

---

JULY/AUGUST 2010

---

## The Ghost of Munich: America's Appeasement Complex

*Fredrik Logevall and Kenneth Osgood*

[Share](#) |

The annual Values Voter Summit might seem an unlikely place to get a preview of the 2012 presidential debate on foreign policy. True, the gathering of several thousand conservative activists, sponsored by the Family Research Council, typically features a parade of Republican stars, many of them hoping for a shot at the top spot on the GOP ticket. But the attendees tend to focus on domestic issues that matter to social conservatives: religious freedom, protection of marriage, and abortion. The breakout sessions during the 2009 summit, held last September in Washington, featured topics like “The Threat of Illegal Immigration,” “Countering the Homosexual Agenda in Public Schools,” and “Global Warming Hysteria: The New Face of the ‘Pro-Death’ Agenda.”

Yet Minnesota Governor Tim Pawlenty used his evening plenary address to launch a blistering attack on President Obama’s foreign policy. Although relatively new to the national stage, Pawlenty secured his place as an early contender for the Republican nomination by delivering a rousing speech that garnered four standing ovations and landed him a strong showing in the Values Voter straw poll that always accompanies the summit. Strength, Pawlenty said, was one of the values under attack in the current political environment: “Not only did the president abandon missile defense, but he is opening negotiations with Iran and North Korea. The lessons of history are clear: Appeasement and weakness did not stop the Nazis, appeasement did not stop the Soviets, and appeasement did not stop the terrorists.”

By leveling the “appeasement” charge, Pawlenty tapped into a central theme that is sure to figure in both the 2012 presidential race and the upcoming midterm elections. But in selling his foreign policy bona fides to the Republican faithful, Pawlenty also summoned the most commonly used, widely accepted, and poorly understood historical analogy in American politics.

The reference to appeasement, of course, evokes the memory of the notorious Munich Pact of 1938. With the world on the brink of war, British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain sought to find a way out by meeting Adolph Hitler on his own turf, at the Bavarian city of Munich, nerve center of the Nazi Party. There Chamberlain made his infamous deal with the devil, allowing Hitler to annex a large chunk of Czechoslovakian territory in return for a pledge of peace. Chamberlain returned to a hero’s welcome in England. Carrying the black umbrella that would later become a symbol of shame, and waving the Munich agreement in his hands, he proclaimed that his appeasement policy had produced “peace in our time.” Less than a year later, Europe was at war. From that moment on, Munich would symbolize the ultimate folly of making agreements with dictators.

Although the United States was not party to the 1938 agreement, Americans have nonetheless fixated on it for seven decades. “Munich” and “appeasement” have been among the dirtiest words in American politics, synonymous with naïveté and weakness, and signifying a craven willingness to barter away the nation’s vital interests for empty promises. American presidents from Harry Truman on have feared the dreaded “Munich analogy”—and projected an air of

uncompromising toughness lest they be branded as appeasers by their political opponents.

For a time, Vietnam seemed to challenge Munich, providing a counter narrative about the danger of avoiding diplomacy; but the specter of appeasement never really went away, and now it is back with force. As a candidate, Barack Obama virtually invited the Munich ghost to return when he signaled his willingness to meet with the leaders of Iran, Syria, and other so-called pariah states without preconditions. This set off a firestorm from the right, with then President Bush leading the charge. “We have an obligation to call this what it is,” Bush declared in a speech before the Israeli Knesset, “the false comfort of appeasement, which has been repeatedly discredited by history.” The drumbeat continued steadily following Obama’s inauguration. Scores of conservative commentators and politicians bludgeoned the new president for scrapping the missile defense plans for Eastern Europe, thereby allegedly caving to Moscow, and for trying to engage Tehran and Pyongyang. Obama had taken “another move straight out of the Neville Chamberlain foreign policy playbook,” Congressman Steve King charged. Newt Gingrich, the former House speaker who harbors presidential ambitions, sounded the same theme, asserting that “patterns of appeasement and avoidance . . . are the heart of this administration.”

We have, of course, heard these arguments before. For the better part of the last century, Americans looked at the Soviet Union in much the same way as they now look at Iran, North Korea, Syria, Venezuela, and other “rogue states”: as dangerous, cunning, and above all devious. Americans assumed that the men in the Kremlin were motivated more by their Marxist-Leninist ideology than by the traditional interests of the Soviet state. Because of their very nature, they could not be trusted. Negotiations were pointless. Munich and the 1930s seemed to offer a clear-cut lesson, as Truman put it in 1948: “Appeasement leads only to further aggression and ultimately to war.”

As the current debate over U.S. foreign policy again turns on the lessons of the past, Americans would do well to take a closer look at the country’s long wrestling match with Munich’s ghost. Such an examination would show, first, that “Munich” has retained its power in American political discourse for more than seventy years largely because of electoral calculations. Second, contrary to the prevailing wisdom, the success or failure of American foreign policy since the 1930s has to a great extent hinged on the willingness of presidents to withstand the inevitable charges of appeasement that accompany any decision to negotiate with hostile powers, and to pursue the nation’s interests through diplomacy. Sometimes these negotiating efforts failed; sometimes the successes proved marginal. But those presidents who challenged the tyranny of “Munich” produced some of the most important breakthroughs in American diplomacy; those who didn’t begat some of the nation’s most enduring tragedies.

When considering the Munich accord and its legacy, we should remember that Franklin Roosevelt initially greeted the pact with equanimity—and that it infuriated Hitler. Like many informed Americans (and Europeans), Roosevelt suspected that Britain and France were unready for war at the time, and he knew that the American public had no desire to enter into another European conflict. Negotiations seemed the best course to take. “Good man,” FDR famously cabled Chamberlain after the conference, even as he privately acknowledged that the Briton was “taking very long chances.” Hitler, meanwhile, wanted war in 1938. He was angry that he had let himself be maneuvered into a diplomatic agreement that bought the democracies time. For Chamberlain, Munich indeed represented a tactical victory of sorts. It provided England with a breathing spell to build its strength in preparation for the likely showdown with the Nazi juggernaut. As a result, Chamberlain won broad support for his efforts among his informed countrymen, who understood he had few cards to play.

When war came the following year, however, “Munich” instantly became a symbol of diplomatic naïveté. By the time Chamberlain died in November 1940, his reputation was in tatters. “Few men can have known such a tremendous reverse of fortune in so short a time,” he remarked not long before his death.

In short order, Roosevelt articulated the new meaning of Munich. “Normal practices of diplomacy . . . are of no possible

use in dealing with international outlaws,” he said over and over again as he tried to convince an isolationist Congress and a fretful public of the need for war. With dictatorship and tyranny, there could be no negotiated settlements, no deals, only capitulation. This led logically to the policy of “unconditional surrender,” announced at Casablanca in 1943. Roosevelt’s notion of total victory sat well with Americans—perhaps too well. For years to come they would expect a similar form of moral clarity and unambiguous triumph in all their dealings with foreign adversaries. But unconditional surrender is, in fact, rarely achieved—and never without tremendous cost, as the sixty to seventy million dead from the Second World War make clear.

The slide into the Cold War solidified the role of “no more Munichs” as a cornerstone of American political discourse. From the start in 1946, America’s containment strategy envisioned little room for diplomacy with Moscow, at least until such a time as the Soviet system fundamentally transformed, or the balance of power tilted decisively in the direction of the United States and the West. The “lesson of Munich” seemed to suggest that negotiations with Joseph Stalin and his Kremlin associates would be pointless, if not dangerous. And domestic politics merely accentuated the danger. Following the success of the Chinese Communist revolution in 1949, Republicans berated the Truman administration for “losing” China, and Senator Joseph McCarthy ratcheted up the pressure by charging the Democrats with “twenty years of treason.”

These partisan attacks cast a long shadow over American foreign policy. A generation of politicians learned a simple lesson: A Communist gain anywhere, on anyone’s watch, would be met with charges of appeasement—now equated not just with spineless gullibility, but treacherous disloyalty. This heated atmosphere narrowed the range of acceptable policy choices available to presidents and sent diplomacy out into the cold.

Thus the United States took a somewhat paradoxical stand in the immediate postwar years; it proved largely unwilling to negotiate even though it was in the strongest position to do so. In the 1940s and throughout the 1950s, the American strategic arsenal surpassed that of the Soviet Union in all but one category—the number of men under arms. In terms of nuclear warheads, missiles, bombers, submarines, warships, military bases, points for logistical support—to say nothing of its vastly superior economic strength and ideological appeal—the United States far surpassed the Soviet Union.

What’s more, Washington knew it. Publicly, however, politicians and government officials articulated a different line: that the threat was as great as ever, that Moscow’s ambitions were global, its capabilities immense. That was the smart message in terms of domestic politics, both to maintain support for a vigilant U.S. posture on the world stage and to win and hold elected office. Negotiation still carried the stench of appeasement, and to advocate it was to run the risk of being called the Neville Chamberlain of a new, more dangerous era.

An abiding faith in the Munich analogy became one of the few things that was truly bipartisan in postwar American politics. In the years that followed Chamberlain’s fateful trip to Bavaria, Democrats and Republicans alike displayed a common understanding of the dangers of appeasement, and a common belief in the political value of using the Munich analogy to undermine the other party. Indeed, the analogy has most often been evoked on two kinds of occasions: when the country is preparing for a war overseas, as with Korea, Vietnam, and Iraq, and during election seasons. Thus the Republican Party platforms in 1948, 1952, and 1964, for example, included stark condemnations of “appeasement.” In those years, and in 1956 and 1960 as well, the major presidential candidates almost ritualistically smeared their opponents as “weak,” as insufficiently vigilant, as likely to give away the store to the wily and cunning Soviets. Republicans did it; Democrats did it. Truman holds the dubious distinction of using the word “appeasement” in a public setting more often than any other American president—much of the time while selling the war in Korea or campaigning for Adlai Stevenson.

Yet it was Democrats who came to feel the sting most acutely, starting with Truman himself after the “loss” of China. A

decade later, John F. Kennedy endured withering Republican attacks for his decision to negotiate with Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev during and after the Cuban Missile Crisis. Kennedy's vice president and successor, Lyndon Johnson, paid due attention. When he announced a massive escalation in Vietnam, for example, in July 1965, he referred confidently to the lessons of history: "We learned from Hitler at Munich that success only feeds the appetite for aggression. The battle would be renewed in one country and then another country, bringing with it perhaps even larger and crueller conflict, as we have learned from the lessons of history."

As the war dragged on, Johnson's reading of the past would fall under painful scrutiny. After more than half a million men and overwhelming firepower failed to win the war, Americans came to accept a new historical lesson—one that stressed not the utility but the futility of force. The ghost of Munich now had to contend with the ghost of Vietnam.

American involvement in Southeast Asia transformed the politics of appeasement. Up until this point, liberals and moderates had both played the game, or some variation of it, as diligently as their conservative counterparts. Vietnam exposed an essential and tragic flaw of the Munich analogy, forcing the left to start shying away from the comparison. This opened them up to political attack, however, because for the right the power of Munich had not diminished. Savvy Democrats understood this, and remained wary of risking the charge of appeasement by appearing too eager to negotiate with Communist foes. This political reality produced a paradoxical outcome: henceforth it would be easier for Republicans to pursue negotiations with adversaries.

Hence, as the saying goes, only Nixon could go to China. Only a Republican with strong anti-Communist credentials—and Richard Nixon's were second to none—could stand up to the charges of weakness that would come from conservative hard-liners. Democrats had already paid their pound of flesh for losing China; they wouldn't do it again.

And so it was that Nixon—the man who had blasted Truman and Stevenson, and then Kennedy and Johnson, for being muddle-headed appeasers—made the first big breakthrough in Cold War diplomacy. Announcing in his 1969 inaugural address a new "era of negotiation" to replace the old one of "confrontation," he not only helped repair two decades of frozen relations between Washington and Beijing, but he and his national security adviser, Henry Kissinger, presided over détente, a relaxation of Cold War tensions that fostered, among other things, a productive round of arms control agreements and the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty. These moves showed that diplomacy with adversaries could work.

The opening of China led to the beginning of a vital commercial relationship that, despite occasional tensions, has served the American economy well over the years and also acted as a force for liberalization within China itself, gradually easing Mao Zedong's repressive structures. Much the same could be said about the impact of détente within the Soviet Union. The 1975 Helsinki Accords, finalized by Nixon's successor, Gerald Ford, provided a mechanism for advancing human rights within the Soviet bloc. Historians now realize that Helsinki sowed many of the seeds for change that would bear fruit a decade later under Mikhail Gorbachev's *glasnost*.

Still, détente did not sit easily with the right wing of the Republican Party. Nixon's seeming acknowledgment of the Soviet Union as an equal, and his tacit recognition of Kremlin domination of Eastern Europe, smacked too much of a pact with the devil. Grassroots conservatives attacked détente and the China opening fiercely. The firebrand Phyllis Schlafly, a leading voice of the New Right, led an assault on Nixon's leadership of the GOP. "Civilized people don't dine with murderers and criminals," she said, as she compared Nixon to—who else?—Neville Chamberlain, and condemned the ABM Treaty as yet another Munich. "The delusion that America can be defended by treaties instead of by weapons is the most persistent and pernicious of all liberal fallacies," Schlafly declared.

Such arguments gained traction as the years went on. It was Jimmy Carter who paid the biggest political price for the new turn in relations with Moscow. He entered the White House determined to build on the détente policy engineered

by Nixon and continued under Ford. But embracing the policies of his Republican predecessors opened him up to attack from, oddly enough, his Republican opponents. Neoconservative intellectuals such as Norman Podhoretz complained about a “culture of appeasement” that was encouraging Soviet adventurism in the third world and turning a blind eye to Russia’s growing strength. Ronald Reagan sensed an opportunity. He focused his quest for the White House in large part on wooing grassroots conservatives by attacking détente and playing up the present danger. Asked what he thought of détente, Reagan quipped, “Isn’t that what a farmer has with his turkey—until Thanksgiving?”

Carter defended himself by toughening his foreign policy accordingly, setting in motion, Americans often forget, the arms buildup, the secret war in Afghanistan, and other tough policies now generally ascribed to his successor. Prodding Carter along was the hawkish Zbigniew Brzezinski, who repeatedly lectured his boss on the politics of national security. “It is important that in 1980 you be recognized as the president both of *peace* and of *resolve*,” Brzezinski advised in April 1979. “For international reasons as well as for domestic political reasons,” he later elaborated, “you ought to deliberately toughen both the tone and the substance of our foreign policy.”

In the end, Reagan played to the Brzezinski script better than Carter did, riding his message of hard-hitting anti-Communism and unquestioning patriotism into the Oval Office. In part he did so by reframing the lessons of Munich to link them to a new interpretation of the meaning of Vietnam. “There is a lesson for all of us in Vietnam,” he announced in the summer of 1980. “If we are forced to fight, we must have the means and the determination to prevail or we will not have what it takes to secure the peace.” In virtually the same breath, Reagan spoke of World War II, which came about, he asserted, “because nations were weak, not strong, in the face of aggression.” One war began because of weakness; another was lost because of it. Both taught the very same lesson: the importance of standing firm in the face of aggression.

Yet in time Reagan would show a different side. He entered office sounding very much like the antithesis of Carter; by the time he left, he looked more like Carter than either liberals or conservatives today care to admit. His anti-Communism did not diminish, but his sense of how to best contend with Soviet power certainly evolved. Negotiations, formerly anathema to him, came to hold promise, particularly after Gorbachev rose to power in 1985. Reagan reached out to him, and the two men initiated a series of stunning diplomatic breakthroughs that laid the groundwork for the end of the Cold War. Thus in 1987 they signed the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, banning all land-based intermediate-range nuclear missiles in Europe. As bilateral relations warmed, Gorbachev also unilaterally reduced his nation’s armed forces, helped settle regional conflicts, and began withdrawing Soviet troops from Afghanistan.

Reagan had come to see what other U.S. leaders have always found when they break free of the never-negotiate straitjacket: that diplomacy can be a vital tool for enhancing American interests. Although Reagan had once attacked détente for perpetuating the Kremlin’s immoral rule, as president he came to realize that by relaxing tensions, he could actually destabilize the Soviet regime’s grip on power. As he jotted in his diary, “If we opened them up a bit, their leading citizens would be braver about proposing changes in their system.” By negotiating with him, Reagan gave Gorbachev the sense of security he needed to move ahead with his domestic reforms, measures that ultimately paved the way for the Soviet Union’s demise.

The more Reagan talked with Soviet leaders, the more he came to understand “something surprising,” as he later recalled: “Many people at the top of Soviet hierarchy were genuinely afraid of America and Americans. Perhaps this shouldn’t have surprised me, but it did.” He realized he could accomplish more by giving the Soviets fewer reasons to fear American power and more reasons to cooperate. As Reagan once said about negotiations: “You’re unlikely to get all you want; you’ll probably get more of what you want if you don’t issue ultimatums and leave your adversary room to maneuver; you shouldn’t back your adversary into a corner, embarrass him, or humiliate him; and sometimes, the easiest way to get things done is for the top people to do them alone and in private.”

Conservatives in his own party didn't see it that way. Like Nixon, Johnson, Kennedy, and others before him, Reagan came under fire for his alleged appeasement. The Conservative Caucus pulled out the stops, running a full-page newspaper ad juxtaposing photos of Reagan and Gorbachev with photos of Chamberlain and Hitler. The conservative icon William F. Buckley Jr. chimed in, alleging that Reagan fundamentally misunderstood the Gorbachev regime: "To greet it as if it were no longer evil is on the order of changing our entire position toward Adolf Hitler." As early as 1983, when Reagan was embarking on the largest peacetime military buildup in U.S. history, Norman Podhoretz compared Reagan to Chamberlain and complained that "appeasement by any other name smells as rank, and the stench of it now pervades the American political atmosphere." Reagan had become a "Carter clone," Podhoretz later griped, warning—less than two years before the fall of the Berlin Wall—that "the danger is greater than ever."

Viewed from the perspective of history, what seems most striking about these critiques is how utterly and completely wrong they were. Declassified documents from Soviet and American archives reveal that it was the deep structural problems in the Soviet system, more than Reagan's military buildup, that paved the way for the USSR's collapse. These same documents demonstrate that the president's willingness to engage Gorbachev diplomatically only hastened that process. Soviet documents also reveal something counterintuitive: Gorbachev became more open to negotiating with the West not because of Russia's military weakness, but in fact because of its strength. He came to realize that he could accept deep cuts in his nuclear arsenal, and loosen his grip on Eastern Europe, because Soviet military power remained sufficient to guarantee his country's security.

If such hard-liners as Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan could embrace diplomacy and trumpet the value of negotiations, why then has the Munich analogy continued to exert such a pull on American politics? Why is it that since 1939 every American politician who advocated engaging an adversary felt obliged to declare that talking was not the same thing as appeasing? Why are Americans so comfortable with the use of force but so uncomfortable with negotiations? And, even more curiously, why has the Munich analogy gained so much traction in the United States, which didn't experience firsthand the terrible consequences of appeasement, but not in Europe, which did?

Part of the answer stems from historical experience. In contrast with Europeans, whose experience living cheek by jowl with powerful neighbors taught the necessity of compromise and living with imperfect solutions, Americans for a century after the War of 1812 felt no such imperative. The Great Powers of the nineteenth century were far away, and the nation was to a large extent protected by two oceans that functioned as vast moats. Later, during the era of the two world wars, U.S. power grew quickly just as that of many other large states declined. In short order, the United States went from being a junior member of the Great Power club to possessing informal hegemony over a sizable part of the globe. Neither before nor after attaining immense international clout, therefore, did Washington have to negotiate and compromise continually to prosper.

Intellectually, too, Americans have found it hard to accept the inevitability of failures in world affairs, to acknowledge the need to occasionally make the best of a bad bargain. Imbued with a moralistic sense of mission, they have tended to view international rivals not as competing states with competing interests, but as evil, demonic, and impervious to reason. The veteran diplomat George F. Kennan once observed: "We Americans like our adversaries wholly inhuman; all powerful, omniscient, monstrously efficient, unhampered by any serious problems of their own, and bent only on schemes for our destruction. Whatever their real nature, we always persist in seeing them this way. It is the reflection of a philosophic weakness—of an inability to recognize any relativity in matters of friendship and enmity."

So it has been since the days of the Revolution. Americans have repeatedly ascribed their difficulties to the malevolent workings of a single demonic figure, the very personification of evil. Thomas Jefferson, Samuel Adams, Thomas Paine, and other revolutionaries set the tone, casting all the colonists' problems at the feet of King George. Reading beyond the first idealistic passage in the Declaration of Independence—the immortalized part about inalienable rights—one finds a

tedious and exaggerated litany of King George's abuses. He was responsible for all manner of "injuries and usurpations," from blocking trade to inciting Indian massacres. In writings from this era, George is a "tyrant of the earth" and a "monster in human form," his aides "apostate sons of venality," "execrable parasites," and "first-born sons of Hell."

Later conflicts would likewise be blamed on lone evil-doers: the Spanish "butcher" in Cuba in 1898, the "beast of Berlin" in 1917, and a host of other monsters: Hitler, Stalin, Ho Chi Minh, Manuel Noriega, Saddam Hussein. Add to this the list of Mideast madmen who have made America's enemies list: Ayatollah Khomeini, Gamal Abdel Nasser, Abdul Kareem Qassim, Muammar el-Qaddafi, and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Many of these rulers fully earned the title "tyrant," of course, especially for their repressive policies at home. But only one was Hitler.

The propensity to view all adversaries as equally wicked and degenerate has usually rendered negotiations morally suspect a priori. Disputes were not about managing interests, for which agreements could be made, but about vanquishing evil, for which one could give no quarter. Diplomatic disputes became holy crusades. Americans came to see international difficulties primarily as military problems, with no foreseeable solutions except through confrontation and force.

Add to this the particular nature of American domestic politics, where the game often turns on which contestant appears the toughest. Nixon, whose political antennae were as well tuned as any White House occupant's over the past half century, summarized the prevailing political wisdom when he reminded Reagan, in 1987, that Americans responded better to toughness than to pragmatism and compromise. "Many people felt my popularity had gone up because of my trip to China," Nixon said. "In fact, it had only improved slightly. What really sent it up was the bombing and mining of Haiphong."

Yet as Reagan came belatedly to understand, and as Nixon had once argued himself, it makes little sense to assume that talking to adversaries jeopardizes American security. Like any other tool of statecraft, diplomacy is subject to failure and to unrealizable expectations, but it can also bring sustainable success. Although the record shows that Americans have been profoundly suspicious of negotiations with adversaries, those presidents who have managed to free themselves from the shackles of "No More Munichs" have often achieved real and lasting national security gains—and, in the process, bolstered their historical reputations.

Conversely, leaders who have chosen the alternative of relying on ultimatums, on threats and "comply-or-else" bluster, have too often painted themselves into corners—their bluffs called, they feel intense pressure to take the next step, to escalate confrontation, often culminating in a resort to major military force (Exhibit A: LBJ and Vietnam). Ultimatums can work in international politics, but the risks for disaster are immense (Exhibit B: George W. Bush and Iraq). As presidents from both parties have come to understand, maintaining maneuverability by broadening the range of options is usually a much better way to get what you want.

As the debate over Obama's foreign policy continues, we would do well to remember that those who scream "appeasement" the loudest are those that understand its meaning the least. MSNBC's *Hardball* offered a taste of this two years ago when Chris Matthews hosted conservative radio personality Kevin James for a discussion about Bush's "appeasement" remark before the Knesset. As James echoed this charge, angrily denouncing Obama's foreign policy platform as tantamount to appeasement, Matthews interrupted to ask, "I want you to tell me now, as an expert, what did Chamberlain do wrong?" For almost five full minutes, James dodged the question, unable to articulate anything that happened at Munich in 1938 beyond that "Neville Chamberlain was an appeaser." Finally, Matthews got James to admit the sad reality: "I don't know." Matthews then answered his own question: "What Neville Chamberlain did wrong, most people would say, is not talking to Hitler, but giving him half of Czechoslovakia in '38."

Matthews got it right. And it's a simple history lesson we should keep in mind should the debate about U.S. foreign policy continue to revolve around a shaky understanding of what actually happened in 1938: Chamberlain's mistake was not in going to Munich; it was what he agreed to when he got there.

For nearly five decades, American presidents faced an adversary that was far more dangerous, and far more powerful, than all of today's "rogue states" combined. And yet every Cold War president came eventually to understand that diplomacy could be a vital instrument for advancing U.S. interests and preventing nuclear war. Indeed, many would say, the weakness of American diplomacy was not that it engaged the enemy too much, but that it did so too rarely and too cautiously, that it missed too many opportunities to resolve, or at least to de-escalate, the Cold War conflict.

"Let us never negotiate out of fear," Kennedy declared in 1961, summoning up some Rooseveltian rhetoric during one of the tensest moments of the Cold War, "but let us never fear to negotiate." Barack Obama, more than his predecessors (including Kennedy himself), seemed in his first year to grasp the penetrating wisdom of those words, and to shape his foreign policy accordingly. Will he stand his ground as another election approaches and the phantom of Munich again stalks the halls of power in Washington? It remains to be seen.

---

Fredrik Logevall is a professor at Cornell University and co-author of *America's Cold War: The Politics of Insecurity*. Kenneth Osgood is a professor at Florida Atlantic University and author of *Total Cold War: Eisenhower's Secret Propaganda Battle at Home and Abroad*.

©2009 Heldref Publications · Helen Dwight Reid Educational Foundation · 1319 Eighteenth Street, NW, Washington, DC · 20036 · [webmaster@heldref.org](mailto:webmaster@heldref.org)

<http://www.worldaffairsjournal.org/articles/2010-JulyAugust/full-Logevall-Osgood-JA-2010.html>