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**Review and Evaluation for Student Use of the Book The Hawk and the Dove
“For every complex problem there is a solution that is clear, simple, and wrong.”**

Part One: A Review of “The Hawk and the Dove”:

The Hawk and the Dove is both biography and history, following the dynamic and powerful careers of two men that spanned decades and that shaped American Cold War policy. The author, Nicholas Thompson, is a journalist, not a historian, but does justice to his subjects, George Kennan (the dove) and Paul Nitze (the hawk, and incidentally, the writer’s grandfather, a point which he acknowledges in his introduction but does not color the rest of his work) in this balanced and comprehensive account of their influence as well as their relationship (though with a marked focus on the former). Thompson’s premise for the book is that Nitze and Kennan were the only two people to have been significantly involved in the Cold War from its outset to its conclusion; and that while equally influential, they were substantially different (Thompson 2-3). Both men began their careers in government and diplomacy at the conclusion of World War II, and both men continued to hold positions of influence in or for every single administration, Republican or Democrat, until after the end of the Cold War. Thompson’s book is a historical analysis, but has contemporary value as it raises important questions about foreign policy decisions and decision-making, diplomacy, and about the nature of our democracy.

Given the profound influence of both men, Thompson routinely notes how each man arrived at his respective position on the hottest issue of the day: the use of nuclear weaponry. Both men were profoundly affected by their World War II experiences – Kennan by his time spent in

Germany, where he undertook a post-war tour of Hamburg, and Nitze by his time in Japan and his subsequent post-war tour and analysis of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Based on the similar level of destruction experienced by both cities, one might expect these two men to arrive at a similar conclusion. Such was not the case. Kennan, horrified by what he saw, which was incidentally the result of firebombing and not a nuclear weapon, became a pacifist, stating “I felt an unshakeable conviction that no momentary military advantage . . . could have justified this stupendous, careless destruction of civilian life and of material values, built up laboriously by civilian hands over the course of centuries for purposes having nothing to do with war. . . ” (91). This sentiment colored the rest of his career. To wit, he continued, “If the Western world was really going to make valid the pretense of a higher moral departure point – of great sympathy and understanding for the human being as God made him. . . then it had to learn to fight its wars morally as well as militarily.” (91). Nitze, on the other hand, struggled to quantify the unimaginable damage caused by the atomic bomb. In so doing, he was able to rationalize its use, not as a weapon of choice, but as an effective deterrent. As part of the United States Strategic Bombing Survey, Nitze helped write a sterile, matter-of-fact report of the effects of nuclear warfare on the Japanese. However, throughout his career, when challenged as to his understanding of the consequences of nuclear warfare, Nitze was quick to point out that he was one of the few people who really did understand its impact. It was this experience that led him to the conclusion that the best way to prevent a nuclear war was to prepare to win one and that while it would be better if no one had nuclear weapons, it would be far worse if the USSR had them and the U.S. didn’t (101, 104).

Ultimately it was this philosophical difference that defined not only Kennan and Nitze’s influence, but the nature of American Cold War policy in general. Kennan and Nitze’s ideology shaped the actions of the U.S. with regard to the Soviet Union from appeasement to aggression for the duration of the war. Kennan’s most significant contribution was the coining of the term “containment” (though notably, not for its practical application) as well as the ideas expressed in

his famous “Long Telegram”. Kennan, a diplomat and academic, had originally conceived of containment as a strictly political tool (similar to Nixon’s *détente*), the intent of which was to push back the Soviet Union when it tried to exercise its political muscle by accumulating information, resources and power. In essence, the United States should apply counter-pressure to counteract the USSR’s subversion, corruption and intimidation (62-63). The Long Telegram sought to explain the Soviet Union’s intentions, as well as why U.S. policy had, to that point, failed to accomplish its stated goals. He argued that Russian geography, history and psychology predetermined their hostility and suspicion towards the U.S. (59). He believed that the Soviet system was fatally flawed, and would ultimately collapse under its own weight (76). Kennan claimed that Marxism, instead of being the bedrock of Soviet beliefs and actions, was actually somewhat of a sham. In actuality, it was the appearance of adherence to, rather than the justification for and defense of Marxism that the Soviets were so keen to preserve. Marxism enabled Stalin to operate a “thuggish police state” with relative impunity as it espoused the doctrine that conflict with the west was inevitable, that harmony was impossible, and that ultimately, national security depended on the destruction of the capitalist system (59-60). Kennan’s insight into the Russians came from years of personal experience working for the State Department and being stationed in Moscow. The publishing of the Long Telegram turned Kennan into something of a diplomatic rock star, as his Long Telegram was used to justify and explain U.S. actions in response to the USSR through the Cold War, and provided him with fame and accolades that would last him for the rest of his career.

Nitze, on the other hand, was a political insider and staunch anti-communist perhaps best known for his authorship of the profoundly influential (and only recently declassified) document NSC-68. After the surprise explosion of a hydrogen bomb by the Soviets, Nitze felt that a strategic overhaul was not only a necessity but a priority. What he drafted in response is a startlingly Machiavellian, bipolar, ideologically-fueled worldview. In it, he claimed that the world ultimately faced a battle between freedom and slavery, and that the enslavers (the Soviets) sought to destroy

the U.S.. Survival was contingent upon the rapid buildup of the armed forces, in order to prevent the Soviets from achieving world domination (112). NSC-68 went even further, making the argument that in almost all cases, the ends justified the means; that the goal of thwarting the Soviet Union was worth virtually any calculated risk (113). This document and its corresponding rhetoric had a profound influence on subsequent U.S. foreign policy, eventually contributing to the implementation of a policy of militarized containment, whereby the U.S. fought a series of proxy wars in attempt to forcibly stop Soviet expansion and influence. While NSC-68 never directly addressed nuclear armament, it set the stage for the nuclear arms race that would proliferate throughout the balance of the Cold War.

In spite of their differences, perhaps the most lasting impression Thompson gives is the significance and necessity of *both* these men's viewpoints to the success of American interests during the Cold War. Based on the comprehensive overview that the book provides of the Cold War, it becomes clear that both viewpoints were not only valid but necessary. For example, Kennan's healthy skepticism of the unlimited application of the Truman Doctrine was balanced against Nitze's view that the U.S. should use its ample power to improve the world. Nitze's belief in the acceptable use of a "limited strike" against the Soviet Union during the Cuban Missile Crisis (which the author concludes after interviewing Soviet military officials would have certainly caused an all-out nuclear war) was balanced with Kennan's rigid contention that "Unless the West shows some disposition to negotiate, the hard line is going to be pursued in Moscow not only to the very brink but to the full point of world catastrophe" (178-179). Ultimately it was the compromise of these two positions – put plainly, to 'act tough but negotiate' – that prevented the onslaught of all-out nuclear war.

While Nitze and Kennan often found themselves on the opposite sides of an issue, sometimes they would argue the same point from opposite angles. For example, Kennan's patience with the Soviet Union and his counsel to outlast it, not defeat it was balanced against Nitze's fear of

being eclipsed by the Soviet Union (both required similar actions to accomplish). Both men agreed to, and worked to execute, a plan to solve the problem of Berlin in 1948 (abandon the military government, establish a legitimate civilian government, and withdraw occupying forces in their entirety) (90). Throughout the duration of the Cold War, both men advocated for covert action, more sophisticated responses to Soviet propaganda, as well as aid to nations at risk; the latter being a lesson learned from World War II (84). Both men also agreed on the problem of Vietnam, proving that even seemingly opposing viewpoints are often not so far apart. Kennan and Nitze both rejected the Domino Theory as well as the strategic importance of Vietnam, especially in light of its cost (203). Kennan counseled “prudence and wisdom. . . do what you can, when you can” while Nitze, perhaps recalling his experience determining the strategic lessons from World War II, claimed that the aggressors always knew where a war began, but never where it would end (204; 11).

Curiously, what this book does is create a ringing endorsement for democracy in that it demonstrates the critical importance of the consideration of differing perspectives during challenging times, and the importance of the discussion of policies and their possible outcomes before rashly implementing them. It further showcases the roles of two schools of political thought pervasive during the time and beyond: Kennan the realist tempered by Nitze the idealist; and begs the question what would have happened if any one philosophy won out. It is also curious to note that on certain occasions, (Kennan with the counterculture and leftist anti-war movement and Nitze with Vietnam), neither man lived up to his established label of the “dove” or the “hawk”; rather, they seemed to switch roles.

Conversely, it calls into question the role of appointed officials in our particular brand of democracy. Neither Kennan nor Nitze ever held an elected position in the entirety of their careers. Each assignment was appointed. Given the nature and extent of their influence, it certainly causes one to wonder about the significance of these decidedly undemocratic positions.

Finally, and most profoundly, the legacy of the relationship of these two men leaves a lasting impression for a number of reasons. In this double biography, Thompson not only provides a history of the Cold War, but showcases the exceptionally high level of tension that existed throughout this very dangerous age. What is most remarkable, then, is not only that these two men could maintain civility and respectfully disagree with one another, but that they could remain friends for decades in spite of their sometimes gaping philosophical and political differences. Time and time again, Nitze and Kennan met, discussed, and critiqued each other's stance on the most pressing issues of the day. Never once did either man insult or berate the other, despite the passionate nature of the problems at hand. If such courtesy and decorum was possible in arguably the most hostile and dangerous political environments in American history (save perhaps for the Civil War), it gives great hope for the future that American politics can be civil and functional again.

Part Two: The value of The Hawk and the Dove in the classroom

This book is a tremendously valuable resource in the classroom particularly because of the questions it raises. First and foremost, its subject matter, Kennan and Nitze, while likely mentioned in passing in history classes across the country, were clearly instrumental in the decisions made throughout the Cold War. While neither ever held the title "President", "Secretary of State" or "General", each man in his own right shaped the policies and actions of those making the most consequential decisions. For example, Nitze's authorship of the document, NSC-68. That document had a profound influence on the design and execution of political and military strategy throughout the Cold War. In addition, Kennan's "Long Telegram" and "X article" had significant influence in defining the problem Americans faced with regard to the Soviet Union during the Cold War years. Considering the fact that each of these men were involved in every administration from Roosevelt to Reagan, they clearly warrant attention by students of history, particularly those examining the

Cold War in America. Their lack of due regard begs the question, who gets to choose who gets to be in history books? Can we really have a history of the Cold War without Nitze and Kennan?

On a related note, it is worth mentioning to students that neither man were ever elected for a position that they held. As extensions of the executive branch, each position was appointed. One thing Thompson's book does is emphasize the power and influence of appointed officials. This is an incredibly important point for students to consider in any American history or civics class. In a democracy, based on the principal of elected representative government, how much power should be entrusted to officials appointed by other members of the government? While it is clear that both of these men were educated, moral men with a strong sense of duty and loyalty to their nation, neither one was really accountable to anyone other than a loose network of bureaucratic supervision and oversight. Given the circumstances, and the all-too-real possibility of nuclear annihilation, it is appropriate for students to consider who holds power and influence in their government and how they got that authority.

In light of the less-than-civil modern American political environment, The Hawk and the Dove demonstrates a meaningful example of cooperation and compromise under unimaginable duress. Students could ponder the hypothetical of what might have happened if either man ignored the counsel and advice of the other, or what would have happened if the powers that be responded to only one point of view and entirely disregarded the other. While imperfect, compromise is often not only desirable but necessary, especially in light of a circumstance with such dire consequences. "For every complex problem there is a solution that is clear, simple and wrong." By themselves, the ideas of these two men would not have accomplished what they did together: they aided a peaceful and successful conclusion to an exceptionally long and dangerous conflict.

Work Cited

Thompson, Nicholas. *The Hawk and the Dove*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2009. Print.