

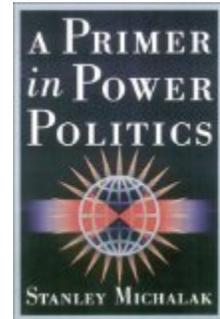
H-Net Reviews

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Stanley J. Michalak. *A Primer in Power Politics*. Wilmington, Del.: SR Books, 2001. xix + 233 pp. \$80.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8420-2950-6; \$28.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8420-2951-3.

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A Global Balance of Power

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Stanley Michalak, a professor of government at Franklin and Marshall College, Lancaster, Pennsylvania, acknowledges about 25 historians, diplomats and political scientists in his preface (p. 12) and dedications (p. 16). Arguably the most influential of these was Hans J. Morgenthau, author of the classic text, *Politics Among the Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (1st edition, 1948).[1] Morgenthau held a chair in both History and Political Science at the University of Chicago.

Morgenthau's major theme, and now Michalak's, is the importance of the "balance of power" in determining what diplomats and chief executives do on a daily or weekly basis in struggling to maintain power at home and peace abroad. During wartime, the balance of power system continues to operate like it does during peacetime. The belligerents look for allies and draft peace terms that they are willing to settle for, because every war must come to an end. Morgenthau, Michalak, and this reviewer are all agreed that for the most part, war results from miscalculations on the part of several foreign ministers. Adolf Hitler and Napoleon Bonaparte were the great exceptions to this rule; their ambitions seemed to know no limit.

Michalak's study lacks a comprehensive bibliography, but the notes to each of his five chapters provide sources for the themes he emphasizes. Like Morgenthau, Michalak tries to be both a historian and a political scientist. Like Machiavelli, Michalak read a great deal of history and tried to list, in handbook form, maxims that

politicians could use in the future. Like Henry Kissinger, another of his heroes, Michalak worked in practical Republican politics for a while. For the benefit of his students, Michalak intersperses essays with two different approaches throughout the entire book (printed respectively on white and grey paper). The white pages reflect a political science style and the grey pages are written in a historical style. But Michalak psychologically is more the historian than the political scientist, and therefore he also writes many of the white pages in historical format as well.

As a historian, Michalak does an excellent job on European diplomatic history, 1919 to 1945. His maps are good, and his best insights deal with German and British foreign policies in the 1930s. Michalak has eight or nine pages dealing with Chamberlain's negotiations at Munich in 1938 with Hitler. This is excellent history, but I doubt that another recounting was needed of that over-worked story. The real "Munich problem" from 1945 to 1991 was that too many journalists, academics, State Department officials, and politicians kept fearing "another Munich" sell-out. They erroneously saw "new Hitlers" in many dictators during a series of diplomatic crises from 1945 to 1991.

Michalak's case histories of President Franklin Roosevelt at Yalta, Harry S. Truman's three decisions: (1) to bolster Turkey's resistance to Soviet demands for concessions in the Dardanelles in 1945, (2) to pressure Joseph Stalin to leave Iran in 1946, and (3) to save South Korea from falling to Communist rule in June 1950, all illus-

trate how the balance of power works. In order to write the first two cases describing Truman's diplomatic victories, the author did original historical research in *FRUS*. The author also presents case studies of the Kennedy-Khrushchev debate in Berlin in 1961 and Clinton's bombing of Bosnia in 1995. Michalak provides sound analyses of these seminal crises.

Michalak's first chapter outlines the history of the European balance of power down to World War II. There is no real justification for the "political science" Chapter 4, which rehashes the diplomatic rivalries of the US and Europe over a broad chronology, from 1901 to the 1990s, all in 48 pages. The author may think he is adding new philosophical-political concepts: "interests," "status quo," "revolution," "national security," "commitments," "solvency," "vigilance," "containment," "limited wars," "strategies for peace," "coalitions," "expansion," "undesirable regimes," "grey areas," and "conciliation," but these are so subjective and broad as to become almost meaningless. In his quest for axioms, he stumbles on to "Circumstance and Context Always Matter." If the author really believed that, he would have reorganized Chapters One and Four into a single chapter, united by a geographical and chronological framework. In short, Michalak's attempt to look for magic words that would have universal validity for a practical politician tells the reader why "political science" should be called "political studies" or something else. "Government" is not what he is writing about either. Politics is about people. Vladimir Lenin said politics could be summarized in two words – "who-whom." Who pays whom, who kills whom, who fools whom, who loves whom, etc. Historians are better prepared for writing about people looking for power than political scientists are.

"Containment," for example, a word invented by Foreign Service officer George Kennan in 1946-1947, summed up Kennan's proposal to President Truman for a long-term Soviet policy. It worked in Washington as a generally sound formula until 1950. After the outbreak of the Korean War, however, the press and the State Department used the word as propaganda to hide more than it revealed. For Bill Clinton and George W. Bush to be talking about "containing" Iraq by periodic bombings is irrational, although the US might thereby help Israel by bombing radar or military stations.

If Michalak ever decided to re-write this essay, he would be wise to devote more space to what statesmen did and less to analyzing a useful Orwellian word to fool adversaries. Dedicating this book in part to George Ken-

nan is a bit insulting, when Michalak did not cite the great American diplomat's *American Diplomacy, 1900 to 1950* (1951), in which Kennan explores the problem of American public opinion and propaganda.

Michalak's basically sound third chapter quotes US and European generals to warn that the outcome of using military force is largely unpredictable. His case studies are Korea and Bosnia. Citing Carl von Clausewitz's essay *On War* (1832-1837, 1943), which claimed that war was determined by politicians, was a wise decision on Michalak's part.[2]

On the other hand, Michalak makes a graduate student error throughout his book, namely a tendency to equate decisions of a chief executive with a state, as if a state had a personality. He does this in his political science sections by omitting dates and covering 50 years of "state policy" in a sentence. Germany is an empty legal shell into which Gustav Stresemann in the 1920s enters and dies. Then General von Hindenberg is in charge in 1932, but Hitler completely changes Germany's direction by 1933-1936. It is easier for historians than for political scientists to keep in mind that nations are not synonymous with their chief executives. The professor suffers from a hangover left over from the Louis XIV era, and is misled by too many dictators intoxicated by the notion of "divine right," whether of the king, the president, or the chairman.

The basically unsound second chapter of *A Primer in Power Politics* develops a political scientist's paradigm: the status quo vs. revisionism. This idea is questionable and the theme of the chapter could be scrapped, if the author ever does a second edition or a similar book. Granted, it is perfectly true that German foreign policy could be called "revisionist" from 1919 to 1933 – that is, Berlin wanted to revise its border with Poland. Michalak goes on to contrast seven major polarities, comparing status quo powers with revisionist powers; "stability" vs. "change"; "peace" vs. "justice"; "defense" vs. "offense," etc. (p. 60). In fact, individual politicians who came to power in the five to seven Great Powers, and the dozen small powers which were their neighbors for over a half century, had ambitions that were far, far too complex and parochial for any sweeping claims about "revisionism."

American leaders were indeed on the side of the status quo in Germany from 1945 to 1948. But U.S. foreign policy became quite expansive on a global scale during the period of re-evaluation or "creation," 1947-1948. In his chapter on the status quo vs. revisionism, Michalak failed to integrate this material with his insightful para-

graphs on the Truman “case studies.” NATO may have looked defensive to the British Foreign Office in 1949, but the consequences of combining twelve sovereign states into NATO belies the claim that the Washington establishment was simply leading a status quo country.

The Truman Administration in Korea and all of the presidents from Truman to Gerald Ford got involved in combat in Vietnam, while the Soviets stayed out of direct involvement in both wars. To call the Soviet Union revisionist after 1949 when Stalin called off the Berlin Airlift and Mao triumphed in China, flies in the face of the facts. Economically the US has been the most dynamic and expansive society in history since 1945, whereas the Soviet Union remained mostly on the defensive both militarily and economically from 1949 to 1991.

Michalak desperately needs another chapter on how the global economy works.[3] The USSR collapsed in 1991 not from promoting “revisionism” but from bureaucratic ossification. Stalin planted the termites in a rotten economic structure which Gorbachev inherited. Neither Washington nor Brussels “won the cold war,” although the international capitalists helped subvert the command economy in Moscow. Michalak seems never to have gotten over Stalin’s military victories in Germany, Manchuria, Poland and in six or seven other east European countries in 1945. The author also ignores the fact that Churchill and Roosevelt invited Stalin (1942-1945) to take Berlin first in order to save Anglo-Saxon lives. Americans who keep talking about Soviet responsibility for the “Cold War,” an American-made metaphor, particularly after Stalin’s death in 1953, were ignoring the U.S. role in that largely peaceful conflict.[4] Ho Chi Minh, Fidel Castro, and Mao Tse-tung regarded themselves as revolutionaries against the American capitalist oligarchy. Communist leaders did want to overturn social and economic class systems and substitute their own rule for capitalist domination by seizing power in particular nations. A historian, however, should beware of lumping those complex activities with Gustav Stresmann’s ambition to change Weimar Germany’s border with Poland.

Morgenthau had a better grasp of both American and world problems when he wrote in 1948. Morgenthau did not discuss revisionism, but instead saw the big status quo states challenged by anti-imperialist social forces. When Britain, France, and the US acquired their empires in the 19th century and before, they were themselves aggressive, expansive, dynamic, or imperialistic. The broad term “imperialism,” popular 1919-1948, is a better concept than the more restrictive, or political, “colonialism.” The

U.S. denounced colonialism but practiced indirect economic imperialism. Colonialism implies a military and political land grab but leaves out the more diverse economic, social, and nationalist explanations for expansion. The Habsburg Monarchy became a status quo state in 1815, declining over the next century, until it collapsed in 1919. It died from economic and ideological subversion rather than being defeated by Russian armies.

In the long run, conservatives are destined to lose most struggles. Michalak and Kissinger in boosting the status quo may be protecting American short-run interests as seen today, but at the same time, the seeds of decay are being planted for the nation as a whole. Winston Churchill, no ideologue, saw the need to balance between conservatism, socialism, and liberalism when he realized in 1936-1941 that Britain needed allies.

The failure to understand that “revisionism” is only a temporary diplomatic tactic demonstrates a fundamental weakness of this book. More should have been done with the relationship between morality, philosophy, public opinion, public relations, the mass media, and propaganda. This was the major contribution of the life and work of George Orwell. Morgenthau himself underestimated the influence of propaganda, although Kenneth W. Thompson of the University of Virginia rectified the problem to some degree in the 6th edition of *Politics Among Nations*. [5]

Michalak’s book is somewhat out of fashion in devoting so much attention to European history before 1945, although it may serve beginners who find Morgenthau and Thompson difficult reading. *A Primer* could be helpful to shake the anti-historical attitudes of today’s journalists and students from reading history since 1914. Yet Michalak should not leave the story of the European balance of power dangling in 1947-1948, when, being “present at the creation,” Dean Acheson became the American Secretary of State and Truman expanded America into a global society. [6]

Morgenthau, born in Germany, brought much more of a European understanding to the problem of the emerging global balance of power compared to Michalak’s American-centered account. British, Russian, Japanese, and French imperialism in the 19th century created three other key regional balance of power systems: in the Middle East, in Northeast Asia, and in Southeast Asia. After 1945, the US and NATO, opposed by the Soviet Union and China, developed the new global balance of power which lasted until 1991.

The ethnocentric Michalak sees the Korean War, 1950-1953, and the Indochinese Wars, 1940-1975, almost exclusively through American eyes. In short, he needs some additional sections to unite his theme of the European Balance of Power with the American-Soviet Balance of Power.[7] This is why readers might better read Morgenthau, who intuitively knew in 1948 that a global struggle was beginning among Oceania, East Asia, and Eurasia, as George Orwell denominated the problem.

After writing *Politics Among Nations* in 1948, Morgenthau became much more liberal, democratic, religious, and anti-imperialist in his later years. For example, he wrote another book denouncing the American adventure in Indochina, a theme *A Primer* largely ignores.

In the last of his five chapters, Michalak makes a survey of international law and the UN. Their meager efforts to establish a "world order" and some kind of "government," as opposed to anarchy, have been modest. Michalak provides two more examples of liberal Great Powers intervening in a limited dispute: Woodrow Wilson's intervention in the Mexican Revolution, and British intervention during the first round of the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05. These two cases helped establish some principles of international law.

Michalak's discussion of why the League of Nations failed to prevent World War II could have been shortened. The author is correct that power politics operated in the League of Nations Council and still operates in the organs of the United Nations today, particularly in the Security Council. More broadly, this final chapter deals with moral and liberal principles like the Atlantic Charter (1941) and the Kellogg-Briand Pact of 1927, which outlawed war. *A Primer* tends to be utterly dismissive of liberals as dreamers. Yet Michalak, who first addresses disarmament in Chapter One and then returns to the issue again in Chapter Five (pp. 184-194), admits that the 1922 Washington Naval Treaties, and the 1972 ABM Treaty signed in Moscow, were "notable successes" (p. 186). This was true because the signing of these treaties opened the door for further disarmament talks.

Michalak concludes that by 1985 the US had enough nuclear warheads to destroy the equivalent of 369,769 Hiroshimas, while the Soviet Union then had the capability to destroy 718,538 cities the size of Hiroshima (p. 187). Michalak should have made this point much earlier in the book. These statistics mean that all of the presidents from Truman to Reagan, and all of the Soviet leaders from Stalin to Konstantine Chernenko (who died in 1985 and is now largely forgotten) were fooled by the

professional military proponents of nuclear buildup in both countries. Albert Einstein came to the conclusion in 1946 that a World War III with nuclear bombs would mean the end of humanity. Why did Washington and Moscow waste so much money on abstract nuclear firepower? Part of the paradox lies in the naive assumption that states would survive the first nuclear battle and subsequent attacks. (One might ask at this point why Donald Rumsfeld, the present American Secretary of Defense, is still talking about this game of chicken with laser and nuclear firepower?)

Michalak's case history concerning the 1986 nuclear disarmament negotiations between Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev at Reykjavik, Iceland, is presented in Chapter One. These grey pages should have been inserted in Chapter Five, where the author develops the problem of disarmament in greater detail. Michalak tells the Reykjavik story through the eyes of Secretary of Defense George Shultz and employs his special jargon. In fact, there are no "defensive weapons" as contrasted with "aggressive weapons." What is key is the intent of the executives of a nation at a particular time. Fortunately for the world, both Reagan and Gorbachev had good intentions in 1986.

A second slogan that should be rejected is "national security" in describing disarmament negotiations. The concept is too abstract: nations struggle over territory, markets, sovereignty, and interpretations of existent treaties. All leaders seek "national security." The problem is that security for Israel means insecurity for Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and the Palestinians. Both Truman and Stalin wanted "national security" in 1946. It therefore is largely an exercise in futility to count nuclear missiles, war heads, bombers, throw rights, blast radii, computers, and arms contractors, or to call a laser weapon system in space the "Strategic Defense Initiative." Speculation over who would launch a first strike was and still is a waste of time. The real issue in a possible nuclear war is whether anybody would be alive after 30 days, and would life be worth living. The Strategic Defense Initiative suggested by Ronald Reagan in 1983 was not even clever propaganda. Only the most naive could believe, in the face of nuclear overkill, that more weapons in space could protect anybody. Michalak in his account of the Reykjavik meeting in October 1986 does characterize the prospect of a "Star Wars" program as "rightly debatable" (p. 17).

In any case, Reagan and Gorbachev debated the issue at Reykjavik. What they actually argued was how much

notice the US should give the USSR in Reagan's threat to withdraw from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM) of 1972. Reagan told Gorbachev, "I propose to eliminate ballistic missiles and share SDI with you" (p. 20). Gorbachev simply did not believe Reagan. Neither did European members of NATO nor advocates of disarmament in America, although Michalak does not add these two caveats to his account. In conclusion, no agreement came out of the Reykjavik Summit of 1986. And an overly cynical Michalak simply concludes that disarmament does not bring peace.

The advocates of nuclear disarmament and arms control would reply "yes" to Michalak's description of the debate, but add that the fuses on nuclear bombs nevertheless were lengthened and peace was thereby extended a few years. The Kennedy-Khrushchev Atmospheric Test Ban Treaty of 1963 helped give humanity at least another 38 years of biological survival. Disarmament treaties and continued talk for the next treaty help create an atmosphere conducive to preserving the peace, but Michalak downplays successes in the long process of treaty making, enforcement, and modifications. He does admit that the Washington Naval Arms Control Treaty of 1922 did not completely fail, in that it saved Americans, Japanese, British, French, and Italian spending on obsolete battleships for 13 years. When the Japanese violated the treaty in 1935, the US and Britain should have demanded round two of the Washington signatories. Unfortunately, Britain and the US then had governments that were drawn to other issues and away from trying to avoid a new naval arms race in the Pacific Ocean.

The United Nations needs a legal committee, emphasizing its role as a neutral information bureau, rather than searching for alleged war criminals. International lawyers could track the various treaties on the books and inform the world press and the UN which countries are derelict in their duty, by citing relevant cases, resolutions, and treaties. The problem now is that nations have agreed to too many treaties and resolutions that remain unread and unfulfilled. The television spotlight shifts from crisis to crisis: from Bosnia, to Somalia, Timor, Israel, Afghanistan, and back to Israel. The League and the UN were created to influence "the public opinion of the international community." Since 1919 they have done a poor job at this partly because everywhere the so-called world press is mostly a provincial and nationalistic press.

It is good that Michalak cites Spinoza as his moral guide in the preface to his study. However, he then proceeds to write the rest of the book abandoning

most moral, ideological, or philosophical considerations. Michalak's epilogue is very important and should be read very carefully. A historical epilogue often tries to speculate about the future in light of what the author has just written about the past. Michalak's epilogue restates his tendentious thesis that powers can be classified as either status quo states or revisionist states. He then anticipates critical reviews of his book coming from the left. He belatedly admits that many Americans have been imperialist, during the Indian Wars, the Mexican War of 1848, and the Spanish American War of 1898. As a conservative, Michalak does not write enough about the Indochinese debacle, 1940 to 1975, and in the case of Cambodia, right up to the present day. The Vietnam War can best be understood as an indirect American imperial war. The American Navy wanted another sea base and the Air Force wanted another air base in preparation for World III. They sought to establish another "banana republic" in Indochina.

In his epilogue, Michalak also admits that American intellectuals have been influenced by a number of idealists, summarily listing the German philosopher Immanuel Kant, Jane Addams, Carrie Catt, Professor James T. Chattel (Shotwell?) at Columbia, Secretary of State Frank Kellogg, and his legal advisor Sal (Saul?) Levinson, commentators about projects to create a world government, Cambridge Professor F. H. Hinsley, and American professor Mel Gurtov. He cites the pro-democratic professor at Princeton, Michael Doyle, who thinks that democracies seldom fight each other. In the end, however, the author of *A Primer* has little faith in the liberal left, and the socialists are not even worth a citation, a debate, or a refutation. His last paragraph quotes conservative historian Donald Kagan, who implies that the U.S. must prepare for war against either China, Japan, Russia, or a united Germany. Kagan predicts that all four rival powers will eventually return to the balance of power game.

In light of the power of global capitalism, this prediction might be fulfilled some years down the road, if at all, and none of the four nation-states may ever be able to challenge the U.S. It is more likely that the present American Constitution will be modified fundamentally in the next century. A Constitution of 2201 might deal with the United States of the Western Hemisphere. The most unpredictable international problem, which could throw a wrench into both Kagan's and this review's projections, is the volatile Middle East. This is the region that may be the first to see indiscriminate war with either atomic or biological "weapons" of war. Religious fanaticism some-

times leads to suicide, as we saw on September 11 at the World Trade Center and Pentagon. Will the U.S. be able to extract itself from the Middle East cauldron?

Otto von Bismarck, the unifier of Germany and a diplomat with over thirty years experience, would never predict the possibility of maintaining peace beyond three years after he made some kind of deal or treaty. So his “three-year contracts” were made with the possibility of extension on the condition of good behavior by his adversaries. He saw many politicians come and go, and did not assume that permanent status quo and revisionist states existed. The problem with conservative political scientists is that they assume that the world is as static as they wish it to be. The overused word “stability” epitomizes the conservative’s utopia.

Despite these caveats, Stanley Michalak has written a very readable, brief introduction to international politics. He is to be congratulated for reviving a key concept: the balance of power. In actuality, a global balance of power existed between the U.S., China, and the USSR between 1945 and 1991, although few Americans understood this European concept. Since 1991 the world has had one indisputably predominate superpower, the United States. The American problem now is how to establish a workable balance of power in the Near East, the Middle East, and Central Asia. The Romans dominated the Mediterranean world for several centuries, but their empire was not global. The questions today are how long will American hegemony last, and if the State Department and the president will be able to set limits on the number of countries the U.S. will have to police.

Notes

[1]. Michalak uses the 6th edition, 1985. Kenneth W. Thompson, Morgenthau’s graduate assistant in 1948, was by 1985 a professor at the University of Virginia and then co-author. The 1st edition has 489 pages, the 6th edition has 688 pages.

[2]. Clausewitz died in 1831. He left behind complex, poorly drafted writings which were soon published in German. *On War* as an English language essay became widely available in 1943 during World War II. He was largely forgotten during World War I, and his ideas had to be re-learned by the U.S. Army in the Vietnam War in the 1960s the hard way.

[3]. He could begin with Paul M. Kennedy’s, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (New York: Random

House, 1987). Examining the history of the balance of power, British historian Kennedy argues that each great power – Spain, France, Britain, and now the U.S.– has over-reached itself. Traditionally historians have put military and diplomatic themes in the forefront. Kennedy emphasizes the economic aspects of the system.

It takes four elites to make a state work or to carry out a foreign policy: economic, ideological, political, and military. See an elaboration of this idea in my book, Robert H. Whealey, *Hitler and Spain: The Nazi Role in the Spanish Civil War 1936-1939* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1989). Most historians put politics first, but I try to treat the four factors of power as philosophically equal. Inevitably history texts will have more on politics, because politicians write a great deal, whereas the economists and corporate leaders keep their documents more private. Beginning readers are usually attracted to exciting military events.

[4]. A.J.P. Taylor, *The Struggle for the Mastery of Europe: 1848-1918* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1954); William L. Langer, *European Alliances and Alignments: 1871-1890*, 1st and 2nd editions (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1931, 1962) and *Diplomacy of Imperialism, 1890-1902*; and John Lukacs, *A New History of the Cold War* (Garden City, New York: Anchor Press, 1966). As early as 1966 Lukacs rejected the American anti-communist crusade. He identified the prime problem as the Soviet geographical challenge to the American ideological pretenses projected on the world.

Most Americans after 1966 were still looking to fight a “cold war.” In 1966 the Americans were fighting a real war in Indochina; in *A New History of the Cold War*, Lukacs understood that ideology can be overrated.

The Last European War: September 1939-December 1941 (Garden City, New York: Anchor Press, 1976) interprets World War II in terms of the balance of power and nationalism. The author, Lukacs, originally a Hungarian, became a U.S. citizen. All of these books are imaginative and unique compared to the usual native-born American accounts.

[5]. My own modest contribution to the problem of propaganda is in “Nazi Propagandist Joseph Goebbels and the Spanish Civil War,” *The Historian* 61 (Winter 1999): 341-360.

[6]. Former Arkansas Senator J. William Fulbright has three important books missing from Michalak’s notes, *The Arrogance of Power* (New York: Random House,

1967); *The Pentagon Propaganda Machine* (New York: Liveright, 1970), and *The Price of Empire* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1989).

[7]. John Lewis Gaddis, *The Long Peace: Inquiries into the History of the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), covers foreign relations between the United States and the Soviet Union in terms of US foreign relations since 1945. Despite his insightful phrase, "The Long Peace", Gaddis provides a standard interpretation of the metaphor, the "Cold War," which in my view lumps to-

gether too many complex events.

My own essay on the "Cold War" can be found in "Give Ronald Reagan Credit for Ending the Cold War? What Cold War? The Myth the Politicians Manufactured," *Tom-Paine.common sense, A Journal of Opinion* <<http://TomPaine.com/>> (13 December 1999). The anti-communist ideological stance of the U.S. tended to drive the PRC into the arms of the USSR. The cliché "Cold War" tended to prolong unnecessarily U.S. participation in the Korean War and the Indochinese Wars.

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