



To Build a Better World: Choices to End the Cold War and Create a Global Commonwealth

By Philip Zelikow and Condoleezza Rice

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Reviewed by Walter M. Hudson

Philip Zelikow and Condoleezza Rice's *To Build a Better World* begins in early 1989, with two nobodies: one, a dutiful KGB officer in Dresden; the other, a research scientist at the East German Central Institute of Physical Chemistry. Like the rest of the world, they do not know what will take place through the course of that pivotal year, or how the aftermath will one day lead these two unknowns, Vladimir Putin and Angela Merkel, to the pinnacle of power.

It is a fitting introduction; how little do we really know about how events will unfold? The so-called experts certainly did not have it right. Well into the late 1980s, the accepted thinking among the intelligentsia was that the Cold War would continue into the foreseeable future and that the "American Century" was ending.

Then, in the blink of an eye, the Cold War ended and the Soviet Union ceased to exist. Talk of America's decline was consigned to history's ash heap and the American Century appeared unassailable. Things are hardly so sanguine now. Nonetheless, the end of the Cold War—with the free market system and the democratic order vindicated—still seems something a little short of miraculous. But perhaps it was not so. Human agency decisively intervened at every point. The end, as the authors make explicit in the book's subtitle, was determined by *choices* made. Zelikow and Rice's "analytical history of the major choices" zooms in on human beings and the choices they made during one of the 20th century's great pivot points.

Zelikow and Rice have done a very fine, scholarly job. Of course, they write not only as scholars but also as actors who played parts in that history. This opens them up to some criticism—how can they be objective? They are, however, forthright about it and occasionally place themselves in the narrative, a seeming overt acknowledgment of this sort of participant history. And it is familiar scholarly territory for them, both having previously navigated this subject matter in their *Germany Unified and Europe Transformed: A Study in Statecraft* (Harvard University Press, 1995). That was a good study, but still a case of near-first impression. Deeper scholarship, more declassification, and the passage of time provide for greater context and make the current title a much richer work.

Zelikow and Rice demonstrate impressive multiarchival, primary source research in a variety of languages to buttress their insights. This scholarship makes it a worthy addition to the growing body of literature examining the end of the Cold War, and, at a minimum, their book supplements traditional Cold War histories, such as the recent magisterial work of Odd Arne Westad, and earlier works by Cold War deans John Lewis Gaddis and Melvyn Leffler.

The book is also highly accessible and offers carefully sketched portraits of key world leaders grappling with the

decisions of their time. The portrait of Mikhail Gorbachev is sympathetic yet ultimately unflattering. George H.W. Bush and Helmut Kohl, on the other hand, are highlighted as capable stewards and leaders, and, in Kohl's case, the German chancellor is portrayed as a near-visionary statesman.

However, Zelikow and Rice do not only offer interesting character studies; the book is more fundamentally about strategic choices and the strategy of decisionmaking. Too often, histories that focus on so-called grand strategy appear as roadmaps to preordained destinations. The "blindness of hindsight," as Zelikow and Rice observe, is powerful. Retrospection confers a sense of the inevitability on events. Historians discern patterns in policymakers' decisions that operate in accordance with Alexander George's famous phrase, "operational codes." To do strategy is to have a mapped out "plan." In senior Service college terms, having a strategy is to have determined "ends, ways, and means."

But strategy is not simply planning; it is *doing*, which means strategist-statesmen are constantly *choosing* what to do. A strategy is often far less a set of rock-solid propositions that become long-range goals and more a series of tentative questions that require immediate answers. Zelikow and Rice's excellent work offers a thorough appreciation of strategy as choice-making.

In order to unpack how strategic choices are made, they rely on "Vickers Triangle," a formulation composed by the brilliant British polymath Geoffrey Vickers. This triangle is composed of values (what one cares about), realities (what the facts are), and actions (what one can actually do). Values, realities, and actions, as opposed to ends, ways, and means, are not linear; they are, in a Clausewitzian sense, relational. They constantly react and interact with each other to create new issues, new questions, and new understandings. They form a crucible from which judgments and choices, framed and reframed, are made in the urgency of the moment.

Thus, Zelikow and Rice frequently break *in medias res* and present "issue

maps” that pose a large geopolitical strategic issue, such as “Ending the Cold War in Europe.” Below that issue, the authors posit broad themes such as “Security in Europe.” They then pose a series of questions that lead to choices such as “Should the U.S. keep troops in Europe or not?”

Such questions, sifted through the interaction of values, realities, and actions, had to be answered. Choices *had* to be made. This is what strategy formulation was during the end of the Cold War. Indeed, one could argue that this is what strategy always is: fork-in-the-road decisions made with incomplete and sometimes confusing data. Some leaders, such as Gorbachev, made decisions that tended to be more wrong than right; others, such as Bush and Kohl, made ones that tended to be more right than wrong. For policymakers, warfighters, and students of strategy throughout the joint force, the insights offered should be of immediate value.

The Cold War ended three decades ago. For a brief moment, history itself appeared to have ended in a way that signaled the ascent of American ideals worldwide, in perpetuity. That moment has passed, no doubt. Nonetheless, as Zelikow and Rice point out, we would do well to remember our triumphs as well as our defeats, and recall that both result from deliberate choices and not simply historical accidents. JFQ

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The Russian Understanding of War: Blurring the Lines Between War and Peace

By Oscar Jonsson

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If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles,” wrote the influential Chinese military strategist Sun Tzu in *The Art of War*. Russia’s ongoing efforts to reshape the world in ways that are at odds with American values and interests have turned Moscow into a dangerous adversary. Countless analyses have appeared in recent years that venture to understand how Russian leadership thinks, what Russia wants, and how it plans to get it. Oscar Jonsson’s *The Russian Understanding of War* is a valuable addition to the corpus of knowledge on Russia’s military thinking about war.

Relying on a close reading of Russian security, military, and foreign policy doctrines and the writings of Russian military, academic, and political elites, Jonsson traces the evolution of Russian

military thought about war from the early Soviet period through contemporary times. According to Jonsson, the nature of war—traditionally understood in Russia as armed violence for political purposes—had not changed much until recently. The advent of information-psychological warfare has led to the blurring of the boundary between war and peace. Having observed the role of information in “altering the consciousness of a country” and undermining public trust in state institutions “to the degree that citizens are prepared to revolt, creating color revolutions,” Russian strategists began conceiving of information as a weapon and a more effective means of achieving strategic outcomes than armed force.

The surge of interest in Russia’s thinking stems from the growing awareness that Western strategic and military concepts may have limited utility for deciphering Russia’s purposes, perspectives, and mental models on war. Notwithstanding an appreciation of the fundamental differences in countries’ conceptions of war, Jonsson chooses to approach Russia’s views on armed conflict from a longstanding Western military theoretical background informed by a Clausewitzian perspective, rather than alternative “lenses” grounded in Russia’s own military theory. By doing so, the author falls into the same trap of ascertaining the seemingly novel Russian approach to operations for a fundamentally new conception of war, as many other writers on hybrid warfare and the Gerasimov doctrine have been caught in before.

Russia’s information-psychological operations are anything but new. They repurpose tried-and-tested malign influence campaigns used by the Soviets in Eastern and Western Europe. Similar to modern Russian strategists, the Soviet military and political elite recognized the economic and technological superiority of the United States and sought to compensate for capability gaps by exploiting cultural values and psychological biases in individual decisionmaking processes. Questions about the nature versus the character of war were not at the forefront of Soviet thinking, which,