

## BOOK REVIEW

US Presidents and Cold War Nuclear Diplomacy  
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(Springer Nature Switzerland AG, 2021), 257



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“US Presidents and Cold War Nuclear Diplomacy” offers a comprehensive analysis of the intricate relationship between American presidents and the complex world of nuclear diplomacy during the Cold War era. Written by Aiden Warren and Joseph M Siracusa, scholars in the field of international relations, the book takes readers on a captivating journey through the critical moments that defined US nuclear policy from the aftermath of the Second World War to the end of the Cold War.

The book’s central theme revolves around the critical role played by different US presidents during the Cold War era. The authors meticulously explore American foreign policies concerning the Soviet Union, emphasizing the complex dynamics of nuclear diplomacy, nuclear armament, and power balancing patterns that characterized this tumultuous period. The book focuses mainly on the nuclear arms race, ideological conflict, and non-proliferation efforts between the US and the USSR.

The argument put forth by Warren and Siracusa highlights the significance of nuclear diplomacy, defined as the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons through diplomatic means. After the invention of the atomic bomb in 1945, global concerns, especially in the US, were centered around the potential misuse of these powerful weapons. The authors contend that nuclear

diplomacy was a crucial tool aimed at preventing the spread of nuclear weapons and their use for peaceful purposes.

The book discusses nine presidencies and four distinct historical eras during the Cold War, covering topics such as the US monopoly on nuclear weapons, America's nuclear prominence, superpower equity, and the final years of the Cold War. The introduction discusses the portrayal of the Soviets by the US, challenging the notion of the nuclear arms race as the sole narrative. It provides insights into Washington's foreign policy, the defense budget's structure and goals, the nature of American policy, and the role of the intelligence community – all geared towards deterring Soviet threats.

The book's introductory chapter investigates the events of the Cold War, emphasizing the proliferation of arms as a significant aspect. Nuclear diplomacy and arms control dynamics emerge as defining factors shaping the relationship between the Soviet Union and the US. This chapter explores communication and dialogue between the two blocs, noting a correlation between improved state relations and the signing of nuclear agreements. Conversely, strained relations impeded nuclear arms control efforts.

The second chapter, "Transition from Roosevelt to Truman," focuses on the American approach to a peaceful atomic arms race between the US and the Soviets. Secretary Henry Stimson proposed an arms race control arrangement between the two states for humanitarian and peaceful purposes. Manhattan Project scientists suggested sharing atomic secrets with the USSR to establish a foundation for arms control. However, Roosevelt awaited diplomatic opportunities from the Soviet Union. This chapter also covers the Potsdam Declaration, where the US, Britain, and China demanded unconditional surrender from Japan. Despite being offered protection of sovereignty, freedom of speech, religion, and trade, Japan ultimately withdrew from the treaty. Truman's decision to attack

Hiroshima marked the beginning of the atomic age, leading to the USSR entering the war and occupying northern Chinese areas, Japan, and southern Sakhalin.

The third chapter, “The Truman Administration and the Security Context,” discusses the Truman administration’s criticism of the Kremlin for power expansion through atomic bombs, missiles, airpower, and submarine capabilities, posing a threat to critical US security areas. The escalating mistrust shattered the grand alliance and any hope for relationship restoration. This chapter covers American national security, the Acheson-Lilienthal report, and the establishment of the United Nations Atomic Energy Commission with the Baruch Plan. The authors analyze the containment doctrine, Stalin’s desire for the Cold War to maintain his regime, Soviet military capabilities, and the economic toll of the war on their infrastructure. The role of nuclear weapons in America’s security policy is emphasized, with NSC7 and NSC 20/4 defining the Soviet expansion as a threat to communism. The objective was to pressure the Soviet Union peacefully to withdraw its influence and power until it was no longer dangerous. Truman ultimately accepted the principles of military containment. The chapter also highlights internal disputes over perspectives on the Soviet threat and effective opposition methods.

In the fourth chapter, “The End of the US Nuclear Monopoly,” Warren and Siracusa explore US perspectives on its nuclear monopoly, detailing events that led to its end, including China’s communist success and the Soviet atomic bomb detonation. The hydrogen bomb’s effects on the US and its development shifted the dynamics of nuclear strength. The revelation of the Soviet atomic bomb and China’s communist victory ended the US monopoly, prompting a reassessment of security policies. The US considered options like maintaining current policies, waging preventive war, isolating itself, or fortifying the free world rapidly.

This chapter also highlights Soviet aspirations for global dominance and emphasizes the need to counter the Kremlin's push. Moreover, it discusses China's entry into the nuclear equation, the role of the Russian and communist governments in the decision, and America's response driven by insecurity, leading to strengthened defense. 1950 is underscored as a significant year in postwar development, marked by a new phase in the Soviet Union's ambitious program. The struggle between the US and the Soviet Union is portrayed as imperialistic, with American influence expanding globally through alliances and economic assistance, forming a network of reciprocal benefits sustaining the American empire.

Chapter five, "Eisenhower and Emboldening the Nuclear Option," discusses the consensus of American Cold War strategies during Dwight D Eisenhower's presidency. Acknowledging the reality of a divided Europe established during Truman's era, the US, under Eisenhower, aimed to sustain its anti-communist stance in China, Korea, Indonesia, and other states, supported by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Truman's precision-lacking policies led to political chaos, prompting Eisenhower to adopt liberation policies. Secretary of State, Dulles, advocated brinkmanship and massive retaliation. Eisenhower focused on deterrence policies against the Soviets, facing challenges with their advancements. Graduated deterrence, adaptable responses, and second-strike capabilities replaced the dangerous massive retaliation doctrine. In sum, this chapter explores Eisenhower's role in nuclear diplomacy, the impact of political and technological developments on power balance in addressing tensions in military and economic targets, and the creation of new tactical nuclear weapons and a joint strategic planning staff up to 1960.

Chapter six, "Kennedy's Nuclear Dilemma," explores President Kennedy's nuclear strategy inherited from Eisenhower, amidst crises like the Berlin Wall and the Cuban Missile Crisis. The authors believe that Kennedy aimed to enhance American

deterrence with a firm stance against the Soviets. Despite setbacks in the Vietnam War, he signed a Limited Test Ban Treaty (LTBT) with the USSR in 1963 but could not prevent nuclear proliferation. Further, the chapter discusses Kennedy's policies, influenced by his personality and domestic and international pressures, and highlights his commitment to peaceful relations.

Chapter seven, "The Johnson Years," examines President Lyndon B Johnson's foreign policies, shaped by the Vietnam War, the nuclear arms race, and shifting global dynamics. The rationality of maintaining nuclear deterrence is acknowledged, yet the optimization of nuclear proliferation remains ambiguous. In this chapter, the authors explore the transition from bipolar to multipolar global order during Johnson's term. Despite facing challenges in West Germany and France's NATO withdrawal, Johnson pursued a flexible foreign policy, favoring détente for global stability. Treaties with the USSR, such as the Outer Space Treaty and Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT), marked the efforts to address nuclear proliferation. The emergence of China and decolonization added to the complexity of global dynamics.

Chapter eight, "The Search for Détente: Nixon and the Ford Transition," explores President Richard M Nixon's diplomatic decisions, focusing on containment and balancing global tensions. The Nixon-Kissinger approach led to strategic debates and initiatives, including treaties like SALT and ABM with the Soviets. This chapter also highlights the strengthening of US-China relations. It examines President Gerald Ford's détente policy and Nixon's Middle East and Southeast Asia initiatives

Chapter nine, "Carter's Lost Opportunity," narrates President Carter prioritized human rights as a moral and strategic obligation. The Camp David Accords with Israel and Egypt were a notable success amid challenges like arms control and nuclear proliferation. Carter's administration acknowledges the evolving world order, emphasizing the need for diverse

international relations and policies.

The last chapter, “The Tale of Two Terms: The Reagan Diplomatic Transition,” discusses Reagan’s firm stance against the USSR, his shift towards dialogue with Gorbachev, and the complexities of US-Soviet relations. It highlights Reagan’s withdrawal from SALT II, the introduction of Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), and the contrasting personalities of Reagan and Gorbachev. This chapter emphasizes the role of leadership in reshaping state relations, leading to the signing of the INF treaty and the removal of nuclear arsenals, marking the end of the Cold War.

This book is a worthwhile read. One of the book’s strengths lies in its well-organized structure, which provides a clear chronological framework for readers to follow. The argument unfolds in a manner that aligns seamlessly with the historical timeline of the Cold War, allowing readers to grasp the evolving nature of US nuclear diplomacy under different administrations. Each chapter is a carefully crafted piece of the larger puzzle, contributing to a nuanced understanding of how presidential decisions shaped the trajectory of Cold War nuclear policy.

The authors’ decision to focus on individual presidents and their distinct approaches to nuclear diplomacy adds depth to the argument. By examining the nuanced differences in leadership styles and policy priorities, the book paints a rich portrait of the complex interplay between personalities and historical circumstances that influenced US nuclear strategy.

Another quality of this book is its commitment to historical accuracy. The authors demonstrate a deep familiarity with primary sources, diplomatic archives, and declassified documents, ensuring the analysis is based on historical evidence. This scholarly rigor enhances the book’s credibility, making it a reliable resource for researchers and students.

The authors also adeptly navigate the complex web of interna-

tional relations, presenting a nuanced perspective that avoids oversimplification. By acknowledging the geopolitical realities of the time and the constraints faced by each president, the book offers a balanced portrayal of the decision-makers and the contexts in which they operated.

Lastly, the author's meticulous research and insightful analysis make this book an indispensable resource for academics and general readers interested in understanding the dynamics of international relations during a period marked by geopolitical tensions and nuclear brinkmanship.

***Reviewed by Raheela Kokab, International Relations scholar at the National Defence University (NDU), Islamabad.***