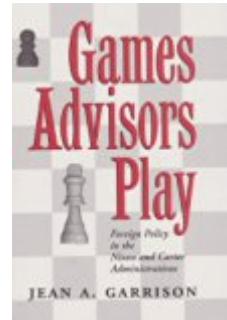


Jean A. Garrison. *Games Advisors Play: Foreign Policy in the Nixon and Carter Administrations*. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1999. xxviii + 193 pp. \$34.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-89096-862-8.



Reviewed by Nancy Mitchell

Published on H-Pol (September, 1999)

In *Games Advisors Play*, Jean Garrison contrasts the techniques used by Henry Kissinger and Zbigniew Brzezinski to "win the game" – that is, to ensure that their recommendations were heard and followed by the president. Further, she attempts to show how the differences between Richard Nixon's centralized advisory structure and Jimmy Carter's collegial one influenced the strategies chosen by their leading advisors. *Games Advisors Play* is both a series of case studies of internal bargaining in the Nixon and Carter administrations, with a particular focus on arms control talks, and an attempt to construct a model of the advisory process.

This is a tall order. Political science of this sort is a second-order skill: the author must master the history and then extrapolate a model from it. To pull off one of these tasks is difficult; to pull off both is rare. Unfortunately, Garrison succeeds in neither. *Games Advisors Play* is sloppy history and shallow political science.

Garrison must persuade the reader that she has mastered the intricacies of the arms control debates that raged in the Nixon and Carter admin-

istrations before she can convincingly model the process. Although good secondary sources exist on the general tenor and direction of these debates, particularly Raymond Garthoff's *Detente and Confrontation*, none is sufficiently detailed to bear the weight of a comparative model. Garrison rightly, therefore, hits the primary sources, interviewing participants in both administrations and citing documents from the Nixon Papers, the Carter Library, and the National Security Archive. Intensive primary research might have revealed enough details of the internal bargaining about arms control to have derived a useful model of the process, but, frankly, I am not sure that it would have been adequate for the Nixon period, given the slow pace of declassification of the Nixon papers.

We cannot judge on the basis of Garrison's research, however, because it is far from intensive. She relies on only a smattering of documents which do not advance our understanding of the bargaining process in either administration. The resulting account of the arms control process is

less clear, accurate, and comprehensive than Garthoff's.

Furthermore, her use of interviews proves that a little research can be a dangerous thing. Garrison interviewed nine miscellaneous members of the administrations, and she puts a great deal of emphasis on their recollections. For example, relying on an interview with General William Odom, she writes that Secretary of State Cyrus Vance "did not develop a close personal relationship with the president" (p. 14). Carter himself, however, surely a better source, is on record that "Cy Vance and his wife, Gay, became the closest personal friends to Rosalyn and me. He and I were to spend many good times together -- talking, fishing, skiing, playing tennis" (Carter, *Keeping Faith*, p. 51). If Garrison wants to contest Carter's memoirs, she needs to do more homework than to chat with General Odom.

Beyond her naivete with sources, Garrison undermines her authority with errors. For example, in *Games Advisors Play*, the Cuban missile crisis occurred "years later" than the Bay of Pigs (p. xviii). In a statement that would surprise Nelson Rockefeller, the GOP, and surely Kissinger himself, she asserts that in 1969 "Kissinger was a political unknown" (p. 9).

Given the doubts her errors and uncritical use of sources raise, Garrison's decision to hone in on the arms control debates with no consideration of their changing context makes one wonder how firmly she knows the broad history of the decade. This is a book about the Nixon White House that does not mention Bob Haldeman or John Erlichman; it is a book about SALT II that barely mentions the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. It is also a short book that could easily have been expanded.

As a political scientist, Garrison is attempting to extract patterns from complex material. Before she can do this with authority, however, she must show that she is comfortable with the complexity. Her uncritical use of sources, her historical er-

rors, and her failure to advance our knowledge despite the availability of new and important sources betray her weak grasp on the complex history of arms control in the 1970s.

The credibility of her model of the advisory process is therefore undercut before it begins. Applying research in political psychology to her account of inside haggling over arms control, Garrison concludes that Kissinger was a skilled and ruthless manipulator of the system and that Brzezinski was considerably less deft; that Nixon organized his advisors in a hierarchical structure and that Carter deliberately did the opposite; that ambitious people in groups try to control information and access, using flattery, threats and bargaining. Didn't we already know this?

Adding to Garrison's difficulties are matters of style. Her English can be opaque, but a more fundamental problem concerns her intended audience. The sections of *Games Advisors Play* concerning arms control are directed at a highly informed audience. Garrison does not adequately explain the significance of the complicated debates that bedeviled the negotiations--why were MIRVs, SLBMs and the ABM treaty so contentious? She seems to assume that the reader already knows the context of these debates. On the other hand, her descriptions of the two administrations is aimed at the thoroughly uninformed. This schizophrenia is annoying.

Games Advisors Play is ambitious. It is also disappointing.

Copyright (c) 1999 by H-Net, all rights reserved. This work may be copied for non-profit educational use if proper credit is given to the author and the list. For other permission, please contact H-Net@h-net.msu.edu.

Lex Renda Associate Professor of History and Director of Undergraduate Studies, University of

Wisconsin--Milwaukee Book Review Editor, H-Pol,
H-Net

Mailing address: Mailing address for UPS
packages: Department of History Department of
History UW-Milwaukee UW-Milwaukee P.O. Box
413 Holton Hall 342 Milwaukee Wi. 53201 2442 E.
Hartford Street Milwaukee, Wi. 53211 E-MAIL:
renlex@uwm.edu

Office Phone: 414/229-5211 Fax: 414/229-2435
Home Phone: 414/228-6367 Website: [http://
www.uwm.edu/People/renlex](http://www.uwm.edu/People/renlex) Office: Holton Hall
345

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at
<https://networks.h-net.org/h-pol>

Citation: Nancy Mitchell. Review of Garrison, Jean A. *Games Advisors Play: Foreign Policy in the Nixon and Carter Administrations*. H-Pol, H-Net Reviews. September, 1999.

URL: <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=3439>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No
Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.