The audience which laughed appreciatively at Russell Lees "Nixon's Nixon" three years ago willingly suspended disbelief that the fictional (or was it factional?) Richard Nixon could be canvassing with his Secretary of State conjuring up a nuclear war between the then Soviet Union and China to save his bacon. In *A Tangled Web*, a study of the foreign policy of Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger, William Bundy scripts a real occasion when the two men walked hand in hand to the brink for no good reason rooted in America's national interest. His meticulous and compressed (he gives it 23 pages, Kissinger 77) reconstruction of the South Asian crisis of 1971, and his wise reflections on the consequences it had in shaping enduring perceptions and "as a continuing example of the fallacies and dangers of the Nixon-Kissinger approach" (though there is also praise, for the book is not a polemic) encapsulate the strengths in this weighty tome. And Bundys acknowledgment of the zany aspects of the operational decisions provides rare and welcome light relief.

The White House was hoisted on not one but a troika of its own petards. First was its predilection for personalizing policy, and its profound preference for Pakistan's dictatorial Yahya Khan (whom Kissinger in *The White House Years* oddly describes as putting on a Sandhurst manner, at a White House dinner at which no one would accept his invitation to call him a dictator) over India's then at least nominally democratic Indira Gandhi, whom Kissinger called "the lady," uncannily anticipating the disparaging term the Burmese military junta and its sympathizers use of Aung San Suu Kyi today. To preference was added a perceived moral debt to Yahya Khan for being the first (Kissinger elides the fact that he was not the only) channel in the opening to China. (Incidentally, one of the ironical outcomes of the whole episode was that Pakistan's Ambassador to China, K.M. Kaiser, who had handled the actual transmission of messages, defected under Zhou Enlai's protection in 1971 and then became the most senior officer when Bangladesh formed its foreign service, so that China won on all counts). Third, and stressed by Bundy, was the highly questionable assumption that the tilt towards Chi-
na necessitated much more than a tilt towards Pakistan.

So America’s leaders maintained unexplained backing for Pakistan in its atrocities-riddled invasion of East Pakistan (Bangladesh), which led on to war with India, even though, in their own overestimation, the local crisis could have escalated into war between the three nuclear super powers. They relied (contrary to their advisers) on a CIA report which Nixon hailed as the first time he had got really timely intelligence from the Agency, but which proved inaccurate, despite its source, subsequent Prime Minister Morarji Desai, whom National Security Council staffer Roger Morris described as “a venerable CIA informant of varying reliability and motives.” Their ally, Yahya Khan, was, on Bundy’s assessment, “about as hopeless a partner-client as could be imagined,” which puts him at the head of a pantheon that—even if confined to Asia—includes nuclear war provocateurs Syngman Rhee and Chiang Kai-shek. Bundy’s own list, in Foreign Affairs in 1975, is thus amended, wisely but without acknowledgment, to substitute Yahya Khan for his predecessor Ayub Khan. Kissinger would no doubt riposte “So what?,” as he did at the time in asking rhetorically “Why is it our business how they govern themselves?”; though that sentiment is hardly consistent, given the depth of the commitment, with his position on Chile that “I don’t see why we have to let a country go Marxist just because its people are irresponsible.”

Bundy makes two important assessments. The first is that the Nixon-Kissinger approach created a perception that the US would always tilt towards China in its geostrategic and even political rivalry with India, though some would go further and argue that the logic of the Kissingerian approach was that the United States would treat China as the major Asian regional power, entitled to traditional tributary relationships or a sphere of influence beyond its borders similar to the Monroe Doctrine. The second, and related, assessment is that the U.S. military deployment precipitated nuclear proliferation in the Indian subcontinent. Bundy also notes the Gilbertian aspects of the Enterprise task force, its stuttering and tardy approach, its re-deployment for prudence sake 1,000 miles south of the conflict, and its recall without explanation. As an Australian, and in the belief that perspectives from Down Under are not irrelevant, the reviewer would note that Bundy’s weighty indictment should provide some satisfaction for Australia, whose normally compliant conservative government criticized the American naval deployment. Later its Labor successor was to disapprove of the superpower naval competition in the Indian Ocean, preferring exploration of a Zone of Peace, and thus contributing to an atavistic but unjustified fear in Washington that the crown jewels, the strategic intelligence, and communications bases in Australia, were in jeopardy.

Bundy focuses on the Nixon-Kissinger period, and rarely compares it with its predecessors (in which of course he served from 1951). However, he permits himself the luxury of a retrospective condemnation of earlier Republican pactomania, which left a legacy of an unsuitable alliance with Pakistan. This is not terribly convincing. In the 1950s Pakistan’s British-trained leaders did not suffer by comparison with, say, their counterparts in Thailand, and SEATO needed any Asian member it could get in 1954. Perhaps, as Bundy almost argues, SEATO was a mistake, but if you argue that, you cannot also be a devotee of the domino theory, as Bundy is, even arguing most conscientiously in 1971 that America’s commitment to Vietnam made possible the fall of Sukarno and the end of Indonesia’s confrontation of Malaysia in 1965-1966. Perhaps, as Bundy explicitly says, “to impress on such situations (as South Asia) a mold of balance of power relations was bound to lead to trouble,” but there are plenty of indigenous contributors to trouble in the area, not least the prospect within a generation of nuclear India being the most populous country in the world,
while nuclear Pakistan continues to permit the seepage of nuclear know-how, not only to fellow Muslim countries in the Middle East, but perhaps also to Muslim Asia, where at least one durable leader has advocated a Muslim bomb.

One assumes that Kissinger would be quite happy to engage Bundy on the philosophical issue of balance of power, though not necessarily on the specific historical case of its application in South Asia (in a footnote Bundy acknowledges an interview with Kissinger in 1994 on this episode: p. 581). In regard to another broad area of challenge, that a hallmark of Nixon's foreign policy was "deception, including frequent concealment and resort to covert operations," and that Chile is the outstanding example, Kissinger could certainly argue that Bundy weakens his attack by only semi-acknowledging, and implicitly defending, what had gone before. It was not an omission made by Roger Morris. In describing Chile as the harshest of the paradoxes between the statesmanship of the summits and the ugly aspects of foreign policy, Morris noted that it was but an accentuation of a bipartisan tradition. It is curious that Bundy acknowledges no debt to Morris's path-breaking Uncertain Greatness in a bibliography of some 300 works. His one footnote reference to Morris, who worked for both Bundy's brother, McGeorge and his father-in-law, Dean Acheson, is carping. For Chile, Bundy relies on the public record, Congressional reports, Seymour Hersh, and especially books by Thomas Powers and Paul E. Sigmund. He does not add any evidence of his own on the destabilization of the Chilean economy (in which the CIA had some Australian assistance), and apparently (unlike in his treatment of Cambodia) made no inquiries of the CIA or old colleagues. He accepts Kissinger's word and the conventional wisdom that the U.S. was not involved in the coup against Allende, but notes that there were implications from the widespread understanding that the United States would not oppose it, a judgment exactly paralleling that in relation to what had happened in the previous year in Cambodia, about which Bundy is more inquisitorial. It is striking to find, albeit in a footnote, the summation that "on any reading, US policy towards Allende, both before and during his rule, was deplorable." (p. 597)

Bundy approaches the Nixon-Kissinger (-Haig, he adds) policy towards Cambodia from the moral high ground of having had the carriage of implementation of the Dean Rusk/Averell Harriman policy of support of Sihanouk and Cambodia's neutrality through three years of pressure to widen the Vietnam War. This was a policy worked out in conjunction with Australia, which represented the United States in Phnom Penh. By the second half of 1968, Rusk was raising with his counterpart Paul Hasluck what should or should not be done in the light of the clear evidence that the Cambodian Army just did not have the resources to do more to inhibit Vietnamese and Viet Cong use of Cambodian territory as supply routes and ad hoc sanctuaries. In Phnom Penh, Australia's long-serving Ambassador, Noel Deschamps, was discussing the problem with his closest contacts, political leaders Penn Nouth and Son Sann and Army Commander Niekh Tioulong (not Defense Minister Lon Nol, who was inefficient and corrupt: he and his family were known to benefit substantially from the Chinese supplies being channeled through the port of Sihanoukville to the Viet Cong and Cambodian Army).

Sihanouk was both well aware of these concerns and equally concerned. His balancing act between the external powers, with China as guarantor of last resort against Cambodia's traditional enemy, Vietnam, was becoming more tenuous by the day. He had indicated to American emissary Chester Bowles that he would not criticize American bombing attacks against the trails in far northeast Cambodia that were uninhabited, but he had made it plain that he would not accept one Cambodian death. The Bowles discussions provide no support for Kissinger's claim that Si-
hanouk had given the green light for attacks against inhabited areas further south in Cambodia (even the right of hot pursuit was highly contentious, as Bundy knew from first-hand experience). The assertion by Kissinger and others that Sihanouk sanctioned bombings in such areas during a later visit by his friend, Senator Mike Mansfield, remains unsubstantiated.

What might have been worked out if the *dramatis personae* had not changed is anyone's guess. The intimate dialogue between the Australian and the U.S. governments ceased, with the United States acceding to Sihanouk's offer to accept a re-opening of the American Embassy. The Nixon Administration was not solicitous of Cambodia's neutrality (as contributing to regional stability), nor, unlike all his predecessors, was a new conservative Australian Prime Minister, who soon changed his Foreign Minister. It comes as a surprise to this reviewer that Bundy states without substantiation that the first secret bombing of Cambodia was a one-off. He states that it was only repeated because Nixon wanted to send a signal either to the DPRKs Kim Il-sung, though that could help to explain the curious intimacy that developed between Kim and Sihanouk after the latter's exile in 1970, or to the Russians about Korea, though in the next breath he says it was the *Asian* Communists Nixon saw as interlinked; and yet two pages later (p. 76) Bundy claims that Nixon and Kissinger believed there was a Communist international movement in which the Soviet Union was "dominant where it chose to be."

Rather than this contradictory hypothesizing, the explanation of the remorseless program of secret bombing of a country deemed to be insignificant seems another "hallmark" of Nixon's and Kissinger's policy style, whereas a different Administration might have tried more cooperative, or less destructive, tactics. After all, Cambodia, China and the United States shared an interest vis-a-vis Hanoi which was ignored in Washington in 1969, but which could have been explored by Si-
hanouk (one of the most durable and independent leaders in a region where longevity of rule is commonplace) if he had received any encouragement. Unilateral options would have included a selective blockade, perhaps involving securing the cooperation of Lee Kuan Yew in Singapore, the transshipment port. Bundy's prognosis that if the United States had not intervened in Cambodia, the alternative would have been "most likely a North Vietnamese takeover of Cambodia, or a struggle for control between China and Vietnam, with a puppet regime set up by either," is too simplistic and too pessimistic. However, few would contest his judgment that these two (possible but unstable) outcomes could never have been as devastating as what happened. (p. 498)

Thus fundamentally Bundy endorses William Shawcross's devastating indictment of Kissinger in *Sideshow*, the seed for which was sown by information he received from the then Australian Ambassador to China, Stephen Fitzgerald, but he does re-allocate the blame to give larger shares to Nixon and Haig. He has added some useful factual information, particularly about Communist supply through Sihanoukville, where a highly respected CIA analyst proved to have made a substantial under-estimate, though Bundy can still judge the supply to have been insignificant. But the big errors were made by the Nixon White House, which was not so much lacking respected sources of information (some of Bundy's own officers, and at least one Colonel in the Pentagon, understood Cambodia well, despite lack of first hand experience) as totally uninterested in seeking them out, or in taking Sihanouk seriously. The result was indeed "a black page in the history of American policy."

*The Tangled Web* remorselessly builds the factual blocks, but considering the established history that it is challenging, it is no blockbuster. The most serious flaw is that the discretion of the former official prevails over the historian's consuming quest, so that the expectations aroused by the
title, laboriously explained in the preface, that Bundy will strip the veils from the "practice to deceive," which he defines as "deception...concealment and resort to covert operations," are not fulfilled. Bundy lacks Kissinger's mighty line (even if he is right that his audience may not know Sir Walter Scott, or the modern variant, readers of this review surely will know their Ben Jonson). The chronological approach does not achieve his aim of being preferable to "sometimes misleading packages." Nixon and Kissinger were the architects of "linkage," and their writings convey its content with a surer touch. Bundy allocates praise and blame judiciously, perhaps too much so, but this reviewer did find strained his reliance on economic difficulties for an explanation of Soviet policy from 1969-71, in order to provide a stick to beat Nixon and Kissinger with for not understanding the economic substructure (halcyon days!). This was after all the period Georgiy Arbatov despairingly calls "Creeping Re-Stalinisation."

*The Tangled Web* is not, therefore, the final word. Although American diplomatic historians wring their hands over the vast amount of official information still in practice exempt from release, their situation is less parlous than in any other country. They seem to be better placed than elsewhere to pry open the still closed layers as well as to shame by example those responsible for the receding tide in fellow democracies and in the Russian Federation. Already since Bundy published, significant new intelligence has apparently (as yet I rely on press reports) surfaced under Freedom of Information which adds to his information on what Nixon and Kissinger offered China on Taiwan and the opening of full diplomatic relations and supports the more positive of his two references, the other being more consistent with Kissinger's own account. (It must be added that, exasperatingly, especially considering the distinguished list of those who read the manuscript, the two accounts of this point, at pp. 242 and 304, which are on the face of it not totally consistent, are not cross-referenced, and the same is true of what Mao Tse-tung or Zhou En-lai said to Pham Van Dong in November 1971—pp. 244 and 298.)

The reviewer, judiciously mixing praise with criticism, greatly appreciated Bundy's rare balance between Asia and America's other foreign policy concerns. Admittedly, there are but four references to Australia, only one of which is substantive, and that incorrect, in denying that Australia gave aid, economic and military training, to Lon Nol's Cambodia. But this is one more than Kissinger managed in four times as many pages, where again only one reference was substantive, a pungent description of Nixon's highly critical first view of Australia's Labor (but hardly "leftist" as Kissinger labels him) Prime Minister from 1972-5 Gough Whitlam. Thereby hangs a tangled tale of Bundy's themes: the "inner confidence that Kissinger and Nixon had in ultimate American power and control of its allies"; their "world of heroes and villains"; Nixon's aversion to personal confrontations; "detestation of Social Democrats," of "those who wanted closer relations to the East in...a fuzzy-minded and dangerous way" (words applied to Willy Brandt in one of Bundy's strongest sections, but having general application); the "red thread" of covert activities; and intimacy between covert intelligence agencies (which Whitlam ended in Chile in early 1973). Australia, I was told, had risked the abrogation of the ANZUS Alliance. Later the crisis resurfaced, and had its dénouement on 27 July 1977 when Warren Christopher made four points to Whitlam, by then out of power, on the instructions of President Jimmy Carter: 1. that he understood the Democrats and Australian Labor Party were fraternal parties 2. that he respected deeply the democratic rights of the allies of the US 3. that the US Administration would never again interfere in the domestic political processes of Australia, and 4. that he would work with whatever government the people of Australia elected.