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The Triumph of Improvisation: Gorbachev's Adaptability, Reagan's Engagement, and the End of the Cold War

Andrew Stigler

James Graham Wilson

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such pressure. Great powers are another matter, since the financial relationships are more symmetrical. One need only consider the United Kingdom's reluctance to limit lucrative financial ties to Russia in the wake of the Crimea crisis.

Dominant as America is financially, abuse of that power threatens the dollar's special role in global commerce. Zarate relates an anecdote about an event that took place in 2003, in which American officials proposed cyber attacks against Iraqi assets to penetrate bank computers around the world covertly and set Iraqi account balances to "zero." Treasury successfully argued that the plan would shatter confidence and outrage allies, but the proposal shows that not all leaders see financial weapons in a nuanced light. Nations have been slower than "realists" predicted to challenge the U.S.-led financial order, likely because the system has not harmed their interests. Freezing out terrorists is one thing, but if the world perceives the United States as using access to global finance as a reward for good behavior, the use of other currencies and development of alternative payment systems will leap ahead.

Zarate writes as a participant and advocate for the policy of financial statecraft and for the institution of the Treasury Department. One should not treat Zarate's account as definitive history (diplomats will likely disagree with Zarate's harsh take on the State Department), but it is a good, detailed account of how policy is made and implemented.

The book could be better organized. It is not quite chronological, not quite thematic, and sometimes redundant. The military will wish Zarate had said more about Treasury and Defense Department cooperation.

Treasury's War is a useful contribution, though clearly a participant's account and not a scholarly assessment. It will interest those trying to understand how economic tools can support national security goals.

DAVID BURBACH
Naval War College



Wilson, James Graham. *The Triumph of Improvisation: Gorbachev's Adaptability, Reagan's Engagement, and the End of the Cold War*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 2014. 264pp. \$29.95

This is an interesting and innovative look at the course of the Cold War. It is interesting in large part because Wilson's perspective is to look for the unscripted moments in the course of the conflict—the occasions when grand strategy, even policy, did not dictate outcomes. To a political scientist, this is a refreshing approach. Political scientists and historians often focus too heavily on patterns, theories, and grand schemes. This volume is a reminder of the crucial role played by policy makers struggling to make up their minds at critical junctures.

Wilson's book is well informed, looking for moments when leaders took the initiative, such as when President Reagan sensed a crisis in Poland in 1981. This work struck this nonspecialist as well documented and particularly well researched on the American side. One might expect that of Wilson, who served as a historian for the U.S. State Department. Deliberations over nuclear-arms limitations talks receive a great deal of Wilson's attention, as one might expect, and his discussion of the development of the Strategic Defense Initiative is particularly engaging.

However, prospective readers might be warned that this book would probably not make good introductory reading to the Cold War. Wilson takes it as his task to relate the critical junctures and the respective leaders' reasoning at the cost of communicating the overall history of the conflict—a reasonable approach, given the troves of work available on the period. His portrait of Mikhail Gorbachev is particularly interesting. He casts a light on Gorbachev not merely as a new thinker who offers a different strategic perspective but as a responder to American initiatives. Gorbachev and Reagan shared an abhorrence of nuclear weapons, sometimes letting this revulsion outstrip the policies with which their advisers were comfortable.

Wilson's portrait of the time is an engaging one, capturing to an unusual extent how leaders then were trying to understand each other's motives. "In the last years of the conflict, improvisation mattered more than any master plan." We do well to be reminded of this, since there is often a temptation to look through the lens of history and see outcomes as certain and predictable, which is often a mistake and the product of psychological bias rather than cold analysis. Wilson's book is a useful corrective in this regard, examining how the role of improvisation and accident can play critical parts at crucial junctures of history.

ANDREW STIGLER
Naval War College



Willis, Sam. *In the Hour of Victory: The Royal Navy at War in the Age of Nelson*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2013. 416pp. \$24

British author Sam Willis's latest book, in what is a fast-growing and impressive collection of naval historical works, reveals new details of battles previously immortalized, shining new light on how these battles were conducted. Willis titles his book aptly and in a manner appreciative of the primary source material he has thrust forward from obscurity. Vice Admiral Collingwood's first dispatch to the Admiralty after the battle of Trafalgar begins, "The ever to be lamented death of Vice Admiral Lord Viscount Nelson, who in the late conflict with the enemy fell *in the hour of victory*." The victorious Collingwood goes on to describe for his superiors and for the British public the circumstances that allowed twenty-seven Royal Navy ships of the line to dominate a larger combined French and Spanish fleet. This book analyzes not only the original dispatches from Trafalgar but also those from several other great fleet battles from 1794 to 1806. Specifically, the author lays out original dispatches, historical context, and skillful interpretations for the battles of the Glorious First of June (1794), St. Vincent (1797), Camperdown (1797), the Nile (1798), Copenhagen (1801), Trafalgar (1805), and San Domingo (1806). These giant fleet engagements were remarkable in several respects, most notably in that they marked the last large-scale battles of the sailing warfare era, and all represent overwhelming British victories.

This work weaves into its narrative fascinating insights already known to naval historians. How did Britain come to dominate all these battles? Numerical superiority, though normally paramount in sailing warfare, was not enough to help the French, Danes, Spanish, or Dutch during this era whenever a British