Congress and the Cold War

This book provides the first historical interpretation of the congressional response to the entire Cold War. Using a wide variety of sources, including several manuscript collections opened specifically for this study, the book challenges the popular and scholarly image of a weak Cold War Congress, in which the unbalanced relationship between the legislative and executive branches culminated in the escalation of the U.S. commitment in Vietnam, which in turn paved the way for a congressional resurgence best symbolized by the passage of the War Powers Act in 1973.

Instead, understanding the congressional response to the Cold War requires a more flexible conception of the congressional role in foreign policy, focused on three facets of legislative power: the use of spending measures, the internal workings of a Congress increasingly dominated by subcommittees, and the ability of individual legislators to affect foreign affairs by changing the way that policymakers and the public considered international questions.

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<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>ABM</td>
<td>Anti-ballistic missile</td>
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<tr>
<td>ACDA</td>
<td>Arms Control and Disarmament Agency</td>
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<td>ADA</td>
<td>Americans for Democratic Action</td>
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<td>AEC</td>
<td>Atomic Energy Commission</td>
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<td>AID</td>
<td>Agency for International Development</td>
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<td>AIPAC</td>
<td>America Israel Public Affairs Committee</td>
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<td>AWACS</td>
<td>Airborne Warning and Control System</td>
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<tr>
<td>CIA</td>
<td>Central Intelligence Agency</td>
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<td>CR</td>
<td><em>Congressional Record</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Democrat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DCI</td>
<td>Director of Central Intelligence</td>
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<tr>
<td>ESSFRC</td>
<td><em>Executive Sessions of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>FBI</td>
<td>Federal Bureau of Investigation</td>
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<td>FMS</td>
<td>Foreign Military Sales</td>
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<tr>
<td>FNLA</td>
<td>National Front for the Liberation of Angola</td>
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<tr>
<td>FPD</td>
<td>Foreign Policy Defense</td>
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<tr>
<td>FRUS</td>
<td><em>Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>HUAC</td>
<td>House Un-American Activities Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>ICBM</td>
<td>Inter-continental ballistic missile</td>
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<tr>
<td>IPA</td>
<td>International Police Academy</td>
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<tr>
<td>IPR</td>
<td>Institute of Pacific Relations</td>
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<tr>
<td>JCAE</td>
<td>Joint Committee on Atomic Energy</td>
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<td>JCS</td>
<td>Joint Chiefs of Staff</td>
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<td>JEC</td>
<td>Joint Economic Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>MAD</td>
<td>Mutually Assured Destruction</td>
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<tr>
<td>MaRV</td>
<td>Maneuverable reentry vehicle</td>
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<tr>
<td>MCPL</td>
<td>Members of Congress for Peace through Law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MIRV</td>
<td>Multiple independently targeted reentry vehicles</td>
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<tr>
<td>MPLA</td>
<td>Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Abbreviations Used in the Text

NCPAC National Conservative Political Action Committee
NLF National Liberation Front
NSC National Security Council
PIS Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee
PRC People’s Republic of China
PSI Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations
R Republican
SALT Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty
SHAFR Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations
SISS Senate Internal Security Subcommittee
START Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty
UN United Nations
UNITA National Union for the Total Independence of Angola
Acknowledgments

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Over the past several years, I have benefited from the friendship of Abigail Rosenthal, whose husband, Jerry Martin of the American Council of Trustees and Alumni, has helped me in many important ways. Jerry and ACTA’s Anne Neal arranged for a generous grant that covered expenses for research trips to several manuscript collections (those of John Tunney, John Culver, Samuel Stratton, and Thomas Downey) that were specifically opened for me. Congressman Downey not only gave me full access to his papers but also time for a personal interview.

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The historical offices of both chambers of Congress are concrete examples of how government funds can improve the study of American political
Acknowledgments

insitutions. Ken Kato of the House Office of History and Preservation provided keen insights on a draft of the manuscript; without his unfailingly helpful suggestions, I would have missed many necessary political science works. All historians of Congress, meanwhile, owe an enormous debt to the Senate Historical Office’s Don Ritchie, who has overseen publication of the invaluable Executive Sessions of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee series as well as the Senate Historical Office’s collection of oral histories. As he had for my previous books, Don critiqued a draft of this manuscript.

As a professor at the City University of New York, I am fortunate to work at an institution replete with examples of appropriate academic leadership. Chancellor Matthew Goldstein has fostered a renaissance at the university with his emphasis on quality and the need for a faculty that values research. Trustees Jeffrey Wiesenfeld, Randy Mastro, and Kay Pesile have worked consistently to improve standards at CUNY.

During the writing of this book, I met two people who gave me a crash course in how lawyers at the top of their profession use government documents, and in the process I dramatically improved my skills as a historian. Vice Chancellor Rick Schaffer is the model of integrity in the CUNY General Counsel’s office. And I cannot say enough about my attorney, Bob Rosen – a friend whose remarkable intellect yielded editorial guidance that I often found myself recalling in writing this book.

At Brooklyn College, I teach a variety of electives in political, legal, and diplomatic history – what some have called the study of “figures in power.” I have found students strongly receptive to studying this kind of history, and I have learned a great deal from them in turn. This book would not have appeared without the efforts of Dan Weininger, Christine Sciascia, Brad Appell, Isaac Franco, Martine Jean, Yehuda Katz, Ryan Sacks, Mike Duchaine, Jenna Schlanger, Bobby Hardamon, Samantha Rosenblum, George Ionnaidis, and John Makaryus. John and Dan also served as my research assistants – and frequently forced me to redefine how I thought about the events detailed on the following pages.

This book is dedicated to the nine friends and colleagues who stood by me through a very difficult period between 2001 and 2003, each at personal – and, in some cases, professional – cost. As head of the rump lawyers’ committee, David Berger offered me his wit, wisdom, and sense of perspective. Andy Meyer never failed to lift my spirits or remind me of the positive aspects of academic life. Instead of quietly retiring, Lenny Gordon served as my de facto protector. Phil Napoli (and Marilyn, Abby, and Adrianna) provided a second family in New York. Steve Remy greeted me with fairness and then with intellectual companionship. Eric Steinberg helped on a variety of levels, all while modestly denying that he was doing anything special. The personal, professional, and intellectual integrity of Paula Fichtner never ceases to amaze me. Finally, two colleagues, Jamie Sanders and Margaret King, endured
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especially unfair behavior after they refused to compromise their principles; both, in different ways, displayed remarkable courage in the process. I would have considered myself lucky if, at some point in my career, I had worked with even one colleague of the intellectual and personal caliber of David, Andy, Lenny, Phil, Steve, Eric, Paula, Jamie, and Margaret. That I can count all as my friends is something for which I am truly grateful.
Prologue

Diego Garcia attracted widespread national attention in 1991, when it served as the only U.S. Navy base from which offensive air operations were launched during Operation Desert Storm. Located 1,000 miles southwest of India, the 17-square-mile atoll described by *Time* as “one of those incongruous specks on the map that once posted the British Empire” passed under U.S. lease in 1966.

The island provided strategically placed access to the Indian subcontinent, Central Asia, and the Middle East. After the Iranian Revolution in 1979, Diego Garcia experienced the most dramatic buildup of any U.S. overseas military installation since the Vietnam War, culminating in completion of a $500 million construction project a few years before the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait.

The Gulf War did not represent the first time in which Diego Garcia’s fate intersected with momentous national events. In early 1974, ignoring formal protests from the governments of India, New Zealand, Australia, and Sri Lanka, the Navy requested $29 million to expand what was then a limited communications facility into the beginnings of a full-fledged military base. “In terms of political implications and potential for troublemaking,” the *Baltimore Sun* noted at the time, “Diego Garcia has dimensions that warrant a full-scale congressional study.”

A highly charged debate ensued in the House of Representatives: after New York Democrat Bella Abzug came out against the Navy’s scheme, Wayne Hays indicated that while he knew little of the issue, he understood that “our presence in the Indian Ocean is going to upset Mrs. [Indira] Gandhi and... that it upsets the gentlewoman from New York.” The notoriously acerbic Ohio Democrat could not “think of two better reasons to be for it.”

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1 *Time*, 1 April 1974.
4 120 Congressional Record [hereafter *CR*], 93rd Congress, 2nd session, p. 9843 (4 April 1974).
5 120 *CR*, 93rd Congress, 2nd session, p. 9843 (4 April 1974).
Prologue

The plan’s fate remained uncertain throughout the summer of 1974; opponents hoped to use the final House debate on the matter, scheduled for August 9, to rally support from a public wary of post-Vietnam overseas commitments. This particular discussion, however, received virtually no notice, either from the media or within the lower chamber itself, since Minority Leader John Rhodes interrupted consideration of the measure to announce that Richard Nixon had become the first president to resign, replaced by Vice President Gerald Ford. Roebbed of public attention, the critics’ amendment failed overwhelmingly. Opponents of the Navy’s plan regrouped in the Senate, however, and a conference committee between the two branches agreed to postpone final determination of the matter for a year. Congressional scholar Barry Blechman correctly termed this procedural gambit “a move typical of legislative decisionmaking.”

One of the highest-profile legislators seeking to block the Diego Garcia expansion, Iowa senator Harold Hughes, described his comrades’ philosophy as a “new internationalism,” based on the “demilitarization of foreign policy,” with an increased emphasis on cultural and economic factors. This approach would replace the bankrupt “old internationalism,” which had relied on armed intervention, secret alliances, and military bases. With little chance that the executive would embrace this approach, the Iowa senator reasoned, only an empowered Congress could produce a more moral foreign policy.

The new internationalists were one of two significant factions that attempted to marshal the institutional powers of Congress to remake Cold War foreign policy. Congressional power, in this respect, was value-neutral, since the other bloc to pursue an ambitious legislative foreign policy role championed a conservative nationalist agenda. In the early 1950s, the “revisionists” (in that they claimed to desire a “revision” of Cold War liberalism) demanded a more rigorous prosecution of the Cold War at home, a greater focus on East Asia, and recognition of the ideological dangers of aiding the social democratic governments of Western Europe.

In the end, both the revisionists and the new internationalists failed in their efforts, and their leading advocates paid the ultimate political price – loss of their seats in Congress.

What commentator Walter Lippmann termed the Cold War – the diplomatic, strategic, and ideological contest between the United States and the Soviet Union – opened with an institutional memory of an exceptionally active and powerful legislative branch. In 1919 and 1920, a combination of ideological disagreements, personal rivalry, and institutional jealousy coalesced in the

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6 120 CR, 93rd Congress, 2nd session, p. 27592 (9 Aug. 1974).
Prologue

successful campaign to block U.S. membership in the League of Nations, which served only as the most spectacular assertion of congressional power following World War I. Shortly before the Senate considered the Treaty of Versailles, Woodrow Wilson bypassed Congress and sent American troops to revolutionary Russia, and legislators threatened the ultimate sanction: a resolution introduced by California senator Hiram Johnson to cut off funds for the intervention failed by a perilously close tie vote. What Acting Secretary of State Frank Polk termed a demonstration of the “critical spirit of Congress” convinced the administration to withdraw U.S. forces. If anything, Congress assumed a more aggressive posture in the 1920s, attempting to prevent U.S. military intervention in the Caribbean Basin, and in the mid-1930s, especially through the efforts of the Nye Committee, which investigated the U.S. entrance into World War I. Secretary of State Cordell Hull complained that the legislative branch, by approving the Neutrality Acts of 1935 and 1936, had usurped “the constitutional and traditional power of the Executive to conduct the foreign relations of the United States.”

Some common patterns guided the interwar congressional approach to foreign relations. A willingness to use roll-call votes on appropriations matters, even on issues such as military spending, enhanced Congress’s constitutionally designated abilities to influence international affairs. The prevalence of treaties heightened the importance of the “advise and consent” role that the Constitution assigned to the Senate. Internally, Congress settled into a stable bureaucratic pattern in which the House of Representatives played a minor role and the Foreign Relations Committee reigned supreme in the Senate, producing a relatively small “foreign policy elite” composed of Foreign Relations Committee members and the few other senators who for personal, political, or ideological reasons exhibited intense interest in international affairs.

This structure, however, was unsustainable after World War II. The willingness of the federal government to use its financial might for foreign policy purposes forced Congress to consider the relationship between its appropriations power and international affairs. In addition, a bipartisan consensus came to interpret such undertakings as the Nye Committee and the Neutrality Acts as embodying an excessively aggressive implementation of congressional power. Finally, the advent of nuclear weapons placed the government on what amounted to a permanent war footing, spawning a new

interpretation of constitutional theory that redefined the commander-in-chief clause to increase the president’s freedom to act unilaterally. The early Cold War, accordingly, is not remembered as a period of intense congressional activism; Michigan senator Arthur Vandenberg complained at the time that issues seemed to reach the legislature only when “they have developed to a point where Congressional discretion is pathetically restricted.”

The reality was considerably more complex. In 1947, even as the administration was uniting behind diplomat George Kennan’s containment doctrine, three foreign policy alternatives enjoyed strong support in Congress. The most tenacious opposition to the Truman Doctrine came from a small group of liberals, led by Florida senator Claude Pepper, who believed that extending military assistance to the undemocratic regimes in Greece and Turkey would contradict the internationalist ideals for which the United States fought in World War II. To the administration’s right, a sizable bloc led by William Knowland in the Senate and Walter Judd in the House demanded that the administration reorient its foreign policy toward East Asia by aiding the nationalists in China’s civil war. Finally, nationalists, such as the unscrupulous Pat McCarran, questioned any initiative that would threaten U.S. sovereignty and feared that an activist foreign policy would strengthen the federal government. They instead advocated concentrating on the Cold War at home by cracking down on alleged Communist sympathizers.

Truman spent most of his term addressing the consequences of this shaky base of support. He was hampered further by the era’s ineffectual Democratic congressional leadership, few of whose members were entirely convinced by the merits of the containment doctrine. Working with internationalist Republicans was therefore vital: more than flattery was at stake in Dean Acheson’s attempts to woo the likes of Vandenberg and his ideological colleagues, Henry Cabot Lodge and Alexander Smith. The trio chastised the administration for conceiving of containment in realpolitik terms and recommended – successfully – framing Cold War foreign policy in a manner more consistent with traditional U.S. ideals of democracy, human rights, and self-determination. The unusual breakdown of Congress thus played an important role in the early stages of the Cold War, but in a different way than has been commonly perceived. The temperaments, ideologies, and inclinations of the internationalist Republicans made them players on virtually every key issue of the day, in a bipartisan foreign policy where formal and informal powers seamlessly intersected.

In 1949 and 1950, however, a combination of events – the Communist triumph in China, the Soviet testing of an atomic bomb, Joseph McCarthy’s allegations of Communist penetration of the State Department, passage of the McCarran Internal Security Act, and, most important, the outbreak of

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hostilities in Korea – doomed the minimal trust between the parties upon which bipartisan foreign policy rested. The leading GOP internationalists passed from the scene (Vandenberg died in 1951, Lodge lost his seat the following year), and a radically different conception of congressional power emerged. Best captured in the approaches of Pat McCarran, Joe McCarthy, and John Bricker, the revisionists challenged Truman’s authority to send troops to Europe, demanded increased legislative control over internal security measures, recommended alliances with right-wing regimes internationally, and championed a constitutional amendment to prevent treaties from superseding domestic legislation.

Eventually the group overreached: the Senate censured McCarthy in December 1954, a few months after it had rejected Bricker’s proposed constitutional amendment. McCarran’s death the same year removed the bloc’s most powerful Democrat. The trio’s effects, however, lingered long after their departure from the scene, as their activities linked the idea of enhanced congressional power with a right-wing foreign policy agenda, making liberals skittish about championing a strong Congress in international affairs.

The revisionists’ collapse eliminated from the political culture the most formidable critics of what was, in many ways, a postwar constitutional revolution, characterized by the dramatic decline of congressional power over war and treaties. Ambitious members of Congress, however, pursued other avenues to influence affairs. McCarthy, for instance, was the most prominent senator to use a subcommittee to advance his own international agenda, but his activities are best viewed as part of a broader decentralization of power within Congress on national security matters. Overall, the number of foreign policy subcommittees in the Senate alone grew from 7 in 1946 to 31 two decades later, and Dwight Eisenhower’s second term witnessed the establishment of 4 important subcommittees, each chaired by a contender for the 1960 Democratic presidential nomination.¹⁴ The quartet’s performance highlights the importance of looking beyond the traditional standards of measurement when analyzing the congressional role in the Cold War. The amorphous committee structure gave senators an avenue for direct influence – by facilitating informal ties with members of the national bureaucracy, by using public hearings that sought to shape the course of political debate, and by providing a vehicle for marshaling the appropriations power. In the end, subcommittee government confirmed Dean Acheson’s aphorism, “The route from planning to actions leads through the committees to legislation.”¹⁵

While its war-making and treaty-making functions atrophied in the post-war years, Congress displayed a mixed record in its third major constitutional

venue relating to foreign policy – the appropriations power. On defense appropriations bills, little initiative appeared until the late 1960s. But congressional involvement with foreign aid was extensive from the program’s inception, since overseas assistance so clearly derived from the appropriations power. Foreign aid also allowed the body in which all fiscal matters traditionally originate, the House of Representatives, to play a greater international role than was the case before World War II. Louisiana congressman Otto Passman, chair of the subcommittee with jurisdiction over the program’s funding, regularly secured a reduction of 20 to 25 percent of the amount requested by the executive; in 1960, the London Times described Passman as “almost a law to himself on foreign aid.”

Politically, the program’s unpopularity provided such a freedom to resist executive branch policies that one Senate aide, noting that political survival dictated his boss becoming “known as an articulate critic of the Administration on at least one issue,” observed that foreign aid had “so little public support that it is a tempting choice.”

For the early postwar period, foreign aid was primarily targeted by congressional conservatives worried about its excessive cost and the support that it provided for left-of-center regimes. As long as these conservatives remained the only opposition, a bipartisan coalition of northern Democrats and moderate Republicans ensured the program’s survival. But beginning in the early 1960s, the program started coming under attack from a group that foreign aid officials labeled the “dissident liberals.” Senators such as George McGovern, Albert Gore, Frank Church, Wayne Morse, and Ernest Gruening contended that assistance too often had gone to dictatorial regimes solely because of their anti-Communist credentials. These legislators began offering amendments to deny aid to governments that came to power through undemocratic means, and they gradually expanded their efforts to launch an attack on military aid that veered toward repudiating Cold War liberalism itself.

This opposition occurred at a critical moment, for in the early 1960s foreign aid assumed a new importance. John Kennedy’s counterinsurgency theories dictated a considerable expansion in military aid expenditures; the administration also based its boldest new international initiative, the Alliance for Progress, on a multi-year commitment of economic and military assistance to Latin America. Unfortunately for Kennedy, in 1963, Passman’s conservatives and the dissident liberals formed an awkward alliance that produced what U.S. News & World Report described as the “foreign aid

17 Phil to Thomas McIntyre, 6 Oct. 1963, Box 99, Series III, Thomas McIntyre Papers, University of New Hampshire.
18 Larry O’Brien, “Memorandum for the President,” 4 Nov. 1963, Box 53, President’s Office File, John Kennedy Presidential Library.