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Review of Legacy of the Cold War

Günter Bischof

University of New Orleans, gjbischo@uno.edu

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Reviewed by Günter Bischof, University of New Orleans

This book represents the sixth volume on aspects of the Cold War put out by the Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung. Known in the past for its controversial traveling exhibit of war crimes committed by the German Wehrmacht on the Eastern front during World War II, the Hamburg Institute nowadays is fishing in less troubled waters.

The 27 essays on various aspects of the Cold War and their legacies in the post–Cold War world, mostly by scholars on the political left, are consistently thoughtful. Some essays are sparkling, but several lack focus in a volume that otherwise is clearly structured. Each of the chapters addresses prominent Cold War policies and ideas that continued largely unabated in the years after the East–West conflict. The book is well arranged in four larger thematic sections. Not all chapters clearly address the issue of the 1989 divide, showing how (or whether) Cold War practices and thinking continued as legacies into the post–Cold War era. If anything is missing, it is the cultural arena and the “Americanization” of the world that continues to this day.

Continuities in and legacies of the national security state over the past eighty years are addressed in the first section. Robert McMahon addresses the permanent sense of insecurity that has gripped U.S. policymakers since World War II. Fear of the Axis powers was quickly transferred to the threat of Communism after the war. In the same fashion, the U.S. government transferred Cold War fears of nuclear weapons to post–Cold War insecurity about nuclear proliferation, rogue regimes, and the global terrorist threat. William Walker locates the deep roots of the post–Cold War “security ethos” in the national security state of the Cold War. The intelligence services, he argues, were politicized during the Cold War and segued into the politicization of intelligence in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. He sees much the same with U.S. disregard for human rights and financing the “warfare state” (military Keynesianism). Berndt Greiner’s chapter on the imperial presidency suggests that a cowed Congress abandoned its function of balancing the executive branch even more eagerly after 9/11 than during the Cold War. He claims that a perception among the electorate of being “soft on terrorism” might be even more devastating for a politician than were concerns during the Cold War about being seen as “soft on Communism” (p. 95). Greiner concludes that one of the most serious legacies of the Cold War was

the undermining of constitutional checks and balances, which he claims has gravely “damaged the root system of democracy” (p. 96). According to Sean N. Kalic, the U.S. government has been framing Cold War and current geopolitical antagonists with the rhetoric of “preparedness” and “monolithic enemies.” In Bettina Greiner’s view, the abuses perpetrated at Abu Ghraib and the notion of “taking the gloves off” in the war against global terrorism (p. 112) have their precedents in what she sees as the efforts by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) during the Cold War to convert torture into a “clean science” (p. 116). John Philip Baesler contends that the proliferation of polygraph testing after 9/11 has its Cold War roots in CIA polygraph experiments. Rolf Hobson maintains that the strategic ideas produced by U.S. defense intellectuals in think tanks funded by the government are rarely scrutinized. He argues that the post–Cold War paradigm of the “Revolution of Military Affairs” propounded by defense intellectuals is rooted in spurious historical analysis and a troubling infatuation with the Wehrmacht’s alleged strategically innovative blitzkrieg triumphs (pp. 153f).

Vojtech Mastny’s and Dieter Krüger’s chapters open section 2 on “foreign and security policies” with overviews of alliances such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and multilateral organizations such as the United Nations (UN) and the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe that collectively provided a “security architecture,” as well as integration schemes such as the European Communities that have continued into the post–Cold War era. Mastny argues that the military legacies of the first half of the Cold War were more pronounced than those of the détente era. Roy de Ruyter’s chapter (“Farewell to the Cold War”) demonstrates how the Netherlands reinvented its military posture after the Cold War, and Christoph Laucht analyzes how Great Britain maintained its nuclear posture after the Cold War to hang on to its great-power status and “special relationship” with the United States. Giorgio Franceschini likewise claims that the United States chose to modernize its nuclear arsenal after the East–West conflict rather than cash in on a “peace dividend”—an argument that is hard to square with the fact that the U.S. nuclear arsenal has been sharply cut since the end of the Cold War. Klaus Naumann’s chapter on German defense efforts after the end of the Cold War is opaque. He seems more interested in theorizing how change works in the political arena than in delving into the crucial debate in the 1990s about the possible inclusion of German troops in NATO contingents that were intervening “out of area.” Fascinating chapters about “the career” of humanitarian interventions and the even stranger career of the supposedly disappearing fissionable material and weapons (“*vagabundierende Atomwaffen*”) from the former Soviet nuclear arsenal after the Cold War complete this section.

Section 3 is the most compelling and innovative section. Sarah Snyder’s and Anja Mihr’s chapters on Helsinki Watch, Human Rights Watch, and Amnesty International as model non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the new era of human rights activism complement each other very well. Amnesty International survived the Cold War well, but other human rights NGOs floundered. Philipp Gassert and Melanie Arndt deal with issues of environmentalism, Gassert discussing the development of environmental consciousness and Arndt on the effects of Chernobyl (and Fukushima)

on Germany's use of civilian nuclear power. Stefanie van de Kerkhof's and Berthold Vogel's chapters on the presence of military strategic thinking in the consulting industry and the welfare state as a product of war and the Cold War are fascinating treatises.

Section 4 begins with Heonik Kwon's essay claiming that the Global South has been ignored by many Cold War scholars. He is generally on the mark but fails to deal with the "legacy" issue. Lorenz Lüthi's dense chapter suggests a different chronology. In China the Cold War ended in the 1970s. China's turning point came in 1978 with Deng Xiaoping's "post-socialist" (p. 453) opening to market strategies, and definitely not in 1989 (the year of the Chinese army's massacre of unarmed peaceful protesters in Beijing). Chapters on state formation in Southeast Asia and the failure of state formation in "fragmented" societies (p. 481) and "war societies" such as Eritrea, Kurdistan, and Nicaragua also fail to deal with issues of the legacies of the Cold War.

Many of the essays in this volume were written in English and are smoothly translated. The long shadow of the Cold War and its many legacies in U.S. society and the U.S. economy, along with the spillover of such militarized thinking into think tanks and business consultancies around the world, should be a fertile field of study for many years to come. The essays in this volume, though mostly slanted toward the political left, set the agenda for future scholarship.