

# Book Review Essay

## Strategic Trailblazers

*Edwina S. Campbell*

***The Hawk and the Dove: Paul Nitze, George Kennan, and the History of the Cold War*** by Nicholas Thompson. Henry Holt and Co., 2009, 403 pp., \$27.50.

***The Atlantic Century: Four Generations of Extraordinary Diplomats Who Forged America's Vital Alliance with Europe*** by Kenneth Weisbrode. Da Capo Press, 2009, 470 pp., \$30.00.

We did not realize it at the time, but those of us commissioned as US military and Foreign Service officers (FSO) in the mid 1970s did not have much intellectual heavy lifting to do. The generation of officers that came of age professionally in the first two decades after World War II had done it for us. By the late 1960s, all of the key concepts that underpinned American foreign and defense policy until 1989 were in place: containment in a bipolar world; deterrence based on the nuclear triad; forward basing of US conventional and nuclear forces; constant attention to the cohesion of the Alliance (we wrote it with a capital “A”)—NATO; and a willingness to engage in the “carrot” of East-West dialogue (*détente*), provided it did not call into question the aforementioned “sticks.” These concepts were applied and refined by us baby boomers born during the Cold War, but we were the heirs, not the founders, of the United States’ intellectual strategic fortune.

Since 9/11, a new generation of American military officers and diplomats has had to take on the threefold task that faced their predecessors in the Truman and Eisenhower years: understanding a radically changed strategic context, defining a strategy for the United States in that new context, and implementing that strategy to secure American interests and advance American values. Nearly a decade after the attacks on New York City and the Pentagon, today’s majors and lieutenant colonels are in the same position as the field grade officers of 60 years ago. In the fall of 1950, as the Chinese crossed the Yalu and General Eisenhower arrived in Paris as the first SACEUR, midcareer US diplomats and their uniformed counterparts found that they represented a different country than the one that had commissioned them as junior officers only a decade before. America’s role in

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the world had changed, and by 1950 the assumptions of American foreign and defense policy in the 1930s served those officers no better than the assumptions of the 1990s serve the officers of today.

Nicholas Thompson and Kenneth Weisbrode have written insightful books about the men (mainly) who overthrew those assumptions, developed a strategy to deal with the Cold War, and implemented that strategy for 40 years.

Thompson tells the story of his grandfather, Paul Nitze, and of George Kennan, whose 1947 “X” article in *Foreign Affairs* gave to US foreign policy the word—*containment*—that would describe Washington’s approach to the Soviet Union for the next four decades. Containment meant many things over those 40 years to various American administrations (hence, the plural in the title of John Lewis Gaddis’ classic 1982 history, *Strategies of Containment*), but one aspect remained constant: the centrality of Europe and the transatlantic relationship. That is the focus of Weisbrode’s book, a history of EUR, the State Department’s Bureau of European Affairs.

EUR, the “mother bureau,” had within its purview much of the Northern Hemisphere, from Vancouver to Vladivostok. Its desks included Canada (as a NATO member) and the Soviet Union, the alliance’s protagonist extraordinaire. But its focus was Germany. The German wars, hot and cold, preoccupied Europe for well over a century, from 1870 to 1990; and after the sinking of the *Lusitania* in 1915, they preoccupied the United States, too, for 75 years. The small cadre of EUR’s “German hands” had watched Europe succumb to the dictators in the 1930s. But it was the next generation that played the crucial role in American foreign and defense policy after 1945. They were the founding fathers of “pol-mil,” the intertwining of American diplomacy and the projection of American military power overseas, specifically to NATO Europe.

The Cold War corresponded almost exactly with their adult working lives. Born circa 1920, they were in 1950 young men “who came to Europe either as military or civilian agents of the [US] occupation [of Germany], along with another group of roughly the same age . . . that provided legal, economic, and other forms of technical advice to the occupation authorities.”<sup>1</sup> They had fought in World War II or served in intelligence or other civilian capacities during the war. In 1961 they were approaching middle age as East Germany erected its wall in Berlin, and in 1989, as that wall came down, many of them were still active in public service. Emblematic of this generation was Arthur Hartman, a career FSO who served before he was 20 in the US Army Air Corps, worked in the Economic Cooperation Administration (Marshall Plan) office in Paris from 1948 to 1952, and retired from the Foreign Service in 1987 after nearly a decade and a half as, consecutively, assistant secretary of state for European Affairs (head of EUR), ambassador to France, and ambassador to the Soviet Union.<sup>2</sup>

While the Marshall Planners were hobnobbing with cabinet ministers, union leaders, and journalists in Paris,<sup>3</sup> other future stars of EUR were sharing experiences in Germany with their US Army colleagues:

[Foreign Service] Officers like [future ambassador Jonathan] Dean were posted in small villages and charged with everything from helping to get the sewer systems to work, to hunting down Nazi officials, to keeping watch on the political activities of local Communists. The impact such power and authority had on these young officers—many just out of the war and serving in their first posts—cannot be emphasized too heavily. . . . They had, after all, helped to convert the largest country at the heart of Europe into a loyal, democratic, and prosperous American ally. There seemed little else they could not accomplish. They were, therefore, a supremely confident and even idealistic group of people.<sup>4</sup>

In Iraq and Afghanistan today, US military and Foreign Service officers are creating personal and professional ties with each other in similar circumstances. It remains to be seen if these ties will be as important in shaping US foreign policy in the first half of the twenty-first century as those formed among military officers and diplomats in postwar Europe were in shaping the second half of the last century.

Weisbrode, as a young intern at the Atlantic Council in the early 1990s, came to know many members of the Marshall Plan/Occupation generation in retirement and is, as he admits, an unabashed admirer of their work, accomplishments, and commitment to public service. He is an Atlanticist—perhaps the last of the breed. But his personal admiration and affection for his subjects in no way colors the story he tells. The book began life as his Harvard dissertation, directed by the late Prof. Ernest May and Profs. Waldo Heinrichs and Akira Iriye. It is thoroughly researched and beautifully written.

Thompson has also written a beautiful book. He tells the story of the Cold War through the dual biographies of Nitze and Kennan, one of Weisbrode's EUR hands for the first 20 years of his career and the founding director of the State Department's Policy Planning Staff under Secretary George Marshall. Nitze came into the department sideways, via Wall Street and the US Strategic Bombing Survey, which had taken him to the ruins of Hiroshima in 1945. First Kennan's deputy, he succeeded him as head of Policy Planning at a crucial moment in 1949–50, bracketed by the Soviets' detonation of an atomic bomb and the invasion of South Korea by the North.

Kennan provided the name for the Truman administration's emerging approach to the USSR, but Nitze in *NSC-68* recommended the arms buildup that became the chief characteristic of containment as practiced by every US president from Truman to Reagan. Two generations of Cold War policy practitioners grew up aligning themselves with Kennan, the dove, or Nitze, the hawk; and the two men argued with each other for 50 years over how best to implement the policy largely rejected by the man who had named it. Thompson believes that

Kennan's ideas and methods were not practical and could do little to help solve day to day problems. He could not, for example, have been an effective arms negotiator. Nonetheless, he played a crucial role, both in framing the conflict and then serving as his nation's conscience as those horrifying weapons hypnotized the superpowers more and more. Kennan, the outsider, accurately foresaw how the Cold War would play out. Nitze, the insider,

helped bring about the Cold War's end by behaving as if Kennan's prophecy would never come true.<sup>5</sup>

The two men were friends “despite their vast differences on issues of national security,”<sup>6</sup> and they were rivals for the ear of the presidents who would decide those issues. Born three years apart—Kennan in 1904, Nitze in 1907—they lived long lives and died within months of each other, Nitze in October 2004 and Kennan in March 2005.

Thompson acknowledges that his family ties to Nitze gave him both access and insights that an outsider could never have. “Had I never known Nitze, I might have begun with the preconception that he was the hard-line demon so often portrayed in modern Cold War histories.”<sup>7</sup> But his book in no way attempts to prove that Nitze was “right” and Kennan “wrong” about how to wage the Cold War: “Each was profoundly right at some moments, and profoundly wrong at others.”<sup>8</sup> And, Thompson does what Kennan's own memoirs and other published personal reflections do not: he leaves his readers with a sympathetic appreciation of Kennan, not as an ascetic academic but as a man of the twentieth century, who “spent an absolutely extraordinary amount of time in his 101 years with his mind focused, trying to understand himself and the world around him.”<sup>9</sup>

Nitze and Kennan were never household names. Neither held elective office or achieved cabinet rank; even if they had, like once-famous senators and secretaries, they would have slipped from public memory 20 years after the end of the Cold War they waged and won. In their time, both aspired for more public and presidential recognition, but like their one-time State Department colleagues, they were also quintessential professionals. As Weisbrode describes EUR, it “never had many officers who sought controversy or many noteworthy ideologues.” Instead, it “came closest to serving as the country's permanent foreign secretary, a kind of self-appointed guardian, conscience, or kingmaker, for nearly four generations.”<sup>10</sup> Kennan and Nitze played both roles. They certainly sought controversy (and it sought them), and they were two of the “diplomatic giants, both inside and outside the foreign service . . . who wrote the rules of the Cold War, who established structures and patterns for a half century of international affairs.”<sup>11</sup>

In their time, unlike most of their colleagues, they were not “nearly anonymous bureaucrats mentioned only in the occasional back pages of official chronicles,”<sup>12</sup> but in the long run, that is likely to be the fate of Kennan and Nitze, too. When their names do appear, Kennan's will be at the beginning of the Cold War story, the Soviet expert who set containment in motion with the “Long Telegram” from Moscow and the “X” article a year later. The picture of him, if there is one, in the history books will be of an already weary-looking diplomat in his mid 40s. Nitze will appear not as the young man at the beginning of the story but at the end of the tale, a man just shy of 80, also looking weary in the history book photo because he has been up all night negotiating

with his Soviet counterpart at Reykjavik in 1986, the Reagan-Gorbachev summit that set in motion the beginning of the end of the Cold War.

But what of the others, the diplomats and military officers whose names are unknown to even the most conscientious historians? It is hard to imagine, given the headlines of the last few years, that obscurity could ever be the fate of Amb. Ryan Crocker and Gen David Petraeus, but who today can identify Gen Lucius Clay, military governor of the US zone of occupied Germany (OMGUS), or his civilian successor as high commissioner of that zone (HICOG), John J. McCloy? Also forgotten is Robert Murphy, Eisenhower and Clay's foreign policy adviser (POLAD), a Foreign Service officer who spent much of his career as a "diplomat among warriors" (the title of Murphy's autobiography). They are, indeed, in Weisbrode's words, "footnotes to footnotes,"<sup>13</sup> if they are mentioned at all. The working-level FSOs and the majors, lieutenant colonels, and colonels who served with Clay, McCloy, and Murphy do not appear in any footnotes at all.

Together on the ground in Germany in 1945, the two groups were not naturally compatible, and the struggles in recent years to achieve interagency unity of effort in Iraq and Afghanistan would be familiar to them. Then, as now, State was playing catch-up:

Before the war, there was no established German Desk or corps of experts, and most of the bureau's talent gravitated to France. During the war, of course, the State Department drew on the few German specialists it had to plan for the aftermath, although, again, most of the initiative for running German affairs rested elsewhere, primarily in the War Department. . . .

[The diplomats assigned to Murphy's POLAD office had a] relationship with the [military] occupation authorities, and to their bosses in State, [that] was complex and often tense. Clay was known to disdain diplomats and to go out of his way to exclude them from decisions. But the bias never seemed to apply to the individual diplomats with whom he worked . . . nor were they known to put Clay's staff on the defensive or to seek to undercut him.<sup>14</sup>

Working together to get the job done, both military and Foreign Service officers found that "pol-mil" was not so bad after all; and when State set up a temporary bureau, GER, in the late 1940s to backstop HICOG, it asked "a military officer [who] had been the Pentagon's 'leg man' on Berlin" to "shed his uniform [and] run German affairs during these critical years."<sup>15</sup>

Does it matter that the names of these individuals are largely forgotten? Maybe to those whose personal aspirations to rank and status went unfulfilled, but perhaps they, too, eventually came to agree with Weisbrode that they "succeeded precisely because they did not proclaim, or even fully recognize, the extent of their accomplishment. There was always another problem to manage, another aggrieved party to assuage, another job to do."<sup>16</sup>

Throughout the Cold War, the diplomats among warriors and the warriors among diplomats provided flesh and blood to grandiose strategic phrases—national strategic guidance, as the military calls it—by accomplishing mundane

tactical tasks “collectively and anonymously, less as conquerors than as subtle missionaries.”<sup>17</sup> And over the course of 40 years, their accumulated successes at the tactical and operational levels offered new strategic options to successive US presidents. The young men of 1945 ended their professional lives as Germany unified, the Soviet Union collapsed, and the two superpowers negotiated an end to their nuclear arms race. Footnotes to history though they may be, few generations have accomplished more in 45 years.

**Editor’s note:** For an insightful look at proliferation, see the SSQ online book review of Matthew Kroenig, *Exporting the Bomb: Technology Transfer and the Spread of Nuclear Weapons* (Cornell University Press, 2010), [http://afri.au.af.mil/review\\_full.asp?id=102](http://afri.au.af.mil/review_full.asp?id=102).

## Notes

1. Kenneth Weisbrode, *The Atlantic Century: Four Generations of Extraordinary Diplomats Who Forged America’s Vital Alliance with Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2009), 87.
2. Ibid., 310.
3. Ibid., 93.
4. Ibid., 92.
5. Nicholas Thompson, *The Hawk and the Dove: Paul Nitze, George Kennan, and the History of the Cold War* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2009), 313.
6. Ibid., 2.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid., 378.
9. Ibid., 379.
10. Weisbrode, *Atlantic Century*, 6.
11. Ibid., 149.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid., 5.
14. Ibid., 90–91.
15. Ibid., 92.
16. Ibid., 302.
17. Ibid., 149.