In 1990 Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan caustically observed that “the neglect of congressional history is something of a scandal of American scholarship.”¹ The historiography of American foreign relations for the most part confirms Moynihan’s observation. Insufficient attention to congressional influence has yielded a distorted perspective, especially in works dealing with the Cold War. Many fundamental questions regarding the legislature’s role in the formation and implementation of postwar U.S. foreign policy remain unexplored. Although some of these questions do not yield themselves to an intensive exploration of congressional influence, any work focusing on the U.S. foreign policy decision-making process or on domestic ideological debates cannot omit the role of Congress.

The tendency to overlook Congress has stemmed from many factors. For one thing, historiographical developments have conspired against a prominent place for the legislature. The early luminaries of diplomatic history, such as Samuel Flagg Bemis, Dexter Perkins, and Arthur Whitaker, focused their research on the presidency, the State Department, and the foreign ministries of the countries with which the United States interacted. In addition, orthodox historians tended to frame their questions in a way that allowed them to avoid inquiring into the type of domestic political, constitutional, and legislative disputes in which Congress traditionally has played a major role. Bemis’s book on Jay’s Treaty, which ends before the highly charged debate in the House of Representatives in 1795–1796 on the treaty’s implementation, exemplifies the pattern. Moreover, the traditionalist historians concentrated mainly on the diplomacy of the early republic, when the power of Congress as a whole was relatively weak and the body played a comparatively minor role in foreign policy.² This approach was perhaps unsurprising given the realpolitik tenor of U.S. foreign policy during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, but it unduly influenced the Cold War interpretations of

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fered by orthodox historians. For instance, Herbert Feis, perhaps the most prolific and certainly the most insightful of the early Cold War scholars, focused almost exclusively on state-to-state relations in his attempt to explain and assign responsibility for the origins of the Cold War.³

Although revisionist historians have sought to distinguish themselves from traditionalists by exploring the relationship between domestic forces and the conduct of U.S. foreign policy, they too have rarely delved into the activities of Congress. Concentrating instead on the influence of more broadly based economic or ideological interests associated with the U.S. economy’s capitalist structure, they have generally treated the U.S. government as a monolithic actor. For example, The New Empire, Walter LaFeber’s study of Gilded Age foreign relations, essentially ignores the congressional anti-expansionist coalition that frustrated almost all of the executive-sponsored initiatives that the volume details, including William Seward’s attempt to purchase the Danish West Indies, Ulysses Grant’s scheme to annex the Dominican Republic, and the Frelighuysen-Zaíbal treaty with Nicaragua. The revisionist works that do include Congress—such as William Appleman Williams’s The Roots of American Empire—almost always minimize congressional influence. Williams does not treat Congress as an independent actor, but simply as a source of quotations that sustain his argument on the consensus supposedly behind American economic expansion. Standard revisionist interpretations of the early stages of the Cold War, such as works by LaFeber and Gabriel Kolko, share little with Feis apart from a tendency to bypass Congress and to focus on the executive branch as the key to understanding the U.S. approach to the Cold War.⁴

A similar pattern of relegating Congress to the periphery has characterized the reinvigorated debates now waged over U.S. foreign policy and the early Cold War. Except for the typical obliging references to Senator Arthur Vandenberg, most works that fall into the category of postrevisionism give

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short shrift to the complexities of securing congressional support for novel and expensive initiatives, including the 1946 loan to Great Britain, the Marshall Plan of 1947, the creation of the national security state, and the funding of the remarkable expansion of the defense establishment after the outbreak of the Korean War. Congress virtually never appears in the work of John Lewis Gaddis or other leading postrevisionists. Melvyn Leffler's *Preponderance of Power* justifiably attracted widespread praise, but it, like the pioneering works of revisionism and postrevisionism of the 1960s and 1970s, focuses almost exclusively on the executive branch. Indeed, the book's bibliography includes only one congressional manuscript collection, that of H. Alexander Smith of New Jersey—a thoughtful, moderate Republican. Moreover, reflecting the shared bias of traditionalists, revisionists, and postrevisionists alike, no prominent review of the volume mentioned this oversight.5

Among recent studies of U.S. foreign relations, Fredrik Logevall's *Choosing War*, which explores U.S. policy toward Vietnam from mid-1963 to mid-1965, demonstrates the benefits of incorporating the congressional perspective. Logevall's meticulously researched volume combines substantial discussion of the international perspective of the war with an equally detailed analysis of the political and legislative situation that confronted Lyndon Johnson. Logevall not only offers extensive coverage of the congressional role in the war, but also uses the widespread skepticism in Congress about the Johnson administration's policy to strengthen his argument that the administration and Johnson himself deliberately chose war, spurning alternatives such as negotiation or neutralization. It is encouraging to see that some younger scholars are also beginning to pay more attention to the role of Congress. Andrew Johns, one of Logevall's students, has been studying the attitudes of congressional Republicans toward Vietnam, and Jeffrey Bass has recently provided the first sustained analysis of the views espoused not merely by anti-war Democrats but by the entire Senate Democratic caucus.6

Practical reasons have contributed to the weak coverage of Congress. Unlike material housed in the various presidential libraries or documents from other executive agencies sorted in the National Archives, congressional archives are spread out across the country, usually in the home states of the various senators and representatives. Graduate students facing decisions about possible dissertation topics, and even senior scholars, understandably prefer

the more centralized access that presidential libraries afford. Trips to many out-of-the-way archives can be expensive and inconvenient. To investigate even ten of the senators most active on foreign policy issues during the 1960s—J. William Fulbright, Richard Russell, Frank Church, Wayne Morse, George McGovern, Ernest Gruening, Henry Jackson, John Tower, John Stennis, and Stuart Symington—a scholar would have to travel to the Universities of Arkansas, Georgia, Oregon, Washington, Alaska-Fairbanks, and Missouri, Boise State University, Mississippi State University, Southwestern (Texas) University, and Princeton University. Moreover, there would be no guarantee that these journeys would yield anything of value, since the papers of postwar members of the upper chamber are of widely varying quality. The John Culver collection includes detailed staff memoranda, and the Frank Church Papers contain occasional personal letters; but many of the other collections are like that of Senator Joseph Clark, whose papers consist almost entirely of published background material of no direct relationship to the senator’s activities. Moreover, while the Church Papers at Boise State’s Albertson Library are impeccably organized—down to the file folder—a more typical case is that of the Culver Papers, which remain in the boxes sent to the archives following the Iowa senator’s defeat in 1980.

The prevailing weakness of specialized studies of Congress further discourages historians of U.S. foreign relations from studying congressional issues. Institutional histories of Congress, which are quite rare in any case, mostly explore domestic affairs and rarely cover the post–World War II years, which are regarded as the domain of political scientists. Instead, biographies are the field’s most popular genre.

Although biographical studies may not be the historian’s usual fare, they can be of great use. The new surge of biographies of key members of the postwar Congress is particularly valuable for those studying the Senate during the Cold War. Three studies of twentieth-century chairmen of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee—William Widenor’s *Henry Cabot Lodge and American Foreign Policy*, Randall Woods’s *Fulbright*, and LeRoy Ashby’s *Fighting the Congress and the Cold War*

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Odds—are all well-researched monographs that provide the background needed to incorporate their subjects into the foreign policy of the time.\textsuperscript{8} Cambridge University Press has issued an abridged version of the Woods biography that focuses exclusively on Fulbright’s foreign policy activities. The volume details the transformation of the Arkansas senator from a somewhat reluctant Cold Warrior who accepted executive supremacy into an outspoken critic of the Cold War who demanded a greater role for the Senate in foreign policy, and it also supplies a stunning bureaucratic history of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, seen largely through the relationship between Fulbright and the committee’s longtime staff director, Carl Marcy. Ashby, for his part, draws on the Church Papers and over 100 interviews to provide the best coverage of the Senate of the 1970s, a period in which Church was highly influential, first as chair of a special committee investigating the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and then as chair of the Foreign Relations Committee.

Unfortunately, too many congressional biographies focus so closely on the life of the profiled figure that they ignore the wider context that would be of use to diplomatic historians. Gilbert Fite’s study of Richard Russell, the chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee from the mid-1950s through the early 1970s, is all too typical in its meager treatment of the politics of the committee and the committee’s broader role in the debates of the era. This oversight is especially problematic given Russell’s prominence at various levels. The newly released tapes from the Lyndon B. Johnson Library reveal that the Georgia senator played an even more important role in foreign policy during the early stages of Johnson’s term than historians previously realized. Within Congress itself, meanwhile, Russell was critical in helping the Armed Services Committee become the most powerful committee in the postwar years and in preventing more rigorous congressional oversight of the national security state. Thomas Becnel’s biography of Allen Ellender suffers from the same difficulty. Ellender, a Democrat from Louisiana who concluded his career as chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee, was a much less influential figure than Russell, but he did wage a somewhat quixotic crusade against the foreign aid program, and, more important, he represented an antimilitary strain in Southern thinking. A well-rounded biography of Senator Henry Jackson was published by Robert G. Kaufman in 2000, but no full-length biographies exist for other key members of the Senate during the Cold War, including John Stennis, Stuart Symington, and John Tower.

Worse yet, virtually no important House member has been the subject of a recent biography.9

Beyond biographies and narrowly focused narrative histories, most studies of Congress during the Cold War focus exclusively on the constitutional struggle for supremacy between Congress and the executive branch.10 With a few exceptions, they describe a series of events in which Congress either voluntarily yielded its power over foreign policy decisions or stood by while the executive branch usurped it. According to this interpretation, the unbalanced relationship between the Congress and the executive 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. Adherents of the executive usurpation thesis unintentionally imply that historians interested in the actual conduct of U.S. foreign policy during the Cold War should look no further than the executive branch, since it possessed the bulk of the power.11

The work associated with the executive usurpation school has other drawbacks as well. First of all, it too often focuses on crisis diplomacy, choosing events that by their very nature lead to heightened executive power. In addition, those who subscribe to this interpretation advocate a political agenda that blurs the line between historical interpretation and public policy recommendation. For example, Loch Johnson, a former aide to Frank Church and author of several books on Congress and the Cold War, begins one of his volumes by observing that the book’s “normative theme” is that “foreign policy should be conducted on the basis of a partnership between the executive and legislative branches.” Johnson concludes by offering what he terms “some


modest prescriptions toward this end.” Louis Fisher does likewise in his well-received book on presidential warmaking. A former staff member of the Foreign Relations Committee, Michael Glennon, also reflects this bias, commenting that his book “proposes that the United States recognize and return to its constitutional moorings in the making of foreign policy.”

This agenda becomes especially problematic when these scholars interpret events that took place before the Cold War. Indeed, the key assumption of this school—that, in the words of Fisher, “gradually the executive branch claimed for the President the power to initiate war and determine its magnitude and duration”—is of limited utility for the years before 1941. The executive-legislative foreign policy relationship passed through three broad phases from 1787 to 1941 as congressional power increased and decreased according to shifts in domestic political forces and alterations in the international environment. Keeping this history in mind allows scholars to view the Cold War battles between President and Congress as part of a broader continuum of executive-legislative struggles in the international arena and offers a more nuanced perspective on the congressional role in Cold War foreign policy issues.

The executive usurpation school implicitly assumes that the U.S. Constitution granted Congress a predominant voice in the conduct of U.S. foreign policy. However, scrutiny reveals that the Founding Fathers drew very different lessons from the Revolutionary era. At the very least, the framers of the U.S. Constitution seem to have anticipated conflict between the executive and legislative branches in foreign affairs as well as domestic policy. Such conflicts marked the diplomacy of the early Republic, when a surprisingly assertive executive branch encountered a generally meek congressional response. Early American history provided a good example of how a constitu-


tional structure evenly divided between the two branches quickly tipped in favor of the executive. The professionalization of U.S. foreign policy also contributed to executive power, an intriguing point initially raised by Felix Gilbert in *To the Farewell Address*. Two other factors played key roles. First, as long as the wars of the French Revolution persisted, this tangible threat to national security magnified the significance of the power of the commander-in-chief. Second, the intimate link between international issues and the first multiparty system ensured that contentious foreign policy questions would be debated along partisan rather than institutional lines.  

The War of 1812 altered the nature of the executive/legislative relationship on foreign policy matters, creating a more pacific situation internationally but a more divisive home front. The four decades following the Treaty of Ghent witnessed regular congressional challenges to executive supremacy. Congressional power in the international arena was enhanced only after the Civil War, partly because presidents during this era were willing to uphold tradition and negotiate substantial agreements with foreign powers as treaties. The failure of the three most ambitious of these treaties—Grant’s scheme to annex the Dominican Republic in 1870, the effort to establish a U.S. protectorate over Nicaragua in 1884, and Benjamin Harrison’s gambit to annex Hawaii in 1893—prompted future secretary of state John Hay to observe that a “treaty entering the Senate is like a bull going into the arena; no one can tell just how or when the blow will fall—but one thing is certain—it will never leave the arena alive.”


Just when Congress seemed dominant, events at the turn of the century brought to an end this second era in executive-legislative relations on questions of foreign policy, as Fareed Zakaria has argued in his stimulating new book. On the domestic front, the realignment generated by William McKinley’s triumph in 1896 ultimately paved the way for closer partisan coordination between the executive and legislative branches, a situation reminiscent of the early years of the Republic. In addition, political activists in the Progressive Era championed a strong presidency on the assumption that Congress was corrupt and inherently conservative. By the first few years of the twentieth century, many envisioned the United States in a more active, even “moral,” international role, a point of view that guided not only McKinley’s Cuban and Filipino policies, but much of his successor’s agenda as well. Executive unilateralism in decision making reached its high point during the presidency of Woodrow Wilson, when U.S. forces were sent to Mexico, Russia, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic, as well as to fight in World War I.

Although the Gilded Age pattern of congressional supremacy thus came to an end, Congress remained a key restraining influence. The one clear-cut executive victory on a treaty during this period—the approval of the Treaty of Paris—occurred only because of McKinley’s deference to Congress during both the negotiations and the ratification. McKinley’s successors lacked either his political tact or his luck, and they struggled with the ramifications of the treaty-making clause. In 1905, for example, Theodore Roosevelt explained that he had not submitted to Congress a treaty confirming the Dominican customs receivership for fear that Augustus Bacon, “backed by the average yahoo among the Democratic senators,” would block the measure and in the process get “a little cheap reputation among ignorant people.” The Senate’s rejection of the Treaty of Versailles might have served as the most spectacular assertion of congressional power in foreign policy decisions, but it clearly was not an isolated example of the upper chamber’s effort to make its presence felt on international matters. When Woodrow Wilson attempted to bypass


Congress entirely during the abortive intervention in Russia, the legislators threatened to use the ultimate sanction: the power of the purse. In 1919 a resolution introduced by Senator Hiram Johnson to cut off funding for the intervention failed on a perilously close tie vote. This demonstration of the “critical spirit in Congress” convinced the acting secretary of state, Frank Polk, and ultimately the administration as a whole that it had no choice but to withdraw the troops.20

The intensity of the Versailles battle heightened the importance of foreign policy pressure groups of all ideological persuasions, and their influence has grown ever since. In a pattern that was just as evident later in the century, such groups tended to have a greater impact on Congress than on the executive branch, as demonstrated by the U.S. Army Chemical Warfare Service's highly effective lobbying campaign against the Chemical Weapons Treaty in 1926 and by the role of anti-imperialists in the U.S.-Mexican crisis of 1926–1927.21

Foreign policy issues remained a point of contention between the executive and legislature during the fifteen years that preceded the Cold War. Franklin Roosevelt's domestic focus made him reluctant to spend political capital on international affairs, such as the protocol for adherence to the World Court, and this enabled the Nye Committee to dominate public discourse on neutrality issues. As Cordell Hull noted at the time, the Congress used its legislative powers to impose sharp constraints on the president, most notably by passing the Neutrality Acts of 1935 and 1936, measures that Hull considered “an invasion of the constitutional and traditional power of the Executive to conduct the foreign relations of the United States.” Ironically, the most substantial expansion of executive authority on foreign policy issues enjoyed by Franklin Roosevelt during his first six years as president—the Recip-


rocal Trade Agreements Act of 1934—occurred when Congress willingly sacrificed its power over foreign economic policy, largely because of the backlash against the Smoot-Hawley Tariff. Nonetheless, the measure had the long-term effect of removing foreign economic issues from congressional discussion during the Cold War.\textsuperscript{22}

Some common patterns emerged in the congressional approach to foreign relations in the years before 1941. The Johnson amendment in 1919 (discussed above) reflected a general willingness to use roll call votes on military spending to expand Congress's built-in power over foreign affairs. The prevalence of treaties heightened the importance of the Senate's "advise and consent" role in the conduct of foreign policy, even though the upper chamber approved 86 percent of the 726 treaties it considered between 1789 and 1926. Internally, Congress settled into a fairly stable bureaucratic pattern when dealing with international questions. With the important exception of the tariff, the House of Representatives played a minor role on most foreign policy issues.\textsuperscript{23} In the Senate, meanwhile, the Foreign Relations Committee reigned supreme, while its two chief rivals—the Committees on Military Affairs and Naval Affairs—remained extremely weak. These conditions produced a relatively small "foreign policy elite" within the Senate, composed of the members of the Foreign Relations Committee and the few other members of the body who for personal, political, or ideological reasons exhibited intense interest in international affairs. This small group of senators marshaled the body's considerable international powers for their own ends.\textsuperscript{24}

World War II brought far-reaching changes. The reemergence of an international threat, Roosevelt's increasing focus on foreign policy, and the public reaction against the attempts to legislate neutrality tipped the balance in favor of executive action. Perhaps no single piece of legislation demonstrated


\textsuperscript{23} During one congressional session in the 1920s, for instance, the House Foreign Affairs Committee spent a week debating a 20,000 dollar appropriation for an international poultry show in Tulsa, Oklahoma, which one committee member recalled as "the most important issue that came before the Committee in the whole session." James Sundquist, *The Decline and Resurgence of Congress* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institute, 1981), pp. 94–102.

the depth of the changes more than the Lend-Lease Act, which passed despite congressional recognition that the measure greatly weakened the institution's foreign policy powers.25

It thus became clear, even before the emergence of U.S.-Soviet tensions, that the balance of power between the congressional and executive branches in the interwar period would not be sustained in the immediate postwar era. The bipolar international system and intense ideological rivalry that characterized the Cold War confirmed the point. Internationally, the seemingly all-encompassing nature of the Communist threat after the outbreak of the Korean War placed the government on what amounted to a permanent war footing, while the advent of nuclear weapons created the need for instant decision making that was lacking in previous challenges to U.S. national security. This situation gave rise to a new interpretation of constitutional theory that sought to increase the power of the presidency through the commander-in-chief clause. On the domestic front, there was a widespread perception that the late 1930s had revealed the dangers of an overactive congressional role, and this allowed the Truman administration to stifle congressional dissent by equating its own foreign policy principles with the concept of bipartisanship. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee chairman, Tom Connally, equated opposition to bipartisanship with isolationism; and Dean Acheson observed more colorfully that a bipartisan foreign policy allowed the president to argue that any critic was “a son-of-a-bitch and not a true patriot.” “If people will swallow that,” Acheson noted, “then you're off to the races.”26

Congress embraced calls for bipartisanship mostly because the two branches agreed on the desirability of vigorously prosecuting the Cold War.27 Indeed, at times Congress seemed positively eager to expand presidential authority. Representative Elden Spence argued in 1949 that “in these highly important international affairs, he [the President] ought to have the same powers


as the executives or dictators representing the enslaved peoples in the totalitarian governments.²² Such sentiments all but guaranteed approval of initiatives such as the National Security Act, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and the expansion of the defense budget following the onset of the Korean War. In the words of Arthur Vandenberg, the fact that issues rarely reached “Congress until they have developed to a point where Congressional discretion is pathetically restricted” was of further benefit to the president. The Korean War was one such example—at the time, several senior members expressly asked Truman not to involve Congress in the decision to intervene.²⁹ Moreover, as Duane Tananbaum has illustrated, events such as the “Great Debate” of 1951, in which the Senate conceded the presidential right to send U.S. troops to Europe without its consent, and the Bricker Amendment of 1953, which sought to scale back the power of the executive to enter into international agreements without congressional consent, represented setbacks for those attempting to assert Congress’s formal powers. In the Cold War era maintaining a rigid balance between Congress and the executive seemed simply impractical.³⁰

The executive usurpation school therefore has a substantial body of evidence favoring the view that congressional influence on foreign policy issues declined in the period from 1941 to the mid-1950s. Postwar presidents further circumvented Congress by relying on executive or statutory agreements rather than formal treaties.³¹ Another standard barometer of congressional influence—the frequency of attempts to legislate foreign policy through resolutions or by attaching policy-related riders to appropriations bills—also de-

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clined during the early stages of the Cold War. The rise of the national security state spread defense spending around the country, leaving members of Congress who sought to reduce it vulnerable to the charge of subverting national security as well as ignoring the economic interests of their constituents. Moreover, in the anti-Communist mindset associated with the McCarthy era, casting a vote against defense spending was often considered a political risk. In the decade from the end of the Korean War to the end of the Kennedy presidency, defense bills passed with an average of less than one negative vote in both chambers. Moreover, this decade featured only fifteen roll call votes (in the House and Senate combined) on amendments to defense appropriations bills, most of which addressed insignificant issues, such as an amendment to permit rather than mandate the relocation of an army munitions depot near Houston. Some foreign policy roll call votes, such as those on joint resolutions seeking advance congressional approval for policy decisions, had the effect of compromising future congressional power. As an outgrowth of Truman's bipartisanship strategy, the first such resolution occurred with the Taiwan Straits crisis in 1955 and culminated with the Tonkin Gulf Resolution in 1964.

Within Congress, the altered environment resulted in a loss of hegemony for the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. The committee came under challenge from the newly created Joint Committee on Atomic Energy, the Senate Armed Services Committee, and the Senate Appropriations Committee, each of which proved less than zealous in challenging executive policies. With the expansion of the defense budget, the Armed Services Committee became particularly important. Its strongly pro-defense members aggressively sought to funnel defense projects to their constituents. Mendel Rivers, a representative from South Carolina who chaired the Armed Services Committee, was perceived as so zealous in securing projects for his district that many joked that the state capital, Charleston, would fall into the sea with the weight of the concrete poured for military bases there. But as Rivers noted in the mid-1950s, the committee viewed itself as “the only voice, official voice, the military has in the House of Representatives.” The committee often gave

open-ended authorizations such as “the Secretary of the Army may procure materials and facilities necessary to maintain and support the Army . . . including guided missiles,” an arrangement that ensured the “inviability” of executive branch defense proposals, as Samuel Huntington lamented in his acclaimed book on the politics of defense budgeting. The oversight of other aspects of the national security state, especially the intelligence community, was equally lax. The CIA referred to the informal system as BOGSAT (“bunch of guys sitting around a table”), while Allen Dulles once admitted that he would “fudge the truth to the oversight committee,” though he would “tell the chairman the truth—if he wants to know.” Generally, the chairmen did not. Senator Richard Russell called for Congress to take CIA statements “on faith,” while his committee’s ranking Republican, Leverett Saltonstall of Massachusetts, commented that he would prefer not to know the details of CIA activities. The senator’s admission, ironically, helped beat back a 1956 attempt to establish a formal Senate committee to oversee the CIA.  

Clearly, these developments provide fodder for the executive usurpation school. But they also obscure Congress’s ability to influence U.S. foreign policy in less traditional ways even at the height of the Cold War. For instance, although the postwar committee structure generally yielded a less prominent congressional role in policy making, the reverse occurred in some cases. The clearest example came with nuclear diplomacy, when the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy, largely spurred by the personal ambitions of its chair, Brien McMahon, successfully pushed through legislation restricting U.S. efforts to share nuclear technology with allied states. In addition, as Senator Frank Church later noted, the decline of the Foreign Relations Committee increased “the role of dissent as well as the advocacy of alternative courses to individual senators.” It allowed senators who were not on the committee an opportunity to influence foreign policy decisions, and it helped produce a multitude of subcommittees dealing with foreign policy matters. On domestic issues, sub-


committees served as one of the key avenues for individual members of Congress to shape legislation, and this pattern held on foreign policy issues as well. Senators with as diverse ideological viewpoints as Joseph McCarthy, Henry Jackson, Ernest Gruening, and Hubert Humphrey all used subcommittees of the relatively weak Government Operations Committee to establish themselves as authorities on various international questions. McCarthy obviously was the most prominent of these figures, but his activities are perhaps best viewed as part of a broader trend, namely the decentralization of power within Congress on national security matters. Overall, the number of foreign policy subcommittees in the Senate alone grew from seven in 1945–1946 to thirty-one by 1965–1966.37

There were thus many ways in which developments during the early years of the Cold War actually magnified the congressional presence in foreign policy decision making. Increased public attention to foreign policy issues gave Congress more opportunities to frame discussions of these issues. Dean Acheson later admitted that Truman refrained from seeking congressional approval of the Korean War in part because he feared that public hearings might produce “one more question in cross-examination which destroys you.” Once out of power, the Democrats remembered this lesson, and Averell Harriman in 1954 encouraged “our senators and congressmen to pursue the tactic of asking questions which it will be difficult for the Administration to answer satisfactorily.” Within the new subcommittee structure, meanwhile, senators such as McCarthy and Jackson also profited from the greater public interest in national security matters.38

Other congressional actions in the early Cold War, such as the resounding votes for measures like the Greek and Turkish aid packages and the Formosa and Middle East Resolutions, also engendered a more complex rela-

tionship between the branches than is apparent at first glance. Because the ideological nature of the Cold War struggle seemed to demand unity at home (and thus overwhelming votes of approval), congressional opinion, either actual or anticipated, could affect executive branch decision making. This was the case when the question of whether to aid the French in Vietnam came up in 1954 and when the Formosa Straits crisis erupted the following year. At the time, Hubert Humphrey commented on the existence of a “remarkable difference of opinion in the Senate, way beyond the difference shown by the vote on the resolution.” The importance of the façade of bipartisan unity strengthened the position of those within the Eisenhower administration who were arguing for restraint. The resolutions in 1954–1955 testified to the ways in which indirect congressional influence affected the conduct of U.S. diplomacy during the early Cold War. Nuclear policy revealed the same pattern—Bernard Baruch owed his appointment to his close relationship with Vandenberg—and so did the outcome of the British loan debate: British officials, not “inclined to risk further debate with Congress,” informed the State Department of their willingness to negotiate the loan to meet congressional concerns. This type of relationship could work the other way as well. Charles Bohlen later asserted that executive branch officials who favored a harder line against the Soviet Union cited the need to placate Congress as a rationale for their preferred policy.

In addition, the proliferation of U.S. bilateral and multilateral security commitments (reflected in the expansion of the foreign aid program), the growing number of military bases, and the surge of executive agreements increased the opportunity for congressional oversight and thus provided new tools for Congress to influence the conduct of foreign policy. The vast international role of the United States also encouraged transnational alliances linking congressional blocs with foreign governments. This type of arrangement, it should be noted, was not peculiar to the postwar period. As early as the 1830s the British government had retained Daniel Webster, then in the Sen-


ate, to help shape U.S. public opinion on the Canadian boundary dispute. The China Lobby of the late 1940s and early 1950s remains the most comprehensively studied of these Cold War alliances. The representatives of the Dominican Republic and Israel also became well known for their influence. Arthur Vandenberg’s comment in 1949 that bipartisanship “did not apply to everything—for example, not to Palestine or China,” is therefore not surprising. In addition, the increasing frequency of congressional overseas trips, which totaled nearly two hundred per annum by the end of the 1950s, provided another opportunity for legislators to conduct personal diplomacy.

Finally, the foreign aid program was largely shaped by Congress through its power over appropriations. Congress enjoyed far-reaching influence on this matter for the simple reason that foreign aid never enjoyed the public support that defense spending did. The program allowed the body in which all fiscal matters originate, the House of Representatives, to play a greater foreign policy role than was usually the case before World War II. Otto Passman, the chair of the Foreign Operations Subcommittee, regularly secured a reduction of 20 to 25 percent of the total requested by the executive. Moreover, beginning in the late 1950s, Congress also began attaching policy riders to foreign aid legislation, much as it had done with defense bills in the pre–World War II era. The riders dealt with issues as diverse as economic nationalism, military coups, and the human rights policies of Latin American governments, and this meant that the foreign aid bill developed into what one commentator described as “the nearest thing Congress has to a ‘State of the World Message.’”

Such efforts demonstrated how Congress adjusted to the altered Cold War environment. But how significant were these actions? Determining congressional influence on international affairs has never been easy. In pathbreaking studies of the turn-of-the-century imperialist surge in the United States, Ernest May appropriately has confined himself to the vague

statement that “Congress played a large but ill-defined role.”\textsuperscript{45} Apart from analysis of roll call votes, an assessment of the role of Congress on foreign policy requires a scholar to explore the intentions of congressional activists, to ascertain whether procedural changes mandated by Congress increased legislative influence, to gauge the effect of speeches and open hearings on Congress’s ability to frame the discussion of foreign policy issues, and to determine whether fear of congressional retaliation restrained executive branch officials from undertaking foreign policy initiatives they might otherwise have launched.\textsuperscript{46} In addition, skirmishes between committees, tactical divisions among opposition legislators about how forcefully to assert congressional power, and the network of alliances between the national security bureaucracy—especially the military—and members of Congress make it difficult to speak of Congress as a unified body on any foreign policy matter after 1945. Precision about the congressional role in the early stages of the Cold War is also thwarted because the Cold War made clear measurements of congressional influence, such as roll call votes, inherently unreliable guides.\textsuperscript{47} Diplomatic crises and the decline of formal powers like warmaking or treaties do not illuminate the more subtle ways in which the Cold War Congress influenced foreign policy issues. Historians need to move beyond such measurements in evaluating the legislature’s impact on U.S. foreign policy.\textsuperscript{48} The appropriations power played an especially important role, since arms transfers and military aid often became substitutes for formal defense treaties during the Cold War.\textsuperscript{49}

A closer examination of Congress’s role in the early Cold War is needed for another reason. As the foreign aid “revolt” of 1963 revealed, the pattern of congressional deference had begun to break down well before the surge of


\textsuperscript{47} For instance, in analyzing Truman’s foreign policy, Thomas Paterson has observed that Congress set “very broad and imprecise limits on presidential activity in international affairs.” Paterson, “Presidential Foreign Policy,” p. 2.


congressional activity in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The clash over foreign aid itself derived from increasing doubts about many of the assumptions of the containment doctrine, particularly among a small but articulate band of Senate liberals. Moreover, the changes within Congress were not confined to the foreign aid program. In 1959, for instance, an amendment sponsored by Richard Russell to require authorization for some aspects of the military procurement budget provided the first significant enhancement of the Senate Armed Services Committee’s authority over the defense budget. Five years later five members of the House Armed Services Committee, dubbed the “Fearless Five,” filed the first minority report in the committee’s history.\textsuperscript{50} Bi-partisanship also became less common, and critics such as Jackson, Humphrey, Stuart Symington, and even Majority Leader Lyndon Johnson became more assertive, as the Eisenhower administration discovered in the late 1950s.\textsuperscript{51} Because congressional reformers in the 1960s and 1970s generally employed tactics pioneered earlier, an understanding of the bureaucratic system that Congress established during the early Cold War is critical to analyzing the wave of activism after 1965. Unfortunately for historians, virtually all work on the relationship between Congress and the national security state has been done by political scientists.

For the most part, historians who have looked at the post-1965 period have focused mainly on what has been described as Congress’s “glorious revolution”: the attempt by the legislature to reclaim a greater role in foreign policy functions that it shared with the executive branch under the terms of the Constitution.\textsuperscript{52} As with other shifts in the balance between presidency and Congress, this one also resulted from a new domestic and international climate, which in turn shook the ideological underpinnings of postwar foreign policy. If judged in terms of legislation passed, the accomplishments of the era seem to confirm the techniques used by proponents of the executive usurpation thesis, such as measuring congressional influence through issues like warmaking and treaty-making.\textsuperscript{53} Ultimately, though, these changes did sur-
prisingly little to alter the fundamental balance between the two branches, in part because the legislation placed such a high priority on abstract constitutional concerns. Legislation still could not restrict the executive’s foreign policy powers, as the era’s more ambitious undertakings on the constitutional front illustrated. The sponsors of the Cooper-Church Amendment, which cut off funds for the Nixon administration’s secret incursion into Cambodia, repeatedly denied that the amendment would constrain the powers of the commander-in-chief. Moreover, they declined to call for an instant cutoff of funding for the incursion, and they consented to a modifying amendment that would uphold the president’s power to “act in emergency situations” when events “made it impracticable for him to first consult with Congress.” Similar complications frustrated congressional attempts to pass a restrictive war powers measure. Negotiations between the House and Senate produced a law limiting the amount of time the president could unilaterally deploy U.S. troops overseas in hostile situations (90 days), but the law contained no discussion of justifications for such action. The bill also enabled the president to decide when troops were introduced into harm’s way, thus allowing the executive branch to establish the start of the time limit. An amendment to include the CIA under the terms of the bill failed.54

Many of the same difficulties prevented Congress from assuming an active role throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Congressional investigations of the intelligence community produced less comprehensive reforms and more political problems for the investigators than was anticipated when the hearings were launched in 1975.55 Although both chambers ultimately formed committees to oversee the CIA and other intelligence agencies, old attitudes lingered. William Casey, Ronald Reagan’s first director of the CIA, asserted in 1984 that “the business of Congress is to stay out of my business.” As in earlier years, many members of Congress agreed. Senator Barry Goldwater, using the rhetoric of Leverett Saltonstall three decades earlier, declared that “there are many bits of [intelligence] information that I would rather not know.”56 These problems culminated in the Iran-contra scandal, but even when this af-


fair highlighted the executive’s disregard for congressional authority, Congress sharply limited the scope of its own inquiry.\textsuperscript{57}

Meanwhile, the War Powers Act, whether because of the compromises necessary to ensure its passage or the unwillingness of presidents to accept its constitutionality, failed to restore a balance between the branches in the warmaking power, a point confirmed by suggestions in early 1991 that George Bush was prepared to go to war with Iraq regardless of the congressional vote.\textsuperscript{58} In line with precedent, moreover, the Supreme Court proved unwilling to involve itself in foreign policy battles between the two other branches. The few decisions that the Court has rendered on the matter, such as \textit{I.N.S. v. Chadha} in 1983, which struck down the so-called legislative veto included in numerous statutes, have weakened congressional influence in foreign policy making.\textsuperscript{59}

At the same time, however, the post-Vietnam era did see Congress build on the tactics pioneered in the early stages of the Cold War to wield often decisive influence on a wide array of foreign policy issues. Most frequently, congressional members used the power of the purse. During the 1970s, the breadth of pro-human rights amendments sponsored by congressional reformers such as Representatives Donald Fraser and Tom Harkin caused a European diplomat to observe that “it isn’t just the State Department or the President anymore. It’s Congress now.”\textsuperscript{60} The human rights legislation had its greatest impact on U.S. policy toward Latin America, as shown in a somewhat dated but nonetheless penetrating book by Lars Schoultz.\textsuperscript{61} By the 1980s decreases in funding and difficulties in passing legislation rendered foreign aid bills less


\textsuperscript{61} Schoultz, \textit{Human Rights}. 
useful vehicles for asserting congressional power, but aggressive members of Congress by then had already turned their attention to defense appropriations measures.  

Perhaps the most spectacular example of the use of the defense appropriations bill to influence broader foreign policy concerns came in 1975, when an amendment sponsored by Senator John Tunney cut off funding for the U.S. covert operation in Angola. Similar measures were proposed throughout the 1980s, most obviously with the Boland Amendment to halt covert aid to anti-Communist rebels in Nicaragua. In addition, a more flexible defense authorization process generated an explosion of floor amendments concerning both policy and funding matters on defense bills, ending once and for all the days of the “inviolability” of executive requests on such matters.

In the aftermath of Vietnam the political consequences of foreign policy activism were significant. A perception of excessive interest in international issues continued to pose political risks. After Hubert Humphrey left a hearing in the mid-1970s on U.S. covert operations in Chile, he announced that he had to go try “to get jobs for four hundred people in Minnesota today,” a task “a great deal more important to me right now than Chile.” But the growing power of the peace and defense lobbies also fitted foreign policy issues “into the bread and butter of routine political business,” as John Culver later described it.

Increased public attention on foreign policy matters enhanced Congress’s


64. Hoyt Purvis and Tura Campanella, “Congress, Country X, and Arms Sales,” in Purvis and Baker, eds., Legislating Foreign Policy, pp. 107–126; Robert Art, “Congress and the Defense Budget: Enhancing Policy Oversight,” Political Science Quarterly, Vol. 100, No. 2 (Summer 1985), p. 234; Lindsay, “Congressional Oversight of the Department of Defense,” p. 60. A few statistics illustrate the startling nature of the shift. From 1976 to 1983 the two armed services committees and defense appropriations subcommittees alone made over 10,000 changes in dollar figures submitted by the president. From 1969 to 1985 the number of reports requested by Congress from the Pentagon increased by 1,778 percent, the instances of directed actions escalated by 922 percent, and changes in provisions to defense-related laws soared by 255 percent.

65. Humphrey quoted in Paterson, “Oversight or Aftersight?” p. 167. Perhaps the most obvious instance of congressional parochialism came after the Pueblo incident in 1968, when Senator John Stennis sent an urgent message to Lyndon Johnson in the White House Situation Room. Expressing concern about the political damage of the operation to Democrats in an election year, the senator delivered the following advice: “For God’s sake, do something.” Johnson looked up and muttered to an aide to “please thank the senator for his helpful advice.” Blechman, Politics of National Security, p. 202.

traditional ability to frame consideration of diplomatic issues. Two senators with diverse ideological viewpoints became especially active in foreign policy debates: Christopher Dodd, a liberal Democrat from Connecticut, who led the opposition to Ronald Reagan’s policy in Central America, and Richard Lugar, a moderate Republican from Indiana, who played a key role in ending U.S. support for Fidel Marcos’s regime in the Philippines. Questions such as the nuclear “freeze” also demonstrated Congress’s ability to bring domestic cultural issues and ideological forces into the foreign policy-making apparatus. This role expanded during the 1970s, as newly energized groups, such as civil rights activists, began turning their attention to international affairs. In addition, congressional debates illustrated the ability of transnational alliances to affect the day-to-day conduct of U.S. diplomacy. With the decline of the Chinese and Dominican lobbies, Israeli interests emerged as the most powerful foreign lobby on Capitol Hill, where they frequently succeeded in either blocking or scaling back executive requests for arms sales to Arab states. Other foreign and ethnic lobbies hoped to imitate the success of organizations like the American Israel Public Affairs Committee. Roughly 125 former government officials represented Japan as lobbyists in the mid-1980s, and Kuwait paid 12 million dollars for a public relations firm in 1990.

At the most basic level, then, diplomatic historians cannot aspire to produce an adequate synthesis of American foreign policy during the Cold War without including the congressional perspective. The constitutional powers of Congress have given it a role to play in virtually all foreign policy decisions. At the very least, Congress acted to modify executive policies on the domestic scene in much the same way that the policies of U.S. allies did in the international arena. At most, as with human rights policies and other initiatives in the immediate aftermath of Vietnam, Congress imposed major restrictions on involvement in Angola and champion of a more liberal U.S. policy toward Africa, came under attack as the “senator from Africa.” See Patsy Mink, “Institutional Perspective: Misunderstandings, Myths, and Misperceptions,” in Franck, ed., Tethered Presidency, p. 65.


executive actions. In either case, historians need to go beyond citing such anecdotes as Arthur Vandenberg’s advice to Harry Truman that the best way to obtain congressional support for U.S. aid to Greece and Turkey was to “scare the hell” out of the American people. (Whether the Michigan senator actually uttered the phrase is unclear.) As Ernest May recently observed, key congressional shifts in policy from the late 1940s and early 1950s remain a “mystery.” But, as Senator Moynihan recognized a decade ago, this type of oversight should come as no surprise. Despite the productive work on the topic that has been done in the last ten to fifteen years, historians of U.S. foreign relations are still a long way from solving the mystery of Congress’s role in U.S. Cold War policy.