



LITERATURE REVIEW

Michaela Dodge, *Enduring Arms Control Myths: A Century of Experience* (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, 2026), 134 pp.

Dr. Michaela Dodge has authored an *Occasional Paper*, *Enduring Arms Control Myths: A Century of Experience*, that is as unique as it is important. She examines the arms control process, as practiced by Washington, and finds that it is driven by enduring myths and fantasies. These are the pathologies of U.S. arms control practice that opponents are able to exploit—leading to agreements that are oversold to the public and unwary officials and are ultimately damaging to U.S. security.

For example, Dr. Dodge examines the enduring, but generally mistaken, expectation that the arms control process is a dynamic that fosters improved political relations, and thereby independently moderates threats. Historically, the reverse appears to be true—significant hostilities frustrate U.S. arms control endeavors; if and when political hostilities ease, the drive for arms moderates and arms control can move. This is the truth behind Colin Gray's frequent quip characterizing arms control from the 1920s to the 1990s, "As peace breaks out, can arms control be far behind?"¹ He posits the corresponding reality that "arms control must fail" in the context of politically hostile relations—particularly with authoritarian opponents.

The fanciful expectation that the arms control process itself will foster benign political relations places priority on maintaining the process and agreements, rather than on how the substance of agreements affects relative power positions and whether opponents are abiding by the terms of agreements. Given this priority, to protect the process, Washington typically is loath to call out and seriously act upon opponents' non-compliance and continues to adhere to the substance and "spirit" of an agreement long after opponents have done neither. Such behavior may prolong an agreement and process, but it betrays the integrity of both and can damage U.S. security.

It is only too easy to spin out yarns about arms control arrangements that would solve political problems, limit threats, and contribute to Western security. Doing so is a popular sport among American academics and advocates²—as if opponents with hostile designs actually are willing to limit the capabilities they deem critical to their political goals and will abide by agreements that do so.

The difficulties almost always ignored, however, are that authoritarian states hostile to the West typically violate arms control restrictions that become inconvenient and will not oblige Washington's visions by giving up power they believe to be critical to their revisionist/expansionist goals. Their hostile political goals are the priority drivers of their armaments, not adherence to agreements, and their arms control agenda is to secure advantages over the United States to the extent possible to help advance those goals. This

¹ Colin S. Gray, *House of Cards: Why Arms Control Must Fail* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), p. 25.

² See for example, Rose Gottemoeller, "Nuclear Deterrence Is Changing—So must Diplomacy," *The Freedom Frequency* (Hoover Institution), September 4, 2026, at <https://www.thefreedomfrequency.org/p/nuclear-deterrence-is-changingso>.



should not be difficult to understand, but such harsh realities often are essentially denied or downplayed in U.S. arms control parlance, for fear that limiting U.S. power might be seen as imprudent. When the enduring American idealistic vision of non-zero-sum agreements to which parties will righteously adhere meets reality, the results are predictably disadvantageous for the United States. Dr. Dodge's work shows this unfortunate dynamic happening repeatedly for a century.

Not since Colin Gray's seminal works on this subject, *The Soviet-American Arms Race* (1976) and *House of Cards: Why Arms Control Must Fail* (1992), has a book-length, scholarly work so effectively demolished the enduring arms control pathologies that have served only to undermine American practice for a century. With her new text, Dr. Dodge goes beyond those earlier works by identifying the interrelated conceptual myths and fantasies that have wreaked havoc on U.S. arms control practice and illustrates those myths and fantasies with historical cases from the early twentieth century to the present. To demonstrate her points, she moves seamlessly from the conceptual to the empirical.

Dr. Dodge concludes that, unless Washington can control for these enduring arms control pathologies, with a designated Red Team specifically tasked to stand guard against them, the process almost inevitably will continue to lead to U.S. negotiating positions and agreements that fail to live up to their hype and ultimately disadvantage U.S. and Western security. This is an inconvenient truth that runs counter to most official and public commentary on the subject in Washington, and in the West in general. Indeed, by starkly calling out the problem set as vividly as she does, Dr. Dodge shows herself willing to risk the wrath of a well-funded American arms control industry, much of which is deeply invested in the myths and fantasies that drive U.S. arms control enthusiasms and practice and will disdain an honest headline that this emperor truly has no clothes.

Dr. Dodge's efforts here should be considered a great public service because, in American political culture, arms control typically is assumed to be an unalloyed good—every administration yearns to show its virtue by bringing home a shiny arms control trophy. This is unlikely to change. Consequently, if Washington is to persist in the endeavor, despite its near consistent record of failure, it should approach the process in a manner that is worthy of the effort. To do so, it must, as Dr. Dodge concludes, control for the enduring pathologies she highlights. If not, the process will continue to generate disappointment and damage U.S. security. And, if administrations continue to publicly invest so much hype and effort into the endeavor, they will continue to resist acknowledging its failures and opponents' unmitigated hostility, threats and noncompliance—until compelled to do so by opponents' manifest brazenness. As Dr. Dodge suggests, a lower level of public investment in pursuit of reflected political virtue would limit the need for pretense and opacity when the results inevitably fall short.

In summary, Michaela Dodge has delivered an analysis that demonstrates the great need for realism in the U.S. approach to arms control and the dangers of contrary existing practice. This is a unique text that tells an unvarnished truth. It is an understatement to say that anyone who is interested in arms control, has a role in the practice of arms control, or comments on arms control should read *Enduring Arms Control Myths: A Century of*

Experience, and be open to the hard lessons it presents. As America seeks to find its way in a new and much more dangerous nuclear threat environment, getting arms control right could not be more important.

*Reviewed by Keith B. Payne
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David Holloway, *Nuclear Weapons: An International History* (Yale, CT: Yale University Press, 2026), 895 pages.

David Holloway's *Nuclear Weapons: An International History* is an account of the development of U.S. nuclear weapons and nuclear strategy with shorter incursions to other states' nuclear weapons programs, and efforts to minimize their spread. The author focuses on the Cold War, omitting the post-Cold War developments, but with the book running at almost 900 pages (including extensive references and bibliography), such a delineation is understandable. The author does not aim to provide a comprehensive history of individual states' nuclear weapons programs, but of their relationships and interactions as they pertain to nuclear weapons developments. The primary focus is on the United States, the Soviet Union, Europe (France, the United Kingdom, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization), China, India, and Pakistan. The book is organized chronologically and begins with a discussion of a U.S. nascent nuclear weapons program during the World War II, originally started for a fear that Nazi Germany will develop the bomb first.

Holloway discusses early efforts to limit nuclear weapons proliferation while democratizing the benefits of nuclear energy, and the accompanying development in thinking on how to use nuclear weapons in achieving a state's national security objectives, including in the Indochina War 1954, the First Taiwan Strait Crisis (1954-1955), the Hungarian Revolution (1956), and the Suez Crisis (1956). The cases are relatively short, and therefore not particularly in-depth. The author's conclusion from these crises against a nascent nuclear backdrop is that "nobody deliberately created a 'recognizable risk of war' that they did not control."

The Berlin Crisis and the Cuban Missile Crisis are each discussed in their own chapter, so does the development of "assured destruction" and the negotiations leading up to the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks. With regard to the latter, Holloway mostly relies on accounts provided by participants of these negotiations, which are almost exclusively couched in positive terms. Thus the author forewent an opportunity to more critically examine the negotiations' negative impacts on U.S. ability to counter the Soviet developments and policies, including the lasting damage to U.S. missile defense concepts and programs. In that sense, the interpretation of arms control is quite conventional.

The chapter on Sino-Soviet relations discusses the uneasy partnership-turned-animosity between China and the Soviet Union during China's quest for nuclear weapons leading to an outright hostility between the two countries in 1969.

As the author notes in the introduction, this is not a comprehensive history of nuclear weapons. People familiar with the topic will find interesting vignettes and references, but, depending on how familiar they are with these issues, they are unlikely to find the book fundamentally new or insightful, and will have different opinions on the merit of which important events, documents, and thinkers the author chose not discuss. The cost of covering a relatively long period of time is that the treatment of each of the relevant topics is abbreviated and therefore by necessity relatively shallow. The reviewer would recommend the book to readers seeking general orientation in nuclear weapons history, or those who simply enjoy reading this type of material.

*Reviewed by Michaela Dodge
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Thomas Kent, *The Propaganda Manual of the Ukraine War, Information Warfare by Russia, Ukraine, and Western Nations: Lessons Learned for Future Conflicts*, American Foreign Policy Council, 2026, 487 pp.

The term "propaganda" originates from the Latin "propagare," which means "to spread" or "to propagate." Over the years, the term has taken on a decidedly negative connotation, creating the impression that propaganda is intended to spread false or misleading information to convince someone of something that is untrue, i.e., an evil influence to be avoided, shunned, and countered.

In *The Propaganda Manual of the Ukraine War*, Thomas Kent masterfully dissects Russia's use of propaganda to spread falsehoods about Russia's invasion of Ukraine in an attempt to influence the opinions of both ordinary Russians and, more broadly, a global audience in support of the supposed righteousness and necessity of Moscow's "special military operation" against its democratic neighbor. In this endeavor, Kent is well credentialed to speak authoritatively on the subject, having been a well-respected journalist and former president and CEO of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. His observations illuminate the historical, cultural, and even religious underpinnings of Russian information operations (IO), and the playbook Russia uses to spread disinformation about its actions and what it perceives as an all-out Western war against Russia. In the information battlespace that characterizes the war of ideas, he concludes that Russia has an inherent advantage over the West, noting that it is "much more difficult for Western countries to promote the concept of democracy, with all its complex institutions and processes, than for Russia to spread a nihilistic view that everything is a fraud and nothing matters but force."

Kent also assesses Ukraine's efforts to shape world opinion in its favor and the country's transition from an information war neophyte to a more sophisticated actor after Russia's invasion. He explains that initially, "It was harder for Ukraine to respond to Russia's claims [of Ukrainian atrocities] than it was for the Kremlin to make them." In time, however, Kyiv adapted its strategy to promulgate a narrative suggesting the entire democratic world was facing an "existential threat" from Russia, not just Ukraine, and that the smaller nation could indeed score impressive victories against its aggressive, bullying, and more powerful neighbor. The book is replete with examples demonstrating Ukraine's efforts to reclaim the information operations advantage using a whole-of society approach involving the media, non-governmental organizations, civil activists, social media outlets, and other elements of society. However, as the conflict extended from weeks to months to years, apparently transitioning to what many observers have characterized as a prolonged stalemate, Ukraine found it increasingly difficult to put points on the IO board, so to speak, as foreign interest in the conflict waned, the costs of Western support to Kyiv increased, and other world events diverted the attention of governments and their respective publics.

Importantly, Kent analyzes the Western reaction and response to this war of narratives and concludes that the West suffers from significant cultural and structural disadvantages that complicate successful public diplomacy. He notes, "Information warfare never sat well with Western publics." "The very term 'propaganda' was an uncomfortable one for Western democracies," he writes, explaining that Western publics were "ill at ease" with covert psychological warfare activities intended to counter enemy propaganda. In essence, he argues that the West has been handicapped in its efforts to expose disinformation and convey the truth due to a cultural and ethical bias against such activities that many analysts view as unseemly.

The general Western distaste of operating in the information sphere recalls the moral and ethical dilemma reflected in then-Secretary of State Henry L. Stimson's comment in 1929 that "Gentlemen do not read each other's mail." Moreover, obtaining consensus to adopt a unified strategy and approach to IO among a multitude of Western democracies with different national perspectives and interests has long been challenging. In the case of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Kent argues it was "impossible." In addition, politics, economics, and the possible escalatory actions Russia might take in response to Western operations (including "fear," which Kent suggests may be "the most essential human emotion") had a strong dissuasive effect, and the information activities conducted by the West were "episodic and disjointed." Consequently, he concludes, "the whole dynamic of the situation made Putin the chief driver of events."

Structurally, the book is well organized, with separate sections describing the information strategies, structures, and tactics of Russia, Ukraine, and the West and highlighting their methods, successes, and failures. The personnel, organizations, and entities involved in IO are meticulously described. In the United States, changes in administrations resulted in different philosophies, programs, priorities, and approaches that have contributed to confusion, chaos, and a lack of cohesion in U.S. policy. (The situation surrounding the Voice of America is but one of many examples Kent highlights.) Importantly,

the different approaches toward IO taken by all parties to the Ukraine conflict illuminate the challenges Western democracies face in confronting and countering false narratives. The statement often misattributed to Winston Churchill sums it up appropriately: “A lie gets halfway around the world before the truth has a chance to get its pants on.”

Fortunately, Kent offers the reader some thoughtful suggestions to the burgeoning problem of information warfare. These include working to develop an informed population, conducting media literacy campaigns, promoting “fact-checkers,” exposing hostile narratives, exploiting legal remedies, and actively seeking to neutralize adversary tactics. Yet, he acknowledges that there are drawbacks and difficulties to these methods that make success challenging.

Kent concludes by drawing several propaganda lessons learned from the Russia-Ukraine war, pointing out the numerous difficulties involved in measuring success. He assesses the strengths and weaknesses of the information warfare strategy, tactics, and operations conducted by Russia, Ukraine, and Western countries, including the missed opportunities each party failed to exploit. As a result, he offers numerous recommendations to improve the resilience of Western governments and private entities, including the media, to counter the growing sophistication of adversary propaganda and information operations.

The Propaganda Manual of the Ukraine War effectively melds extensive scholarship with analytical rigor. It is a veritable treasure trove of useful information on the critical subject of modern-day information warfare. As the nature of warfare evolves, IO and psychological warfare activities are becoming ever more commonplace and part of the campaign to shape the battlefield. Those who fail to understand the growing role and value of information warfare activities are likely to find themselves on the losing end of future conflicts. In this regard, Kent’s book—extensively documented and chock-a-block with contemporary examples—is a definitive work that provides not only a useful primer on this contemporary aspect of warfare but also serves as a roadmap for countering the malicious propaganda of America’s adversaries and those who seek the West’s demise. Hopefully, its message will not go unheeded.

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