“Editorial”

James I. Matray

Editor-in-Chief

jmatray@csuchico.edu

More than a decade ago, Thomas A. Schwartz, in his review of the second edition of *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations*, noted how editors Michael J. Hogan and Thomas G. Paterson had included new essays demonstrating “the triumph of the ‘cultural turn’ within diplomatic history.” Scholars in the field no longer studied exclusively how “dead white male elites” determined events in world affairs, but instead incorporated such factors a gender, culture, and race in their analysis. They also examined the role of non-government organizations in the formulation of policy, as well as previously ignored issues such as environment, fashion, and food. “The cultural turn,” Schwartz rightly observed, “has opened up new vistas in our understanding of the various dimensions of American foreign relations . . .” However, he also wondered whether it was “really a huge detour” away from “engagement with such profound political and moral questions as war and peace, and what it is that the United States should seek to represent, strive for, and accomplish in the world.”¹ Another result of these new analytical methodologies in diplomatic history has been a de-emphasis on the role of individual leaders in the making of foreign policy. Ultimately, presidents play arguably the central role in deciding U.S. international behavior. For example, would the United States have entered World War I earlier than it did had Theodore Roosevelt been president rather than Woodrow Wilson? Would there have been war against Iraq in 2003 if Al Gore had won the presidency? Three years of Donald J. Trump’s foreign policy underscores the importance of presidents in determining the actions of the United States internationally and its impact on the course of world affairs.

Individual government officials working below the president also have played a central role in directly making key foreign policy decisions in U.S. history. For example, on 29 April 1965, U.S. Ambassador to the Dominican

1 Thomas Alan Schwartz, “Explaining the Cultural Turn—or Detour?,” *Diplomatic History* 31, no. 1 (January 2007): 143–47.

Republic William Tapley Bennett cabled President Lyndon B. Johnson that rising violence threatened U.S. citizens and anti-government rebels were receiving Soviet and Cuban support. In response, Johnson, against the recommendations of his advisors, sent U.S. troops to the island to prevent what Bennett had convinced him was a plot to install a "Communist dictatorship" in the Dominican Republic. More recently, on 25 July 1990, Ambassador April C. Glaspie, according to some scholars, tacitly gave U.S. approval to Saddam Hussein for him to invade Kuwait when she told him that the United States was not interested in his quarrel with that country. Instances of American diplomats and military officers acting on their own in making U.S. foreign policy were far more common prior to the 20th Century. Not only was it normal for them to receive relatively general instructions, but communications with Washington took months to complete. A good example of how U.S. representatives often acted on their own initiative was when early in 1848 Nicholas Trist negotiated terms for the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ending the U.S.-Mexican War that did not coincide entirely with the desires of President James K. Polk. Kenneth J. Blume, in the first article of this issue titled "Preparing the South Pacific for U.S. Influence: The USS *Narragansett* in Samoa, 1872," notes how such occurrences increased after the American Civil War during U.S. expansion into the Pacific. He provides an excellent example of how U.S. representatives abroad in the late 19th Century "could create and conduct foreign policy with little to no direction from the U.S. government . . ."

Blume examines diplomatic negotiations culminating in the signing of two treaties that U.S. Navy Commander Richard W. Meade conducted in Samoa in 1872. "Meade's motivations and actions in Samoa," he skillfully demonstrates, "provide a case study in how the interactions of naval officers, business leaders, islanders, and diplomats converged to produce early U.S. diplomacy in the Pacific." Blume first explains how historians have described the last quarter of the 19th Century as the prelude to American imperialism, but emphasizes that the U.S. diplomatic corps was small and expansion was gradual and episodic. Commander Meade and his ship, the USS *Narragansett*, set out in 1871 on a mission to find coaling stations, seek trade opportunities, and promote science in the Pacific. It was Meade's decision to visit Samoa, which already was well known in Europe and the United States for its strategic value. Indeed, Germans had bought considerable land there. "In the classic late 19th Century tradition of the independent American naval officer," Blume writes, "Meade's actions in Samoa over the next few months were largely of his own making." Responding to encouragement from a U.S. shipping firm, he worked with its representative and, in just three days, secured with a local chief a commercial treaty granting broad rights to foreigners and also regulating alcohol and prostitution.

A second treaty provided for an exclusive U.S. right for a naval station at Pago Pago. Meade, however, wanted Samoa to stay independent. He therefore interceded to end fighting between feuding factions, persuading them to sign articles of confederation. Although the U.S. Senate refused to ratify his treaties, Blume concludes, “Meade’s efforts provided an important ‘first start’ for the United States in Samoa and, quite possibly, prevented German annexation of the islands in the early 1870s.”

Meade was not the only American sailor-diplomat during the 19th Century. Nor was he the first. Nearly two decades earlier, Commodore Matthew C. Perry famously had ended Japan’s isolation from the outside world. Like Meade, he believed that the United States would benefit economically from expanded trade in Asia, but was more purposeful. After studying Charles Wilkes’ report on his exploration of the Pacific from 1838–1842, Perry gained approval from the Fillmore administration for his plan to open Japan as a first step in ending British commercial dominance in China. As is well known, Perry’s arrival in Yedo Bay in July 1853 was dramatic because two of his warships were steamers. He presented a letter from President Franklin Pierce demanding that the Japanese sign a treaty agreeing to protect shipwrecked sailors and establish commercial relations. Japan complied the following February, signing the Treaty of Kanagawa. But the agreement only opened two ports to trade. In another example of individual initiative in the making of U.S. foreign policy, Townsend Harris, the first American representative to Japan, achieved Perry’s vision for full access to the nation. He did so despite extraordinary opposition, as the Japanese waged against him a campaign of hostility and harassment to force him to leave. Despite having no diplomatic contact with Washington for eighteen months, Harris negotiated a treaty in July 1858 opening more ports for trade, fixing tariff rates, granting criminal and civil extraterritorial rights, and exchanging of diplomatic representation. The pattern that Perry and Harris established of U.S. representatives determining early Japanese-American would continue, as Susanna Fessler describes in the second essay of this issue titled “Gunboat Diplomacy of a Different Kind: Robert H. Pruyn and Japan’s Purchase of U.S. Warships, 1862–1865.”

Fessler describes how Pruyn, the U.S. minister, carefully handled the negotiation and implementation of “a contract between the Shogunate of Japan and private agents in the United States for the construction of three ships of war” that it would use against “loyalist forces who supported the emperor.” Previous historians, she convincingly argues, have erred in accusing Pruyn of mismanaging the deal and using the funds for personal financial gain. After replacing Harris in April 1862, he completed discussions for the ship purchases, resulting in a contract to buy a gunboat and two sloops, with the Albany

Iron and Saw Works, a firm he and his brother-in-law owned, supervising the project. Contrary to the claim of prior historians, Pruyn did not hide his actions from Secretary of State William Seward, but instead “sent his dispatch . . . one day after the Japanese made the first down payment” on 28 October. They also allege that he was “a conniving scoundrel” who misrepresented himself as a general, when, as Fessler shows, he held that rank. But his main problems were the wartime fluxuation in the value of greenbacks and the rising costs of construction and escalating tariffs that raised the costs of the ships beyond what Japan had agreed to pay. When the price reached double the contractual amount in March 1863, Pruyn decided to proceed with the cheaper gunboat alone. Then Japanese firing on a U.S. ship caused the Lincoln administration in October 1864 to block the departure of the completed *Fusiyama* until the war ended. Upon arrival early in 1866, Japanese officials protested paying a higher price for just one ship, but Pruyn, now back in the United States, persuaded them to relent and use the balance to buy another vessel. Fessler demonstrates that Pruyn “acted with honesty and integrity” and, “through perseverance, prudence, and luck, . . . managed to pull the deal back from the brink of disaster, thus promoting further amicable relations between the two countries.”

Individual initiative in policy making has occurred regularly in U.S. relations with China as well. In 1844, Caleb Cushing in the Treaty of Wangshia—the first accord between the two nations—gained better terms than in Britain’s Treaty of Nanking, adding extraterritoriality in civil cases. In 1868, Anson Burlingame, after retiring as U.S. minister to China, represented the Chinese government in negotiating an agreement in which the United States recognized sole Chinese territorial jurisdiction in China, left all future trade privileges to China’s discretion, and disavowed any intention to interfere in China’s internal affairs. His actions helped create the myth that the United States was China’s main friend and patron. Early in 1898, U.S. Minister Charles Denby urged President William McKinley to condemn European imperialism in China and press the Chinese government to implement reforms so that it could defend itself. A year later, John Hay would issue his first Open Door Note. Paul S. Reinsch, U.S. minister to China from 1913 to 1919, loosely interpreted his instructions to vigorously pursue concessions for U.S. corporations to promote China’s economic strength sufficient to preserve its sovereignty. During World War II, the China Lobby, a loose and disparate collection of private citizens and members of Congress, worked to promote assistance for Chinese leader Chiang Kai-shek. In the 1960s, academics and private American citizens lobbied for normalization of relations with the People’s Republic of China, helping persuade the Nixon and

Carter administrations to follow their advice. Non-government organizations worked thereafter to maintain cordial U.S.-China relations, as Priscilla Roberts demonstrates in this issue's last article titled "Our Friends Don't Understand Our Policies and Our Situation': Informal U.S.-China Dialogues Following Tiananmen."

Roberts describes how the National Committee on U.S.-China Relations (NCUSCR), the Council on Foreign Relations, the Asia Society, and the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations gradually developed contacts during the 1980s with Chinese elites and thereby supplemented formal Sino-American relations. "From the mid-1970s, the NCUSCR—with State Department funding—[handled] the growing number of short-term exchange visits on both sides," she explains, "which soon expanded to include not simply sports and cultural events, but students and delegations of various kinds of Chinese experts . . ." In 1984, the NCUSCR joined with the Chinese People's Institute of Foreign Affairs to host the first "U.S.-China Dialogue." "Around thirty to forty top-level American and Chinese elite leaders would meet for three days in private sessions" to discuss policies between the two nations and "specific topics in economics and trade, security, and politics." In between, American and Chinese journalists, academics, non-government organization members, and former government officials met in other key meetings, briefings, roundtables, and conferences. From the start, participants mostly "talked past each other," but exchanges became contentious after China's government brutally suppressed student protests in June 1989. "At the Fourth U.S.-China Dialogue meeting in Beijing in early 1990," Roberts reports, "the American and Chinese participants assumed radically different positions, with the Chinese complaining bitterly about U.S. interference in China's internal affairs." But they judged continued contacts to be valuable and the U.S.-China Dialogues continued until the eleventh and last meeting in June 2002. Roberts concludes that "the public-private networks of American China watchers that had developed over the prior two to three decades . . . functioned to mitigate the impact of 4 June 1989 and help rebuild the Sino-American relationship."

For several years, the *Journal of American-East Asian Relations* has maintained the practice of publishing at least one theme issue annually. The most recent example appeared in the second issue of 2018 titled "The United States and East Asia Under President Trump: A One-Year Retrospective" with Mitchell B. Lerner serving as guest editor. Unfortunately, there was no theme issue in 2019 because of unexpected events. Happily, the *JAEAR* will resume this tradition with its second publication in 2020 being a theme issue with the tentative title "The Korean War Prisoners Choosing Neutral Nations: Their Global

Odyssey from China and Korea to India and then Latin America.” Dr. David C. Chang, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, will guest edit the publication of three articles that the authors presented in March 2019 at the Association of Asian Studies Conference in Denver, Colorado. The editor-in-chief welcomes the receipt of proposals for future theme issues.