-releases/james-lindsay-returns-cfr-director-studies-elliott-abrams-evan-feigenbaum-among-new>.
- Jilani, Zaid. “Samantha Power to Receive Prize From Henry Kissinger, Whom She Once Harshly Criticized.” *The Intercept*, May 29, 2016. <https://theintercept.com/2016/05/29/samantha-power-to-receive-prize-from-henry-kissinger-whom-she-once-harshly-criticized/>.

- Johnson, Adam. "Another Warmonger Rewarded for Being Wrong on Iraq War." *FAIR*, February 1, 2018. <https://fair.org/home/another-warmonger-rewarded-for-being-wrong-on-iraq-war/>.
- Johnson, Toni. "Foreign Policy Brain Trusts: Clinton Advisers." Council on Foreign Relations, June 20, 2008. <https://www.cfr.org/background/foreign-policy-brain-trusts-clinton-advisers>.
- Jones, Sarah. "Area Criminal Shocked by Congresswoman Who Cites His Crimes Out Loud." *Intelligencer*, February 13, 2019. <http://nymag.com/intelligencer/2019/02/criminal-shocked-when-congresswoman-says-his-crimes-out-loud.html>.
- Jost, Kenneth. "Iran-Contrats: Elliott Abrams on the Use and Abuse of Special Prosecutors." *ABA Journal* 79, no. 1 (1993): 92–92.
- Kakutani, Michiko. "In 'World Order,' Henry Kissinger Sums Up His Philosophy." *The New York Times*, June 14, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/09/books/in-world-order-henry-kissinger-sums-up-his-philosophy.html>.
- Kaplan, Robert D. "In Defense of Henry Kissinger." *The Atlantic*, April 24, 2013. <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2013/05/the-statesman/309283/>.
- Kegley, Charles W., and Eugene R. Wittkopf. *American Foreign Policy : Pattern and Process*. New York : St. Martin's Press, 1996.
- Khelil, Khaldoun. Twitter Post. February 13, 2019, 9:32 PM. <https://twitter.com/kkhelil/status/1095918743983517697?s=20>
- Kiernan, Ben. *How Pol Pot Came to Power: A History of Communism in Kampuchea, 1930-1975*. London: Verso, 1985.
- Kiernan, Ben. *The Pol Pot Regime : Race, Power, and Genocide in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge, 1975-79*. New Haven [Conn.] : Yale University Press, 2008.
- Kinzer, Stephen. "Trump Is Gutting the National Endowment for Democracy, and That's a Good Thing." *BostonGlobe.com*, March 14, 2018. <https://www.bostonglobe.com/opinion/2018/03/14/trump-gutting-national-endowment-for-democracy-and-that-good-thing/fKxkRFVIC6F9wLIw4WsUzL/story.html>.
- Kirby, Jen. "Saudi Arabia Begins Trial for 11 Suspects in Khashoggi Murder." *Vox*, January 3, 2019. <https://www.vox.com/2019/1/3/18166689/khashoggi-trial-saudi-arabia-mbs>.
- Kissinger, Henry. *Diplomacy*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994.
- Kissinger, Henry A. "Military Policy and Defense of the 'Grey Areas,'" *Foreign Affairs*, April 1955. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/1955-04-01/military-policy-and-defense-grey-areas>.
- Kosoff, Maya. "Theranos Does Damage Control, Takes Henry Kissinger Off Its Board." *The Hive*, December 2, 2016. <https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2016/12/theranos-does-damage-control-takes-henry-kissinger-off-its-board>.
- Krauss, Clifford. "How U.S. Actions Helped Hide Salvador Human Rights Abuses." *The New York Times*, March 21, 1993. <https://www.nytimes.com/1993/03/21/world/how-us-actions-helped-hide-salvador-human-rights-abuses.html>.

- Ledwidge, Mark, and Inderjeet Parmar. "Conceptualising and Historicising the US Foreign Policy Establishment in a Racialised Class Structure." *International Politics* 54, no. 3 (May 2017): 306–21. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41311-017-0034-z>.
- Linker, Damon. "Elliot Abrams and the Absurd Paradoxes of American Foreign Policy." *The Week*, February 15, 2019. <https://theweek.com/articles/823801/elliott-abrams-absurd-paradoxes-american-foreign-policy>.
- Lovato, Roberto. "What Explains Nicaragua's Surprisingly Low Murder Rate?" *The Boston Globe*, January 12, 2018. <https://www.bostonglobe.com/ideas/2018/01/12/what-explains-nicaragua-surprisingly-low-murder-rate/GTL3T5Ps1KwbbOdUMgB26I/story.html>.
- Luce, Edward. "How Trump Laundered the US Foreign Policy Elite's Reputation." *Financial Times*, December 13, 2018. <https://www.ft.com/content/b5855d2a-fedb-11e8-aebf-99e208d3e521>.
- Maass, Peter. "Max Boot Is Very Sorry for Backing the GOP and the Iraq Invasion. Why Is He Being Praised for This?" *The Intercept*, October 13, 2018. <https://theintercept.com/2018/10/13/max-boot-book/>.
- Magazine, Politico. "Henry Kissinger: Good or Evil?" *POLITICO Magazine*, October 10, 2015. <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2015/10/henry-kissinger-history-legacy-213237>.
- Magness, Josh. "A Few Things to Know about Steve Bannon's Ascension to the National Security Council." *McClatchy*, January 31, 2016. <https://www.mcclatchydc.com/news/nation-world/national/national-security/article129795364.html>.
- Marcetic, Branko. "The Tragic Life of the War Criminal Elliott Abrams." *Jacobin*, February 16, 2019. <https://jacobinmag.com/2019/02/the-tragic-life-of-the-war-criminal-elliott-abrams>.
- Marx, Greg. "Tom Friedman: Still Wrong." *Columbia Journalism Review*, July 25, 2011. https://www.cjr.org/campaign_desk/tom_friedman_still_wrong.php.
- . "Tom Friedman's 'Radical' Wrongness." *Columbia Journalism Review*, July 25, 2011. https://www.cjr.org/campaign_desk/tom_friedmans_radical_wrongnes.php.
- McWhorter, John. "Is 'Tar Baby' Actually a Racist Slur?" *The New Republic*. Accessed April 20, 2019. <https://newrepublic.com/article/93088/tar-baby-racist-slur>.
- Merry, Robert W. "The Morality of Kissinger's Realism." *The National Interest*, April 25, 2013. <https://nationalinterest.org/commentary/kissingers-moral-foreign-policy-8398>.
- "Milestones: 1945–1952 - National Security Act of 1947." Office of the Historian – United States Department of State. Accessed April 25, 2019. <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1945-1952/national-security-act>.
- Miller, Judith. "- Kissinger Co." *The New York Times*, May 27, 1979, <https://www.nytimes.com/1979/05/27/archives/kissinger-co-kissinger-co.html>.
- Mills, C. Wright. *The Power Elite*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1956.
- Milton-Edwards, Beverley. "The Ascendance of Political Islam: Hamas and Consolidation in the Gaza Strip." *Third World Quarterly* 29, no. 8 (December 1, 2008): 1585–99. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436590802528739>.

- Mitter, Rana. "World Order by Henry Kissinger – Review." *The Guardian*, October 1, 2014, sec. Books. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/oct/01/world-order-by-henry-kissinger-review-account>.
- Moncrieffe, Joy Marie. "Reconceptualizing Political Accountability." *International Political Science Review / Revue Internationale de Science Politique* 19, no. 4 (1998): 387–406.
- Moreno, Dario. *U.S. Policy in Central America: The Endless Debate*. Miami: Florida International University Press, 1990.
- Morris, Brett S. "Nixon and the Cambodian Genocide." Magazine. *Jacobin*, April 27, 2015. <https://jacobinmag.com/2015/04/khmer-rouge-cambodian-genocide-united-states/>.
- Murphy, Dan. "Iraq War: Predictions Made, and Results." *Christian Science Monitor*, December 22, 2011. <https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Backchannels/2011/1222/Iraq-war-Predictions-made-and-results>.
- Nathan, James A. *Foreign Policy Making and the American Political System*. Baltimore, Md. : Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994.
- Naureckas, Jim. "New York Times Columnist Thomas Friedman's Crazy Terrible Middle Eastern Economics." *Salon*, September 10, 2018. <https://www.salon.com/2018/09/10/new-york-times-columnist-thomas-friedmans-crazy-terrible-middle-eastern-economics/>.
- Norton, Ben, and Jared Flanery. "Emails Expose Close Ties between Hillary Clinton and Accused War Criminal Henry Kissinger." *Salon*, January 12, 2016. https://www.salon.com/2016/01/12/emails_expose_close_ties_between_hillary_clinton_and_accused_war_criminal_henry_kissinger/.
- Novak, Robert D. "Abrams and the Special Prosecutor." *The National Interest*, no. 29 (1992): 76–82.
- Pakulski, Jan. "Introduction: John Higley's Work on Elite Foundations of Social Theory and Politics." *Historical Social Research / Historische Sozialforschung* 37, no. 1 (139) (2012): 9–20.
- Pareene, Alex. "Hillary Clinton Has a Henry Kissinger Problem." *Gawker*, February 5, 2016. <http://gawker.com/hillary-clinton-has-a-henry-kissinger-problem-1757313187>.
- Pear, Robert, and Special To the New York Times. "Push the Russians, Intellectuals Say." *The New York Times*, November 25, 1985, <https://www.nytimes.com/1985/11/25/world/push-the-russians-intellectuals-say.html>.
- Prewitt, Kenneth, and Alan Stone. *The Ruling Elites: Elite Theory, Power, and American Democracy*. New York: Harper & Row, 1973.
- Priest, Dana, and William Arkin. "A Hidden World, Growing beyond Control." *The Washington Post*, July 19, 2010. <http://projects.washingtonpost.com/top-secret-america/articles/a-hidden-world-growing-beyond-control/>.

- “Public Knows Basic Facts about Politics, Economics, But Struggles with Specifics.” Pew Research Center, November 18, 2010. <http://www.pewresearch.org/2010/11/18/public-knows-basic-facts-about-politics-economics-but-struggles-with-specifics/>.
- Putnam, Robert D. *The Comparative Study of Political Elites*. Contemporary Comparative Politics Series. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1976.
- Radosh, Ronald. “Elliott Abrams Doesn’t Deserve Attacks From the Right.” Hudson Institute, February 7, 2017. <http://www.hudson.org/research/13332-elliott-abrams-doesn-t-deserve-attacks-from-the-right>.
- Reuters. “Kissinger Sued over Chile Death.” *The Guardian*, September 12, 2001. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2001/sep/12/2>.
- Rhodes, Ben. Interview by Sam Fraser. Email interview. Claremont, CA, April 28, 2019.
- Rhodes, Ben. *The World As It Is: A Memoir of the Obama White House*. New York: Random House, 2018.
- “Richard N. Haass.” Council on Foreign Relations. Accessed April 26, 2019. <https://www.cfr.org/expert/richard-n-haass>.
- Rieff, David. “Were Sanctions Right?” *The New York Times*, July 27, 2003. <https://www.nytimes.com/2003/07/27/magazine/were-sanctions-right.html>.
- Robinson, Glenn E. “The Fragmentation of Palestine.” *Current History; Philadelphia*, December 2007.
- Rose, David. “The Gaza Bombshell.” *Vanity Fair*, April 2008. <https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2008/04/gaza200804>.
- Sayigh, Yezid. “Inducing a Failed State in Palestine.” *Survival* 49, no. 3 (October 1, 2007): 7–39. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396330701564786>.
- Schwarz, Jon. “Elliott Abrams, Trump’s Pick to Bring ‘Democracy’ to Venezuela, Has Spent His Life Crushing Democracy.” *The Intercept*, January 30, 2019. <https://theintercept.com/2019/01/30/elliott-abrams-venezuela-coup/>.
- Sellers, Mortimer Newlin Stead. “Classical Influences on the American Founding Fathers.” In *The Classical Tradition*, edited by Anthony Grafton, Glenn Most, and Salvatore Settis. Rochester, NY: Harvard, 2009. <https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=1437142>.
- Samuels, Alana. “Poor at 20, Poor for Life.” *The Atlantic*, July 14, 2016. <https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2016/07/social-mobility-america/491240/>.
- Smith, Harrison. “Óscar Mejía Victores, Guatemalan Military Ruler of Mid-1980s, Dies at 85 - The Washington Post.” *The Washington Post*, February 2, 2016. https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/oscar-mejia-victores-guatemalan-military-ruler-of-mid-1980s-dies-at-85/2016/02/02/39ee5d84-c9cc-11e5-88ff-e2d1b4289c2f_story.html?utm_term=.fdecf1f4a08d.
- Solomon, Norman. “Thomas Friedman Claims It’s ‘Stupid and Obnoxious’ to Say He Was a Cheerleader for the Iraq War.” *HuffPost*. https://www.huffpost.com/entry/thomas-friedman-claims-it_b_3473444.
- Souva, Mark, and David Rohde. “Elite Opinion Differences and Partisanship in Congressional Foreign Policy, 1975-1996.” *Political Research Quarterly* 60, no. 1 (March 1, 2007): 113–23. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912906298630>.

- Stolberg, Sheryl Gay. "Kavanaugh Is Sworn In After Close Confirmation Vote in Senate." *The New York Times*, October 7, 2018, sec. U.S. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/06/us/politics/brett-kavanaugh-supreme-court.html>.
- Sun, Baltimore. "Abrams Pleads Guilty." *baltimoresun.com*. Accessed April 4, 2019. <https://www.baltimoresun.com/news/bs-xpm-1991-10-10-1991283134-story.html>.
- Sutton, Barbara, and Kari Marie Norgaard. "Cultures of Denial: Avoiding Knowledge of State Violations of Human Rights in Argentina and the United States." *Sociological Forum* 28, no. 3 (September 2013): 495–524. <https://doi.org/10.1111/sof.12035>.
- "The Growth of the National Security Council." *The Washington Post*, August 4, 2015. https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/the-growth-of-the-national-security-council/2015/08/04/788f8a2c-3b06-11e5-b3ac-8a79bc44e5e2_graphic.html?utm_term=.5028c154d327.
- "The Guatemala Genocide Case – CJA." Accessed March 13, 2019. <https://cja.org/what-we-do/litigation/the-guatemala-genocide-case/>.
- "The Iraq War." Council on Foreign Relations. Accessed April 26, 2019. <https://www.cfr.org/timeline/iraq-war>.
- "The Sultan of Brunei Wants His \$10 Million Back..." *UPI*. Accessed March 13, 2019. <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1987/06/02/The-sultan-of-Brunei-wants-his-10-million-back/5750549604800/>.
- Trotta, Daniel. "Iraq War Costs U.S. More than \$2 Trillion: Study." *Reuters*, March 14, 2013. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iraq-war-anniversary-idUSBRE92DOPG20130314>.
- "Truth Commission: El Salvador." United States Institute of Peace. Accessed March 28, 2019. <https://www.usip.org/publications/1992/07/truth-commission-el-salvador>.
- Unterberger, Betty Miller. "Power Politics and Statecraft: The World According to Kissinger." *Reviews in American History* 23, no. 4 (1995): 723–28.
- Vulliamy, Ed. "Venezuela Coup Linked to Bush Team." *The Guardian*, April 21, 2002, sec. World news. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2002/apr/21/usa.venezuela>.
- Wallace-Wells, Benjamin. "Bernie Sanders Imagines a Progressive New Approach to Foreign Policy," *The New Yorker*, April 13, 2019. <https://www.newyorker.com/news/the-political-scene/bernie-sanders-imagines-a-progressive-new-approach-to-foreign-policy>.
- Walsh, Lawrence E. *Firewall: The Iran-Contra Conspiracy and Cover-Up*. New York: Norton, 1997.
- Walt, Stephen M. "On Hagel, Abrams, and Haass: Why Richard Haass Should Tell Elliott Abrams to Apologize." *Foreign Policy*, January 14, 2013. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2013/01/14/on-hagel-abrams-and-haass-why-richard-haass-should-tell-elliott-abrams-to-apologize/>.
- . *The Hell of Good Intentions: America's Foreign Policy Elite and the Decline of U.S. Primacy*. First edition. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018.

- Walther, Matthew. "A New Anti-Trump Publication Is the Last Thing Conservative Media Needs." *The Nation*, March 1, 2019. <https://theweek.com/articles/826437/new-antitrump-publication-last-thing-conservative-media-needs>.
- "What the Public Knows – In Words, Pictures, Maps and Graphs." Pew Research Center, September 5, 2013. <http://www.people-press.org/2013/09/05/what-the-public-knows-in-words-pictures-maps-and-graphs/>.
- "Who Is Elliott Abrams, US Special Envoy for Venezuela?" *Al Jazeera*, February 12, 2019. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/02/elliott-abrams-special-envoy-venezuela-190212012146896.html>.
- Yglesias, Matthew. "Kavanaugh and Trump Are Part of a Larger Crisis of Elite Accountability in America." *Vox*, September 21, 2018. <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2018/9/21/17876832/kavanaugh-trump-crisis-elite-accountability>.
- Young, Thomas. "40 Years Ago, Church Committee Investigated Americans Spying on Americans." *Brookings*, November 30, 2001. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brookings-now/2015/05/06/40-years-ago-church-committee-investigated-americans-spying-on-americans/>.