History and Policy
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What are the benefits, if any, to rigorously applying historical knowledge and methodology to the making of US foreign policy? Are there advantages for policymakers in thinking about the past in a serious way, and should historians consider these decision-makers part of their audience?

The answer to all these questions would seem to be obvious. Most would agree that, yes, a deep and sophisticated understanding of the past is desirable for those making such important decisions. Asking professional historians to include policymakers among their target audiences may be a more contested notion, but one that should not be dismissed out of hand. Surprisingly, however, there is little effort by either policymakers or historians to find common ground. To be sure, policymakers often employ "anecdotal" history, and popular histories, particularly biographies, are found on the shelves of many decision-makers, yet there are few serious attempts by what might be called "scholarly" historians, trained and employed by

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research universities, to write for a policy audience, nor is it common for policymakers to access their work.

Exceptions exist, of course. Paul Kennedy's *Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, while not explicitly written for a policy audience, was popular among decision-makers because it was crafted in a way that engaged their concerns.[1] A more notable example, however, is Ernest May's classic text, *"Lessons" of the Past*.[2] Written over three decades ago, May persuasively argued that because those in power inevitably used their perceptions of the past when framing policy choices, it made sense to teach them how to do it more effectively. In the decade that followed, May teamed up with political scientist Richard Neustadt to formalize this notion with a popular Harvard policy school course and book of historical case studies oriented towards those in government called *Thinking in Time*.[3]

"Lessons" of the Past and *Thinking in Time* were admirable efforts to help policymakers develop a better understanding of the past and how it can inform policy choices. Both are still taught in a number of graduate policy schools. The books are decades old, however, and are not without their flaws. Neither inspired much of a following among scholarly historians, and there are very few historical works that explicitly followed their model. The US government did not heed May's call to staff the national security bureaucracy with trained historians, nor have historians pursued with any vigour the types of research questions suggested in *"Lessons" of the Past*.

DO POLICY AND HISTORY MIX?

Why aren't there more examples of historical scholarship oriented towards policymakers? At first glance, this is a puzzle. There are at least three important reasons, however, why historians and policymakers don't have a more fruitful relationship

First, policymakers are not interested in the past for its own sake. Forced to make difficult choices under enormous time pressures, government officials want "usable" knowledge that provides guidance for making

1 Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (New York: Random House, 1987).

2 Ernest R. May, *"Lessons" of the Past: The Use and Misuse of History in American Foreign Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975).

3 Ernest R. May and Richard E. Neustadt, *Thinking in Time: The Uses of History for Decision Makers* (New York: Free Press, 1988).

the best decisions. Understandably, they seek certainty, particularly about the future, and are grateful for clear-cut rules and parsimonious explanations. Historians, on the other hand, do not like to generalize over space and time, and as both Kennedy and May have demonstrated in their books, historians are no better at making predictions than anyone else. The comparative advantage of history is in exposing complexity, nuance, and shades of grey. Studying the past discourages efforts to simplify or forecast. Unlike economics or international relations theory, which aim for parsimony, generalization, and prediction, historical scholarship often *appears* to offer little that can be of immediate help to the policymaker.

A second reason for the poor relationship is the deep suspicion historians have of power and those who wield it. Scholars warn that historical work should not be used to validate broader political claims. If such a political effort is to be made, it should be on behalf of groups and issues ignored or underrepresented by the political process, not policy elites. Historians often see their role as "speaking truth to power," and do not want their perspective compromised by the needs of policymakers. Furthermore, national history has a less than stellar record in many parts of the world—including at times the United States—as the past has often been exploited to justify morally problematic policies. The record of scholars who have been close to power in the United States has not always been exemplary. For example, the historian Bruce Kuklick has argued that the ideas of American defence intellectuals during the Cold War often "served to legitimate but not to energize policies." Often, "fashion was more important than validity" and policy intellectuals who "professed deep understanding" actually "groped in the dark."[4]

Finally, it is important to remember that policy is only a very small part of the past that historians reconstruct and explain. Even scholars who focus on international history or American foreign relations are as likely to emphasize factors outside of the realm of policy. Historians may identify structural factors, like geography, long-term trends such as demographic or economic shifts, or cultural or intellectual variables, like the changing role of race and gender or the emergence of new ideas, when they explain why certain things happen the way they do in international relations. This can be frustrating to decision-makers in government, as these variables are

4 Bruce Kuklick, *Blind Oracles: Intellectuals and War from Kennan to Kissinger* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 15.

either immune to policy or respond to policy pressures in unpredictable ways. For many historians, it can be artificial to study the history of a particular policy, or to engage in what political scientists call "process tracing." Historians also lament the focus on "crises," as if singular events emerge out of nowhere and are to be understood in their own terms.

These are powerful reasons for historians to look for different audiences and for policymakers to seek wisdom and guidance elsewhere. The requirements for good historical scholarship are rarely in line with the needs of decision-makers in government. Does that mean, however, that it is a bad idea for historians to write for policymakers, and for policymakers to take an interest in understanding historical methodology? Should the history professors stay locked in their ivory towers, far away from the power centres of the world?

WHY HISTORY IS GOOD FOR YOU: FIVE SKILLS FOR POLICYMAKERS

The simple answer is no. The issues policymakers confront are too important, and the benefit of historical insight too great, for them to avoid communicating with each other. Developing a historical sensibility can do much to improve policymakers' understanding of the world they find themselves in, and depending on how the knowledge is used, improve the quality of policy. And as May and Neustadt pointed out, all policymakers reason from historical analogies, whether they know it or not. Providing government officials a better understanding of the past is not unlike teaching sex education to adolescents. "A little knowledge," they wrote, "holds out the prospect of enhancing not alone safety but also enjoyment."[5]

There are advantages for the historian as well. While scholars may want to maintain a healthy distance from the political process, it does not mean their historical work should be obscure, filled with jargon, or irrelevant to the concerns of policymakers. Nor is there anything wrong with scholarship being *useful*. It is fair to say that much of the professional historical field has, for any number of reasons, embraced methodologies and studied subjects that are far afield from the concerns or interests of much of the larger public, including those in government. While some of this cutting-edge work is to be admired, there is a danger that this scholarship is meaningful to smaller and smaller audiences. Grounding research and analysis in the

5 May and Neustadt, *Thinking in Time*, xxi.

larger concerns of society can only broaden the reach and influence of historical work, demonstrating the merits of good history to more people.

Exploiting my own work on US foreign, strategic, and economic policy during the 1950s, 60s and 70s,[6] this essay identifies five key concepts that, if properly understood and employed, should provide a firmer grasp on how historical analysis can benefit policymakers. None of the five notions are particularly novel or cutting-edge; in fact, one of the advantages of possessing knowledge of the past and a familiarity with historical methodology is a healthy skepticism for claims of profundity or originality in either world events or policy responses. Observers of recent US global policymaking might welcome the virtues of caution and common sense that a deep understanding of history can bring. Nor is it necessary to accept my historical interpretations to recognize the value of these five concepts. In fact, developing a historical sensibility should encourage readers to challenge the received wisdom about past and current US policies and encourage them to develop their own explanations. The five concepts of history for policymakers discussed below are vertical history, horizontal history, chronological proportionality, unintended consequences, and policy insignificance.

Vertical history

When looking at a historical event or phenomenon, historians first look at its temporal origins. Temporal origins or chronology might be thought of as *vertical* history. Vertical history is the easiest concept for policymakers to grasp, since it involves understanding the sequential notions of causality and agency. Why did a certain event or series of events occur, and what agents or combination of agents—forces, persons, institutions, and ideas—caused the event? While explaining how events unfold over time would seem to be straightforward, it is never a simple or uncontested process, as anyone who has studied controversial issues, such as the causes of the First World War, understands. Identifying causes and agents depends upon the

6 Francis J. Gavin, *Gold, Dollars, and Power: The Politics of International Monetary Relations, 1958-1971* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); "Blasts from the past: Nuclear proliferation and rogue states before the Bush doctrine," *International Security* 29, no. 3 (winter 2005): 100-35; "The gold battles within the cold war: American monetary policy and the defense of Europe, 1960-1963," *Diplomatic History* 26, no. 1 (winter 2002): 61-94; "The myth of flexible response: American strategy in Europe during the 1960s," *International History Review* 29, no. 3 (December 2001): 847-875; "Power, politics, and US policy in Iran, 1950-1953," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 1, no. 1 (winter 1999): 58-89.

perspective of the historian, including spatially, culturally, and temporally. Causes can be either proximate or long-term.

Despite these difficulties, however, sophisticated historical analysis is useful in both revealing the origins of important events and exposing when the origins and causality are less clear than people might think. It is important to note that vertical history has less to do with the "case study" method—suggested by May and Neustadt—or the process tracing employed by many political scientists, and instead seeks to identify the deeper, more complex, and often surprising chronological roots of a particular policy situation. When assessing the origins of the First World War, for example, historians balance out their concerns about military timetables and diplomatic dispatches during the July 1914 crisis with analysis of longer-term trends, including but not limited to the demographic patterns produced by industrialization and urbanization in turn-of-the-century Europe, the influence of economic competition and imperialism among the Great Powers, and the rising force of modern nationalism. Good vertical history can also reveal when a seemingly small change within a complex system can produce profound changes to the international environment over time.

An example of how "vertical history" might be used to lift the veil to reveal deeper, less known sources of the world policymakers face would be to reconstruct the roots, or long-term causes, of current US policy in what might be termed the greater Middle East. When and for what reasons did this region become such an important focus of US policy, and how did American interests develop? What are the causes of the United States' close relationship with problematic allies, such as Saudi Arabia and Israel, and its bitter enmity toward Iran? A contemporary analysis that focused on proximate causes might identify a variety of factors: the importance of oil reserves to the American economy, the threat of terrorism and instability in the region, concerns about nuclear proliferation, and powerful domestic support for Israel within the United States. These interests, it is widely assumed, have driven US policy for some time, and our policies in the region have been pretty much constant since the middle of the 20th century.

Detailed historical work assessing the longer-term causes might provide a more nuanced picture. Consider the following interpretation, based on historical analysis, of a series of relatively minor events that had profound long-term consequences. Until the mid-1960s, the Middle East was not an area of primary concern to the United States, falling far behind

Europe and East Asia, and even at times Latin America, as a geopolitical priority. Great Britain, not the United States, was seen as the most important western power in the place. Energy was not a first-order issue, and regional rivalries and conflicts—between Saudi Arabia and Egypt, or Syria and Iraq—were of little concern to US policymakers. Israel was not considered a close ally, and efforts were made to balance its interests with those of its Arab neighbours. In 1965, the United States provided more weapons to Jordan than Israel.

Why and how did this situation change? The key is to understand the evolving role of the Middle East during the Cold War conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union. A historian reconstructing the story might argue that starting in the late 1950s, but increasing in scope in the 1960s, the Soviets targeted the greater Middle East as a region where they could make geopolitical inroads. Starting with Nasser's Egypt and moving to Iraq and Syria, Russia used vigorous diplomacy and generous aid to gain friends in the region. This effort caught the United States flat-footed, and when tensions between Israel and its Arab neighbours sparked a war in 1967, the Johnson administration was for the most part caught off-guard.

The United States was even less prepared for the consequences of the war. Recent historical work has made it clear that Egypt's and Syria's aggressiveness was, in no small part, driven by Soviet support and prodding, reflecting Russia's desire to gain greater influence in the region. The war created a financial crisis that exacerbated an already desperate British balance of payments deficit that led, in November of 1967, to a devaluation of sterling. More ominously, Great Britain announced its intent to withdraw its military commitment to the region.

The United States found itself in a poor geopolitical position in the region. The Soviets were moving aggressively to establish strategic dominance in the greater Middle East as America's close ally, Great Britain, was pulling out. The United States, bogged down in a costly war in Vietnam and burdened by its own balance of payments deficit, was unable to replace the British military commitment. Unwilling to cede the region in the Cold War conflict with the Soviets, but unable to meet the threat head on by deploying military forces, first the Johnson and then the Nixon administration developed a "pillar" strategy of providing massive military and political support to their allies in the region. The three most important geopolitical allies, from the US perspective, were Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Israel. In the years following the Six-Day War, they were given or sold billions of dollars

of the most cutting-edge military equipment. This created a deeper and more complex relationship between the United States and all three, although in the case of Iran, this relationship soured when the Shah was deposed. America's post-1967 strategy in the greater Middle East had some success in blunting and reversing Soviet advances in the region. However, it produced consequences for the region and US policy that persisted well beyond the end of the Cold War.

This is, of course, only one plausible historical interpretation of US policy in the Middle East. The point is not to argue that it is correct, but to reveal how such nuance and depth could provide greater insight into the policy environment US policymakers face today. It also reveals how factors that seem small—in this case, the British and American balance of payments deficits—can have larger and unimagined longer-term consequences on the policy environment. Simplistic, monocausal explanations for US involvement in the region—the demand for oil, the power of the Israel lobby, a clash of civilizations—are much harder to accept at face value when seen in the light of a longer-term and complex history.

Using vertical history also allows us to undermine policy explanations based on the misuse or oversimplification of history. Policy analysts looking to understand our poor relations with Iran since its revolution in 1978-79 have been quick to focus on the history of US involvement in the country's internal politics. Most critics identify the Eisenhower administration's overthrow of Iran's democratically elected leader, Mohammed Mossadegh, in 1953, and his replacement with an American puppet, Shah Mohammed Reza Palhavi, as the turning point in the relationship, and run a straight line from this event to the rise of an anti-American Islamic Republic. The coup was inspired, so the story goes, by a combination of support for British imperial interests and a desire to control Iran's oil resources. The Shah, once in place, was given unlimited military and political support for 25 years, despite his despotism.

Reconstructing the history of America's relations with Iran during this period reveals, not surprisingly, a more complicated story. The documents reveal that US policy was driven by concerns about the Soviet Union, and less by oil, American corporate interests. or the fate of the British empire. There is little doubt that the United States took a keen interest in Iran's political orientation because of its proximity to the Soviet Union. Historical evidence also indicates that US policymakers in both the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations were far more ambivalent about the Shah than

they let on in public, and one gets the sense from the documents that they would not have been too upset if a more competent and reform-oriented leader emerged, provided this person did not move Iran into the Soviet orbit.

The 1967 war in the Middle East dramatically changed American calculations, and Iran, almost out of necessity, became the key part of the US pillar strategy. Arms sales and aid increased dramatically, as did the Shah's leverage with the United States. While the 1953 coup against Mossadegh is a critical part of the story of poor US-Iranian relations, it can only be properly understood in the context of the aftermath of the Six-Day War and the Johnson and Nixon administration's search for a policy to stem Soviet influence in the greater Middle East.

A policymaker—or a historian, for that matter—would not have to accept an interpretation based on the centrality of the 1967 war to explain US policy in the greater Middle East today, in the same way neither need believe the First World War was caused by long-term demographic pressures, the effects of European imperialism, or Germany's mobilization schedules in August 1914. Wrestling with these kinds of interpretations, however, provides deeper context to contemporary events and reveals the complexity under the surface of most important global policy issues.

Horizontal history

An understanding of the past doesn't just reveal how things relate *over time*; history can expose horizontal connections *over space* and *in depth*. In other words, good historical work can move side to side, or laterally, and can reveal linkages between issues that are not readily apparent at first glance. This is the *horizontal*, or spatial-depth axis on a historian's imaginary graph.

Consider American foreign policy in the early 1960s and look again at the obscure issue of the US balance of payments deficit. For a variety of reasons, including the somewhat inefficient and contradictory rules of the Bretton Woods monetary system, the United States began hemorrhaging dollars, which surplus countries used to purchase US gold, during the later years of the Eisenhower administration and the Kennedy presidency. Lessening the gold and dollar outflow became an obsession for both men, who (mistakenly) connected the deficit to the economic conditions that led to the Great Depression of the 1930s. Both administrations sought to end the dollar and gold drain without resorting to restrictionist economic policies, such as interest rate hikes, trade barriers, and capital controls, which were bound to depress the domestic economy.

Both presidents demanded that their administrations identify and decrease the sources of the balance of payments deficit. The largest portion of the US current account deficit was produced by the costs of America's military commitment abroad, particularly in NATO countries. And the most expensive part of the military account was the price of stationing almost 300,000 fully supplied US troops and their dependents in the Federal Republic of Germany that, not coincidentally, ran the largest payments surplus with the United States. Reducing these foreign exchange costs, either through troop "redeployments" or getting the West Germans to "offset" these outlays, became the primary foreign economic policy goal of presidents Eisenhower, Kennedy, and even Johnson.

The idea of focusing on the balance of payments costs of US military commitments abroad, however, created enormous difficulties in crucial policy arenas. What if the West Germans refused to offset American expenses? And even if they did pay, how would such a mercenary policy appear to an ally on the frontline of the Cold War? At a time when nuclear parity with the Soviets was right around the corner, would plans to pull US troops out of Europe undermine the credibility of America's commitment to defend western Europe? And how would the Soviets interpret a troop withdrawal? What effect would this clash over economic and security issues have on the cohesion of the western alliance?

The issue becomes more complex when the influence of nuclear policies and politics is taken into account. Europeans on both sides of the Iron Curtain were loathe to see West Germany develop or acquire atomic weapons, and the Soviet Union (and France and Great Britain) made it clear that such a development would be a matter of grave concern. But if the Americans considered pulling out troops for something as prosaic as balance of payments considerations, could the West German government responsibly leave their security in the hands of the United States? And faced by a nuclear-armed Soviet behemoth and an unreliable and mercenary ally, wouldn't it be irresponsible not to at least consider acquiring nuclear weapons?

In the end, a series of complex and hard-fought deals were worked out that reassured West Germany while keeping it non-nuclear, protecting the dollar, and lessening the outflow of US gold. The Americans pulled out some troops and the West Germans agreed to buy lots of US military equipment while not cashing in their surplus dollars for gold. What is interesting for both policymakers and historians was how this rather obscure and secondary issue—the balance of payments deficit—influenced a wide range

of issues, from international trade negotiations to the development of the nuclear nonproliferation treaty (NPT).

To give just a flavour of these kinds of unexpected but important linkages, consider a memo from the "wise man" and presidential negotiator Averell Harriman to Lyndon Johnson in October 1966. In the document, Harriman lays out a plan that will settle all of the Cold War's most troubling problems, from Vietnam to nuclear proliferation to international monetary instability. The Russians would be told that the Germans would get no nuclear hardware, allowing the Soviet Union to sign a nonproliferation agreement. In return, the Russians would "commit themselves to getting Hanoi to make peace in Southeast Asia." Finally, the United States would "pay off the Germans by making balance of payments concessions." In the end, Johnson's national security advisor, Walt Rostow, argued against the proposal, in large part because it was "wrong to let the Germans off the hook on balance of payments offsets." What is amazing—and hard to discern without detailed historical work—is how these obscure monetary questions influenced US fiscal policy and debates over America's military strategy in Europe, and had a direct bearing on relations within NATO. As Harriman's memo reveals, these questions even spilled over into discussions about ending the Vietnam War.

Many analysts—international political economists, nuclear strategists, experts on Germany, trade experts—have looked at a particular issue during this period in isolation. And short of those at the top of government—the president, the secretaries of state and defense, the national security advisor—most policymakers worked on only one or two of these questions and were unlikely to make the broader, more complex connections. Treasury officials demanded troop withdrawals, State Department officials insisted the troops had to stay to reassure West Germany, and Defense officials, focusing on military calculations, stood somewhere in between. Good horizontal historical work, however, can reveal the complex interconnections and trade-offs that permeate most important foreign policies. This "bird's eye" view provides a more holistic picture of how policymaking actually works, allowing government officials to organize their processes to more effectively consider horizontal linkages in their work. It forces both scholars and policymakers to recognize how complicated the policy environment can be. The complexities of current US policy towards Pakistan, or China's current account surplus, for example, might today be better understood through a lens that includes horizontal historical analysis.

Chronological proportionality

How do we assess the long-term policy significance of a current policy question? Many things that seem like a very big deal when they happen can turn out to be, in the long run, less consequential than we originally imagined. Other issues that receive less contemporary attention turn out to have important long-term consequences when viewed through a historical lens. The standard that many observers use to assess the importance of an issue and policy response—media coverage—is often a misleading barometer for measuring the long-term impact.

Consider the example of the Vietnam War during the last two years of the Johnson administration. This brutal and—to many minds—misguided conflict took thousands of American lives, debilitated the US economy, and left a bitter political and cultural legacy that permanently affected American institutions. Not surprisingly, every aspect of the war in Vietnam in 1967 and 1968, from the battlefield to the influence on popular culture to the discord at the political conventions, dominated media coverage and public debate. Looking back from our current perspective, however, was the Vietnam War, as important as it was, the only international policy issue of great significance at the time? Was the war in southeast Asia even the most important *long-term* US foreign policy question of the day?

We have already seen the extraordinary legacy that the 1967 Six Day War has had for US policy in the Middle East in the recent past. The issues created by that conflict and the American policy response are not likely to go away any time soon. While the tensions leading up to the war in the Middle East and the Six-Day War itself were certainly covered in the press, the aftermath and consequences of the conflict received nowhere near the media or scholarly attention of the Vietnam War. Another example was the negotiation of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, which was opened for signature on 1 July 1968. While not ignored, neither the media nor the public debate gave any indication that the NPT was the most important arms control treaty ever signed, with implications that would shape world politics in the decades to come. Longer-term developments, such as the emerging stability and détente in central Europe, and the evolving thaw between the United States and China, had equally important long-term consequence for world politics. Lacking a singular event or crises, these tectonic shifts in world politics were underplayed, at least until Nixon's visit to China in 1972.

This is not meant to diminish the historical importance of the Vietnam

War, or in our own times, the war in Iraq. It is merely to point out such events can crowd out the focus on other, less "noisy" developments that may have equal or even greater long-term consequences. Developing the historian's skill of chronological proportionality can help a policymaker see the bigger picture. The rise of China, shifting demographic trends, or changes in sources of energy supply, may turn out to have equal or even greater long-term consequences for US global policy than the Iraq War, even if they do not dominate the front page of the newspaper in the same way.

Unintended consequences

History is also good at exposing the ironies, dilemmas, and unintended consequences of policy. Consider again the consequences of the Vietnam War, and the counterfactual of a US victory. What would have resulted if America had prevailed in helping South Vietnam defeat the Viet Cong insurgency? One plausible scenario would have seen the United States bogged down and drained in southeast Asia, forever pouring in blood and treasure to support a weak state surrounded by enemies. If the United States had "won," China and Russia might have subsumed their mutual enmity to the larger goal of reducing American power in Asia. The United States did lose the war in southeast Asia, however, and did bring its forces home. The military defeat of the United States, though a terrible, humiliating drag on American power and reputation, ushered in a period of intense reassessment within many institutions, particularly military, which arguably had great long-term benefits for American power.

More importantly, the prospect of a US withdrawal may have hastened the bitter Sino-Soviet split. By the late 1970s, China had become our ally in our struggle against a mutual enemy, Russia, a turn that had immeasurable but important consequences for how the Cold War ended. More surprising, China attacked a unified Vietnam. From the perspective of geopolitics, a US defeat that divided the communist world in Asia was much better than a victory, which would have led to an expensive, long-term commitment in the face of a unified communist front. And might the "weakened" status of the United States have tempted the Soviets to intervene more deeply in Africa and Afghanistan, to their long-term detriment?

Understanding that history is not always linear, and that the force of events can have powerful and unanticipated effects, would no doubt aid policymakers as they think through how the US should move forward in Iraq.

Consider the rise of Iran, which many analysts believe has been made possible by American failures in Iraq. There is some evidence that this regional power shift, which has left Saudi Arabia feeling threatened, has prodded Saudi leaders to make greater strides (including the possibility of eventually recognizing Israel) to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in order to focus on Iran. Could the American debacle in Iraq have opened up an unexpected door to moving forward on the Palestinian question? It may or may not be the case, and for the purposes of my argument, it doesn't really matter. What does matter is that possessing a historical sensibility can open your mind to unexpected and unusual causal possibilities.

This does not mean that policymakers can be expected to understand how their policies can produce unexpected, and indeed, unwanted consequences. Nor does it mean that analysts can blithely use counterfactuals to justify one policy or another. But this type of historical knowledge, emphasizing that important events almost always have unforeseen and unintended results, should provide some humility to the decision-maker, and prevent those in policy from only seeing disaster in defeats and paradise in victories.

Recognizing when policy is insignificant

A familiarity with good historical work can also help government officials understand when the making and implementing of policy is nowhere near as important as they are accustomed to thinking. In other words, history can provide them with the confidence to *do nothing*. This is true even when events or historical processes influence or even shape the policy environment.

Reflect upon the global position of the United States in the mid-1970s, after the disastrous war in Southeast Asia. There was little surface evidence to indicate that the United States was about to start an amazing 30-year economic surge that would dwarf anything seen in world history. In retrospect, however, the post-Vietnam era, a period policymakers identified as marked by steep US decline and malaise, was actually the birth date of our current age of power triggered by globalization-induced economic growth.

Consider three California-related events that happened months apart, that may have given some clues, and that had little to do with national policy decisions. The first was the creation of the first Apple computer in 1976, signaling the dawn of the high-tech age dominated by Silicon Valley and a revolution in telecommunications and information technology. The second

event was the release in 1977 of the movie *Star Wars*, the highest grossing movie of all time, highlighting the increased dominance of a US popular culture that would spread around the globe like wildfire. The final, if more obscure, event was the 1976 victory of a group of wines produced by the Napa Valley vineyard, Stag's Leap, over more established French wines in a Paris taste test, highlighting the ability of American high culture and value-added products to compete on the world stage as well.

All three stories are anecdotal and alone explained little, but combined foretold tectonic shifts in American culture and its economy that would help reshape the global landscape. There was no way of knowing, of course, how the trends represented by these three seemingly unrelated events would transform the international order. These stories serve as an important reminder to policymakers, however, that many of the events that have the most effect on the *policy environment* are not always the direct result of policy decisions. No one in Washington had much to do with the making of *Star Wars*, the first Apple computer, or the fine wines of northern California. Nor did these events have much to do with foreign policy, narrowly defined. All three, however, had enormous consequences for America's power and role in the world in the decades to come. By emphasizing the importance of factors outside of policy—culture, economic trends, innovation, and social changes—historians are more aware of these forces. Understanding this history can sensitize policymakers to the large, complex, and uncertain world outside of governmental decision-making.

Scholars and government officials focused on a narrow definition of foreign policy may look back at the global position in the 1970s with alarm or even scorn, but they should recognize the world they operate in today had its seeds in the supposed malaise and decline of the period. This should act as a caution to pundits or policymakers who claim to identify an overarching trend to the world we live in today, or who make hard and fast assessments about America's global position.

THE PERILS OF PARSIMONY AND THE PLEASURES OF THE PAST

It is natural to think of events unfolding in a transparent and linear fashion, and it is no surprise that we desire crisp, parsimonious explanations for the most important issues we face. Mix in the element of intense time pressure, and it is easy to see why most policymakers don't (or can't) embrace the complexities, uncertainties, and ambiguities that mark historical explanation.

The payoff for acquiring such skills is not always readily apparent. A familiarity with good historical scholarship will not necessarily help government officials make specific policy choices on a day-to-day basis. Nor will historical analysis provide an overarching framework or theory with which to view and understand the world. Acquiring these historical skills will, however, provide important benefits. The five concepts discussed above will allow policymakers to identify the patterns and trends that shape the policy environment. It will allow them to recognize and go beyond the surface-level picture of an event to access the deeper logic moving things. Historical analysis will provide a more finely tuned sense of the consequences of both events and ensuing policy responses. In the end, understanding these five concepts will make for more deliberate, thoughtful, and hopefully more successful US foreign policy. And there are no reasons policymakers and diplomats from other countries cannot benefit from applying these rules and methods as well.

Keeping this important audience in mind—intelligent government professionals who are often overwhelmed by the complexity and difficulty of the policy choices they face—when writing and researching about the past can only sharpen and improve scholarly work. But historians should do even more to reach out to decision-makers. They should spend more time explicitly linking their historical studies to contemporary policy questions. They should provide guidance to policymakers as to where to look for valuable information, including what authors and texts to consult, and make an effort to publish in venues and in a style that makes it easier for government officials to access their insights.

Appreciating the past for its own sake is an important mantra for the professional historian. However, this value does not have to be sacrificed (and in fact, should not be sacrificed) in order to write in a style and on subjects that would engage and educate the policy world. Like the workings of history itself, the benefits of a relationship between historians and policymakers are not obvious. The deeper one looks, however, the clearer it is that they share important interests and concerns, and are far better off with each other than without.