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978-0-521-76362-2 - The New Cambridge History of American Foreign Relations,
Volume 4: Challenges to American Primacy, 1945 to the Present

Warren I. Cohen

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THE NEW CAMBRIDGE HISTORY
OF AMERICAN FOREIGN RELATIONS,
VOLUME 4

Challenges to American Primacy,
1945 to the Present

Since their first publication, the four volumes of *The Cambridge History of American Foreign Relations* have served as the definitive source for the topic, from the colonial period to the Cold War. This new fourth volume explores the conditions in the international system at the end of World War II, the American determination to provide leadership, and the security dilemma each superpower posed for the others. It incorporates recent scholarship and revelations, carrying the narrative into the administration of Barack Obama. The author points to the nature of the Stalinist state, with its secrecy and brutal dictatorship, to explain the course of the Cold War. The character of the American political system, including the separation of political powers and the role of interest groups, prompted American leaders to exaggerate dangers abroad to enhance their domestic power. The book also provides fresh insight on Chinese and Soviet actions during the Korean War, the Taiwan Strait crises of the 1950s, and the Cuban missile crisis. It explains the rise and fall of détente in the 1970s, describes how imperial overreach strained both the United States and the Soviet Union in the 1980s, and reflects on what the Cold War has meant for the world.

Warren I. Cohen is University Distinguished Professor Emeritus at Michigan State University, the Distinguished University Professor Emeritus at University of Maryland, Baltimore County, and Senior Scholar at Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. Professor Cohen has published nineteen books, the best known of which is *America's Response to China* (2010). In addition to scholarly publications, Professor Cohen has written for the *Atlantic*, the *Baltimore Sun*, *Christian Science Monitor*, *Dissent*, *Foreign Affairs*, *International Herald Tribune*, the *Los Angeles Times*, *Nation*, the *New York Times*, the *Times Literary Supplement*, and the *Washington Post*. He has served as the president of the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations and chairman of the U.S. Department of State Advisory Committee on Historical Diplomatic Documentation. Professor Cohen has also been a consultant on Chinese affairs to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, the CIA, the Department of State, two governors of Michigan, and three directors of the Michigan Department of Commerce.

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Warren I. Cohen, Editor

Volume 1: Dimensions of the Early American Empire, 1754–1865
– William Earl Weeks

Volume 2: The American Search for Opportunity, 1865–1913
– Walter LaFeber

Volume 3: The Globalizing of America, 1913–1945
– Akira Iriye

Volume 4: Challenges to American Primacy, 1945 to the Present
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WARREN I. COHEN

*University of Maryland, Baltimore County
and*

Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars



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*In loving memory of my child bride,
Nancy Bernkopf Tucker
1948–2012*

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GENERAL EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

My goal for *The Cambridge History of American Foreign Relations*, published in 1993, was to make the finest scholarship and the best writing in the historical profession available to the general reader. The response of readers and reviewers was gratifying. Then, as now, I had no ideological or methodological agenda. I wanted some of the leading students of diplomatic history, regardless of approach, to join me, and I was delighted to have my invitations accepted by the first three to whom I turned.

When I conceived of the project nearly thirty years ago, I had no idea that the Cold War would end suddenly, that the volumes would conclude with a final epoch as well defined as the first three. The collapse of the Soviet Empire, just as I finished writing Volume 4, astonished me, but allowed for a sense of completion those volumes would have lacked under any other circumstances.

Twenty years have passed since the publication of those volumes. Most obviously, additional chapters were needed to bring the story to the present. In addition, we were aware of the need to incorporate new scholarship, fresh insights into the works. *The New Cambridge History of American Foreign Relations* offers our most recent thoughts.

The first volume of the 1993 series was written by Bradford Perkins, then the preeminent historian of late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century American diplomacy and doyen of active diplomatic historians. Brad's death necessitated a search for a successor to write the initial volume of *The New Cambridge History of American Foreign Relations*. With the concurrence of my colleagues Akira Iriye and Walter LaFeber, I chose William Earl Weeks as this generation's finest student of early American diplomacy.

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Weeks has written persuasively, sometimes provocatively, on a broad range of subjects, focused primarily on American expansion. Like Perkins, he stresses the building of an empire and sees a pattern of imperial behavior that existed before the creation of an independent United States. He sees men such as Ben Franklin promoting a vision of a great nation, an empire of freedom that would stretch across the continent. Again, like Perkins, he notes the persistent effort of presidents to dominate policy, contrary to the intent of the participants in the Constitutional Convention. In particular, Weeks raises the stature of James Monroe, portraying him as the first “hidden hand” president, foreshadowing methods Dwight Eisenhower perfected more than a century later. He is equally impressed with the audacity of James Polk as he contributed mightily to the nation’s self-declared expansionist mission. He describes how Polk’s role in acquiring an empire on the Pacific provided an enormous stimulus to continental expansion. Weeks argues that the concept of Manifest Destiny was applicable to the entire forty years’ period preceding the Civil War. He demonstrates that American leaders did not hesitate to eliminate all obstacles to the creation of the early American Empire. He details their brutal treatment of Native Americans as the nation satisfied its lust for land on which various tribes had lived for hundreds of years. And finally, he takes a fresh look at the issue of slavery as a cause of the Civil War.

Walter LaFeber, author of the second volume, is one of the most highly respected of the so-called Wisconsin School of diplomatic historians, men and women who studied with Fred Harvey Harrington and William Appleman Williams and their students, and were identified as “New Left” when they burst on the scene in the 1960s. LaFeber’s newly revised volume covers the last third of the nineteenth century and extends into the twentieth, to 1913, through the administration of William Howard Taft. He discusses the link between the growth of American economic power and expansionism, adding the theme of racism, especially as applied to Native Americans and Filipinos. Once again, his rejection of the idea of an American quest for order is striking. He argues that Americans sought opportunities for economic and missionary activities abroad and that they were undaunted by the disruptions they caused in other nations. A revolution in China or Mexico was a small price to pay for advantages accruing to Americans, especially

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when the local people paid it. His other inescapable theme is the use of foreign affairs to enhance presidential power.

The third volume, which begins on the eve of World War I and carries the story through World War II, is again written by Akira Iriye, past president of the American Historical Association and our generation's most innovative historian of international relations. Japanese-born, educated in American universities, Iriye has been fascinated by the cultural conflicts and accommodations that permeate power politics, particularly as the United States has confronted the nations of East Asia. Iriye opens his book with a quick sketch of the international system as it evolved and was dominated by Europe through the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. He analyzes Wilsonianism in war and peace and how it was applied in Asia and Latin America. Most notable is his discussion of what he calls the "cultural aspect" of the 1920s. Iriye sees the era about which he writes as constituting the "globalizing of America" – an age in which the United States supplanted Europe as the world's leader and provided the economic and cultural resources to define and sustain the international order. He notes the awakening of non-Western peoples and their expectations of American support and inspiration. In his conclusion he presages the troubles that would follow from the Americanization of the world.

Much of my work, like Iriye's, has focused on American–East Asian relations. My friend Michael Hunt has placed me in the "realist" school of diplomatic historians. Influenced by association with Perkins, LaFeber, Iriye, Ernest May, and younger friends such as John Lewis Gaddis, Michael Hogan, and Melvyn Leffler, I have studied the domestic roots of American policy, the role of ideas and attitudes as well as economic concerns, the role of nongovernmental organizations including missionaries, and the place of art in international relations. In the final volume of the series, *Challenges to American Primacy, 1945 to the Present*, I also rely heavily on what I have learned from political economists and political scientists.

I begin Part I of the book in the closing months of World War II and end it with the disappearance of the Soviet Union in 1991. I write of the vision American leaders had of a postwar world order and the growing sense that the Soviet Union posed a threat to that vision. The concept of the "security dilemma," the threat each side's defensive actions seemed

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to pose for the other, looms large in my analysis of the origins of the Cold War. I also emphasize the importance of the two political systems: the paradox of the powerful state and weak government in the United States and the secrecy and brutality of the Stalinist regime. Throughout the volume, I note the importance of the disintegration of prewar colonial empires, the appearance of scores of newly independent states in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, and the turmoil caused by American and Soviet efforts to force them into an international system designed in Washington and Moscow. Finally, I conclude Part I with the reemergence of Germany and Japan as major powers, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the drift of the United States, its course in world affairs uncertain in the absence of an adversary.

In Part II, two chapters focus on the American role in world affairs since the end of the Cold War. I write of the struggle of political leaders and public intellectuals in the United States to find a new lodestar after the collapse of the Soviet Union rendered containment obsolete. George H. W. Bush and William Jefferson Clinton were hampered by a public tired of efforts to pacify an unruly world, demanding attention to domestic affairs. Not until the al Qaeda attacks on American soil on September 11, 2001, was a new foreign policy goal, articulated by George W. Bush, “the War on Terror,” widely accepted – with grim consequences in Iraq and Afghanistan. But in the twenty-first century, it was quickly apparent that the principal challenge to American primacy would be the resurgence of Chinese power. As I write, Barack Obama has disposed of Osama bin Laden, but American troops remain in Afghanistan, Iran and North Korea taunt the American president, and he rebalances his nation’s defensive forces across the Pacific.

There are a number of themes that can be followed through these four volumes, however differently the authors approach their subjects. First, there was the relentless national pursuit of wealth and power, described so vividly by Weeks and LaFeber. Iriye demonstrates how Americans used their wealth and power when the United States emerged as the world’s leader after World War I. I discuss America’s performance as hegemon in the years immediately following World War II, and its response to perceived threats to its dominance through the Cold War – and after.

A second theme of critical importance is the struggle for control of foreign policy. Each author notes tension between the president and

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Congress, as institutionalized by the Constitution, and the efforts of various presidents, from 1789 to the present, to circumvent constitutional restraints on their powers. The threat to democratic government is illustrated readily by the Nixon-Kissinger obsessions that led to Watergate, Reagan's Iran-Contra fiasco, and the deceptions of the Bush-Cheney administration that led to the invasion of Iraq.

Finally, we are all concerned with what constitutes American identity on the world scene. Is there a peculiarly American foreign policy that sets the United States off from the rest of the world? We examine the evolution of American values and measure them against the nation's behavior in international affairs. And we worry about the impact of the country's global activity on its domestic order, fearful that Thomas Jefferson's vision of a virtuous republic has been forgotten, boding ill for Americans and for the world they are allegedly "bound to lead."

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My thanks go first to Akira Iriye, Walt LaFeber, and Bill Weeks for joining me in this project and to Eric Crahan for inviting us to prepare this new series. Nancy Bernkopf Tucker examined every sentence I wrote with excruciating care. She *usually* failed to intimidate me and will have to settle for the dedication.

Most of the work for the 1993 volume was undertaken during a sabbatical leave from Michigan State University. I am grateful to MSU for its consistent support over the thirty years when I taught there. I was a fellow at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 1990–1, where Mary Bullock, Rob Litwak, Sam Wells, and Lindsay Collins looked after me, providing all the support one hopes for from a residential program. Sergo Mikoyan's comments on a paper I presented at the Center in June 1991 were most helpful. I revised and expanded Volume 4 in the leisure of retirement after a delightful fifteen years of teaching at UMBC, the most promising upcoming public institution in the country.

A work of this kind rests heavily on the research and writing of many other scholars, most of whom are mentioned in my notes and bibliographic essay. I benefited also from conversations over the years with many of those cited and with British, Chinese, German, Japanese, Korean, and Soviet colleagues at a wide range of international conferences. Equally rewarding has been the teaching of my students. Listening to Qing Simei probably delayed completion of the first manuscript by a year. Many of the insights in Part II, covering the years 1991 to 2010, derive from discussions with policymakers in Washington and abroad.