

Research surprise, security, and the american experience john lewis gaddis

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Book research " Surprise, Security, and the American Experience" John Lewis Gaddis What is John Lewis Gaddis's definition of " security?" Is his definition of security consistent throughout the book? Explain why or why not and provide examples.

In the background of the terrorist attacks of 9/11 on America, the world in general, and America in particular, has faced a new case for the understanding of the meaning of ' security' and the distinguished Cold War historian John Lewis Gaddis makes a reflective analysis of the concept of security in his celebrated work *Surprise, Security, and the American Experience*. Most essentially, the author offers a detailed overview of the history of national security policy in the United States for the last two-hundred years. Based on this analysis, Gaddis compares the reaction of the nation to security threats in the past with that of the present. According to him, " there has been periods, for all Americans, in which security has been problematic: the dangers of immigration in the first place, and of life on the frontier once there; the struggle for independence, secure borders, and maritime rights in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries." (Gaddis, 8) Therefore, security has been an issue for the nation at different stages of its history and it has been comprehended differently over the years. However, with the Cold-War situation, there was a considerable change in the understanding of security in the country, which " could never again be taken for granted as easily as it once had been." (Gaddis, 8) One of the basic factors that the writer highlights in his writing is the deep relationship between security and the American character. Significantly, the concept of security in the American character has been defined as free

security that shaped the character as a people and nurtured the development as a nation. (Gaddis, 31)

In an analysis of the definition of security as offered by John Lewis Gaddis in his *Surprise, Security, and the American Experience*, it becomes lucid that the meaning of security has changed drastically over the years, although America has always realized the importance of the same. The various episodes with surprise attack in American history such as the Pearl Harbor incident and the British attack on Washington in 1814 demanded different types of understanding of the concept of security, based on their 19th century, 20th century and 21st century experiences. All these surprise attacks in the American history influenced the meaning and definition of national security considerably which helped the nation have rethinking about the strategies of security. According to the author, “. . . surprise attacks tend to sweep away old conceptions of national security and what it takes to achieve it. They bring about new – and sometimes radically different – assessments of vital interests and available capabilities.” (Gaddis, 37)

Therefore, it becomes evident that the author does not make the definition of the concept of security consistent throughout the book, mainly because he analyzes surprise attacks in the American history separately and defines the notion of national security differently. In his own words: “. . . when confronted with unexpected dangers, we tend to expand rather than contract our sphere of responsibilities. Running and hiding has rarely been our habit.” (Gaddis, 37) In other words, America has always come up with effective solution and reaction to the surprise attacks it faced, although the idea of security was understood differently throughout its history.

Work Cited

Gaddis, John Lewis. *Surprise, Security, and the American Experience*.

London: Harvard University Press. 2005.