often instead provided a means with which to avoid difficult questions rather than resolve them. Indeed, Jeffrey Michaels' chapter on the Obama administration's quest for a "responsible end" to the war in Afghanistan demonstrates that scripts and narratives had more of an influence on American thinking than events on the ground did.

This tendency has a long history, stretching from Cold War narratives of containment, to visions of dominoes falling, to fantasies of American soldiers being greeted as liberators in a newly democratic Iraq in 2003. In surveying this history of repeated inability to author scripts that take into account the agency or perspective of others, we are reminded of F. Scott Fitzgerald's assessment of Hollywood producers in his unfinished novel, *The Last Tycoon*, that the "tragedy of these men was that nothing in their lives had really bitten deep at all."[16]

How is it that despite the heavy costs of these wars, these failures continue to occur? How was it that nothing seemed to "bite deep" in certain policy making circles in Washington, and why do the scripts not change? Part of the answer might lie in the failure to think historically: after the US withdrawal from Vietnam, the deeper implications of that war were largely ignored and forgotten, even as the "collective memory" of the war remained a constant. In *How Modernity Forgets*, memory scholar Paul Connerton argues that accelerating time scales of information flow and media production induce a "cultural forgetting" on the part of society.[17]

The forgetting has been strategically useful to certain protagonists within the executive. Even as the United States had just left Vietnam, Henry Kissinger concluded that the war was relatively unique and that there were not that many lessons that could be usefully drawn from the situation; President George H. W. Bush argued that great nations could not be sundered by memories.[18] Yet there is another, deeper, lingering memory of the war that vitiates US policy making. Robert Brigham's chapter on the Vietnam syndrome shows that it has in some respect influenced the thinking of every presidential administration since 1975, while David Kieran notes that the war continues to resonate in US culture.

There is an unsustainable duality in US culture between memory and forgetting. When Ronald Reagan identified the "Vietnam syndrome," he did so to imply a cultural wariness, an illness of sorts, a reticence about going to war and deploying troops—it is frequently used as a negative term, something that the United States needs to get over, to heal itself from. Rather, it could be used in a positive frame, a reticence about going to war especially when the national interests are not apparent, when objectives are ill defined and when outcomes and exits are elusive. The repetition of US wars and failed outcomes since the 1960s reflects a broad strategic myopia and an inability within policy circles to engage

with historical thinking apart from the "lessons" that might advance its tactical engagement.

All too often, the lessons literature is confined to the instrumental aspects of warfare and military intervention. The wider strategic costs, the consequences of war, the opportunity costs, and the fundamental lessons are elided.[19] By confining the "depth" of lessons to the instrumental, one can seemingly engage in historical thinking, albeit within narrow parameters. As such, the focus is on greater efficiency, fewer costs, reduced risks, and fatalities instead of engaging the wider question of whether war and intervention really serve the US national interests or whether they bring about a more stable and peaceful regional order. Would diplomacy and other forms of engagement address US objectives at even lower costs, less risk, no casualties? Political scientist David Hendrickson observes, "Obama was a far more moderate character than George W. Bush, and really did want to stay out of new wars; that a fellow pacifically inclined should use force as often as he did speaks volumes about the weight of the Washington consensus." His plea in *Republic in Peril* is for a turn to "liberal pluralism" and a new historically informed understanding of US internationalism.[20]

Gideon Rose has argued that these unending wars are in part a product of the failure of American strategic imagination. As the United States contemplates war, it usually addresses a number of phases in sequential order—from planning to D-Day to execution, termination, and aftermath—and Rose has suggested that Washington should reverse the order of the phases, to begin with the clear notion of what they want the aftermath of the conflict to look like before decisions for war are made.[21] Yet this has rarely been how Americans have approached war. The Cold War that John Lewis Gaddis famously termed the "long peace"[22] maintained forms of stability in Western Europe while other parts of the Third World were pacified or subject to intervention to contain or rollback forms of communism, socialism, nationalism, or other forms of resistance to the Western system.

The broad conception of "national security" present at the end of World War II remained, but the means by which this security would be pursued narrowed considerably. Brutal national security states and authoritarian governments were supported to maintain forms of violent order or stability. Thus, the Cold War was a condition to be lived with, rather than a campaign that could be sequenced out in a precise order with a defined end state.

We can see this most clearly in how the United States operated in the Third World, an imagined theater that was in many ways the center, rather than the periphery of Cold War (and other) conflicts and wars.[23]

In these regions, wars did not have to end when the United States could wage them with alternative instruments: the use of CIA and covert operations, the reliance on regional allies to maintain stability, the use of "proxy" or indigenous forces. The limited nature of these commitments conformed to the advice given to the Nixon administration by the British counterinsurgent Sir Robert Thompson in 1971.

Discussing how the United States might maintain a presence in South Vietnam despite domestic hopes for an end to the war, Thompson argued:

> If you have a long struggle one of the important things is to keep the temperature down. You do not want to fight a long struggle at a high temperature and at a high cost and at a high tension because that in itself will be damaging to the unity of your country.[24]

For Thompson, it was "therefore very important to fight a long war with determination but with a great deal of coolness." Thus, American strategic thinking on conflict termination, with its sequential series of steps, bore little relation to its actual practice during the Cold War, where wars were never designed to end in the first place. These conflicts, devastating in their consequences for those at their center, remained largely invisible in the United States, both in political and cultural terms.

Of course, it is certainly not the case that the United States has not suffered, even if American wars have become increasingly less visible to the public. The costs of war have had a profound impact; these have been written about extensively.[25] The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan coincided with the financial recession, compounding the costs and accelerating the relative decline of the United States.[26] David Hendrickson observes that the $5 trillion cost of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan mean that the "capital that might have rebuilt America was fruitlessly extended on unachievable objects, in the most inhospitable environment imaginable, in pursuit of a phantom vision of American security, at great wastage of life."[27] Yet it is clear that despite these considerable costs the United States has been inhibited only to a certain degree. War and military intervention remained attractive, whether because of the primacy of presidential power within the US system—the so-called imperial presidency—or because, as Chris Hedges put it, war is "a force that gives us meaning."[28]

Whether it was a war of choice or necessity, whether it involved wars on poverty, on race, on AIDS, on drugs, and any number of other issues, historian Michael Sherry and others have emphasized the importance of war in shaping US culture.[29] More often than not, though, it has been imagined war, either metaphorical or symbolic, that has shaped the US polity. The specific ways in which war has shaped American cultures has

meant that the costs of war, even those costs borne by Americans, have been difficult to perceive. Marilyn Young has argued, in this volume and elsewhere, that the aftermath of every American war was marked by attempts to erase the experiences of that war from popular memory. David Fitzgerald's chapter on soldier homecomings shows that even as the US public venerates soldiers coming home from war, it puts some distance between those who have gone to war and those who have not.

There is a geopolitical as well as a cultural context to these practices; thus, we need to be mindful not only of the politics of the erasure of war but also of the ways in which the absence of any existential external threats to the American homeland shaped the character of US engagement with the world, and thus its cultural interpretation of war. Indeed, historian Mary Dudziak has shown that the cultural erasure of war and the relative geographical isolation of the United States are interlinked. Even during World War II, a conflict in which millions of Americans participated, American civilians were largely spared the sensory experience of war itself. Unlike the "republic of suffering" experienced by Americans during the Civil War and by other nations throughout their histories, war was distant, understood largely through news reports and letters home.[30]

Andrew Preston has argued that the "free security" generated by this isolation, although no longer in existence by 1945, "was a unique condition in world history, one that indelibly shaped America's approach to the world, even long after the conditions of free security had vanished."[31] Indeed, Scott Lucas argues in his essay in this volume that the American inability to adjust to the end not only of this period of free security but of unipolar hegemony has meant that the United States has become increasingly inadept at understanding the agency of local actors and what the regional consequences of its actions are.

The objective of this collection is not just to critique this American carelessness, although our contributors surely do that, but to suggest that thinking historically about these issues includes not just a consideration of what lessons might be learned for "next time" but a full accounting of the costs and of what the United States has left behind. Philosopher Mark Evans suggests that in addition to the two traditional concepts of just war theory, *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello*, which deal with issues before and during the war, a *jus post bellum* framing is needed to assess responsibilities during occupation or after the war. Evans relates that the theory at least has to address a wide variety of potential scenarios, including, first, what victors might do *to* their former enemies "with respect to punishment and reparations"; second, what they might do *for* them, "with respect to reconstruction"; and, third, what they might do

more broadly, such as "contributing towards future peace and security" through initiatives, institutions, or mechanisms.[32]

Obviously, such thinking usually refers to wars that are clearly defined and conventional, wars that end in a *USS Missouri*-style capitulation—not the "new wars" of the 1990s and beyond. Nonetheless, Evans' theory condemns the postwar behavior of the United States. If we look to the Vietnam War we can see how, as Ed Martini's chapter shows, the overwhelming costs of war in lives, infrastructure, and environment, were borne by the Vietnamese, despite American promises in the Paris Peace Accords. When we look at Iraq, we see a neglect of *jus post bellum* in the spring of 1991, when the United States won the war but lost the peace as Saddam retained power and exacted revenge against the Shia and the Kurds after uprisings inspired by Washington, and in 2011, when the United States tried to move on from the damage it had caused during its occupation. The constraints of such considerations of *jus post bellum* are unlikely to exercise officials after they leave Afghanistan, despite the long-term blowback from the failure to provide aid after the Soviet withdrawal in 1989.

In his conclusion to his devastating book *The Deaths of Others*, political theorist John Tirman explores the "epistemology of war." He argues that the formula for calculating success in American wars includes "the costs in American blood and treasure to save Rhee or Diem, or to bring down Saddam, or prop up Karzai, but this state-centric calculus never includes the blood of those who lived there."[33] The United States-centered narratives have rarely advanced the broader conception of the national interest as it had done in Europe after WWII; that ultimately it was in the US interests to stabilize and to rebuild these areas, to mitigate radicalism or extremism, through the politics of prosperity that animated some thinking in the 1940s. There have rarely been deep questions or extended discussion about the impact of war in Vietnam, in Iraq and in Afghanistan, and US visions of the postwar did not take into account conditions in these countries or US obligations toward them. For even if the United States departed all of these three wars as the vanquished, the *comparative* damage and costs are very much one sided.

The countries have been devastated; reconciliation has been slow in the case of Vietnam; reconstruction, such as it was, was not through relief or integration. When Obama finally arranged the orderly withdrawal of US forces from Iraq, he talked simply about turning a page and new beginnings.[34] In Afghanistan, Washington lowered the threshold of its objectives to such a point that many in the United States will forget why they are there or no longer recall the purpose of the war. The primary objective nearly two decades after war commenced is to get out. Such a

recursive, self-centered approach to these wars can only be the product of a polity that has lost the ability to imagine a world in which American wars *do* in fact end and in which the United States takes responsibility for the damage that it has caused abroad. In their different ways, the contributors to this volume argue for a more expansive epistemology of war, one that is not beholden to the myopic visions and assumptions of Washington.

David Ryan is professor of modern history at University College Cork, Ireland. He has published extensively on contemporary history and US foreign policy concentrating on interventions in the post-Vietnam era. His books include *Obama, US Foreign Policy and the Dilemmas of Intervention* coauthored with David Fitzgerald (Palgrave, 2014), *US Foreign Policy and the Other*, edited with Michael Cullinane (Berghahn, 2015), *Frustrated Empire: US Foreign Policy from 9/11 to Iraq* (Pluto and University of Michigan, 2007), *Vietnam in Iraq: Tactics, Lessons, Legacies and Ghosts,* edited with John Dumbrell (Routledge, 2007), *The United States and Europe in the Twentieth Century* (Longman, 2003), *US Foreign Policy in World History* (Routledge, 2000), and *US-Sandinista Diplomatic Relations: Voice of Intolerance* (MacMillan, 1995). He is also the author of numerous articles.

David Fitzgerald is lecturer in international politics in the School of History, University College Cork, Ireland. He has written numerous articles and books on military and foreign policy, especially counterinsurgency warfare and "small wars." His first book, *Learning to Forget: US Army Counterinsurgency Doctrine from Vietnam to Iraq* (Stanford, 2013), was a runner-up for the Society for Military History's Edward M. Coffman first manuscript prize. His current research focuses on consequences of the all-volunteer force for American society and the rise of a "warrior ethos" within the post-Vietnam US military. Together with David Ryan, he is the coauthor of *Obama, US Foreign Policy and the Dilemmas of Intervention* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

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