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Book Review

Surprise, Security, and the American Experience by John Lewis Gaddis. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004. 150 pages. ISBN 0674011740.

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Renowned Cold War historian John Lewis Gaddis, in his 2002 book, *The Landscape of History*, dealt with the philosophy of history and argued that looking back at history was a useful enterprise in order not only to understand the present, but also to forecast the future. With *Surprise, Security, and the American Experience*, he is applying that lesson to examine President George W. Bush's "War on Terror." Gaddis connects the policies of John Quincy Adams and Franklin D. Roosevelt with those of President Bush.

This short book has short personal anecdotes as an introduction and conclusion, surrounding three substantive chapters. In the second chapter, "The Nineteenth Century," Gaddis talks about the influence of "free security," an idea forwarded by C. Vann Woodward in 1959. The "free security" thesis posited that as Americans were historically accustomed to a life mostly free from foreign threats, they had to redefine their national psyche with the advent of the Cold War.

In fact, on rare occasions in the past was war brought home to Americans. Witnessing the surprise burning of its capital in 1814, the U.S. formulated a new approach to security: expansion. Unlike other nations, Gaddis argues, the U.S. preferred expansion to contraction and offense to defense when it came to national security. The War of 1812 demonstrated that the U.S. could only be secure as long as it expanded. This policy became evident in the Monroe Doctrine of 1823, formulated by Secretary of State John Quincy Adams. Adams advocated three principles in order to ensure expansion: preemption (the U.S. was to address security threats before they materialized), unilateralism (the U.S. was to address those threats on its own), and hegemony (the U.S. was to exercise full authority over the western hemisphere).

In the next chapter, "The Twentieth Century," Gaddis discusses how the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor and the aftermath triggered another paradigm shift in American national security thinking. This time President

Franklin Roosevelt modified unilateralism and preemption by committing the U.S. to the new world order. However, hegemony (now control of the whole globe) was maintained, evident in the creation of the Bretton Woods system, the United Nations, and the veto in the United Nations Security Council.

In the chapter, "The Twenty-First Century," Gaddis looks at how preemption and unilateralism have emerged once again, as a result of the surprise attacks of September 11, 2001. In fighting an elusive enemy, the Bush administration's emphasis on preemption and unilateralism seems to weaken the U.S.'s international credibility. But Gaddis draws favorable comparisons between President Bush's position against terrorism and "weak states" and Secretary of State Adams's reactions to Indian incursions from Spanish Florida and the weakening Spanish empire in the 1810s and 1820s.

Surprise, Security, and the American Experience is thought provoking and puts the Bush administration's policies into historical perspective. It might appear as if Gaddis is praising Bush's policies, but the book must be read as both an analysis of the Bush Doctrine and a warning. Gaddis is suspicious of the unilateralist tendencies of the administration, even though he views this as a natural flow of traditional U.S. foreign policy.

The book is arguably the best study of the Bush Doctrine and the "War on Terror," comparable to Walter Russell Mead's *Power, Terror, Peace, and War* and Niall Ferguson's *Colossus: The Price of America's Empire.* Its brevity and Gaddis's use of anecdotes as well as analysis make for a broad readership. Those who wish to read current U.S. foreign policy from an historical perspective are well advised to refer to this book.