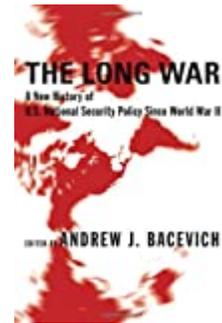




**Andrew J. Bacevich, ed.** *The Long War: A New History of U.S. National Security Policy since World War II.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2007. xiv + 586 pp. \$77.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-231-13158-2.



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## From Cold War to Long War?

Edited by Andrew Bacevich, *The Long War* does not quite live up to its title, since its twelve contributions divide the subject not chronologically or territorially, but thematically. Most of them focus on aspects of the workings of the American government in the second half of the century, and a few show some influence from newer historical approaches. Several are extremely valuable, both for the events that they summarize and the perspective they provide on the similarities and differences between the present and what is rapidly becoming the distant past of the Cold War. Any student of American foreign policy in the second half of the twentieth century will find plenty of interest here.

Arnold Offner's essay—*Liberation or Dominance?*—is an interesting one, especially in light of the author's long career as a Cold War revisionist. Offner has not changed his views of Cold War foreign policy, but unlike many on both sides of the political spectrum, he concludes unequivocally that the George W. Bush administration immediately broke with the entire postwar consensus by explicitly repudiating the principles of the

Peace of Westphalia (national sovereignty), the United Nations (war only in self-defense), and the Geneva Conventions regarding treatment of prisoners. (There is a great difference between occasionally violating those principles and officially consigning them to the ash can.) Similarly, James Kurth argues that President Bush and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld attempted something fundamentally different from *the American Way of War* in Iraq, and that those differences largely account for their lack of success (p. 53).

Striking another note in a long survey of American strategic nuclear policy, Tami Davis Biddle argues that American military planners rarely if ever succeeded in providing presidents with useable nuclear options during the Cold War, and adds that we have not really evolved any new paradigm for the use of nuclear weapons. Interestingly enough, presidential candidate Barack Obama, in a little-commented on speech in July, actually revived Ronald Reagan's call for the abolition of nuclear weapons, which Biddle notes was both seriously meant and very influential at some key junctures of the Rea-

gan presidency. Perhaps Reagan's biggest legacy is yet to come.

Anna Kasten Nelson contributes an interesting history of the evolution of the national security state. She suggests that the creation of the National Security Council (NSC) had little impact during the Harry S. Truman and Dwight D. Eisenhower administrations, during which the State Department maintained the primary policymaking role, but that the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) emerged during the 1950s as a key player. I was not altogether persuaded by her discussion of the Eisenhower period because of the very important role the NSC structure played in both defining the goals of American foreign policy around the world and prescribing the military means to implement them. It was the Eisenhower NSC that decided, for example, that the United States would defend South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia against Communist aggression, without allied help and with nuclear weapons if necessary—and those policy statements, I found, led to a stream of recommendations for intervention in Southeast Asia beginning in late 1960 and continuing all the way to 1965. Marc Trachtenberg (*A Constructed Peace* [1999]) has also shown how the Eisenhower NSC structure loosened presidential control of nuclear weapons—a problem that President John F. Kennedy and his NSC advisor, McGeorge Bundy, were determined to fix. Nelson is correct to note that Kennedy and Bundy loosened the Eisenhower process somewhat, but Kennedy still met with an expanded NSC to make major decisions and, on at least two occasions (October 1962 and August–October 1963), to handle crises, first in Cuba and then in South Vietnam. What Kennedy and Bundy did not want was an Eisenhower-style set of approved policy documents for every contingency that would tie their hands, and they even resisted Walt Rostow's attempts to write a new basic national security strategy. But Robert McNamara's Pentagon certainly did eclipse Dean Rusk's State Department under both Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson.

Under Richard Nixon, as she discusses at length, the White House became the real center of decision-making power, and even of the execution of diplomatic and military strategy, for the first time. Nelson omits the Gerald Ford years, when Congress tried to reign in some of the covert excesses of the national security state, and rightly cites Reagan's problems as a manager. She might have said more along the same lines about George W. Bush. The president's critics have focused on the principles behind his policies, but I suspect that future historians will discover that an almost complete failure to coordinate

their implementation or develop clear lines of responsibility on major issues has been another huge problem during the last eight years. On a related front, George H. Quester surveys changing approaches to war, both conventional and unconventional, during the second half of the twentieth century.

Not surprisingly, Bacevich provides one of the most stimulating contributions: a succinct and spicy history of American civil-military relations since the end of the Second World War. The subordination of the military to civilian authority, he argues, is a convenient myth spread to secure the position of the national security elite in an age of empire, and military and civilian authorities have collaborated to keep the American people from playing any significant decision-making role. Bacevich shows how the military has again and again thwarted civilian control. The Marine Corps and the navy, he argues, developed the modern techniques of resistance to civilian authority—mostly leaking to the press and cultivating favorable congressmen and senators—while successfully fighting the true unification of the armed services in the late 1940s. The army blew off President Truman's 1948 desegregation order until the Korean War forced it to put it into practice. During the Eisenhower era, the air force seized control of nuclear strategy (and at times, he might have added, pushed for and even claimed the right to start a nuclear war on its own), while the army protested the reduction of its role. The McNamara era witnessed a new low in civil-military relations, although I personally believe that those problems had less to do with the American failure in Vietnam than the failure of either the civilian or the military leadership to understand what it would take to win the war. Bacevich then retells the story of the birth of the all-volunteer military and the assertion of military control over the use of force via the Caspar Weinberger and Colin Powell doctrines. He notes provocatively that Reagan's renewed emphasis on the Soviet threat to Europe and the United States itself allowed the services to rebuild themselves and reestablish their reputation as practitioners of conventional warfare, a process that culminated, of course, in Operation Desert Storm.

Despite some of President George H. W. Bush's rhetoric, civilians actually played a much more influential role in the design and execution of war plans in the Gulf War campaign of 1990-1 than they had for most of the Vietnam War. By this time, Bacevich adds, the entire military was in a fairly close alliance with the Republican Party. At the outset of the William Clinton admin-

istration, the new president, following in the footsteps of Truman in 1948, tried to allow a marginalized group, homosexuals, to serve equally and openly in the military, but he was no more successful than Truman was. However, Bacevich concludes accurately that relations between Clinton's Republican successor and the military have been anything but smooth.

In "Intelligence for Empire," John Prados identifies some interesting patterns in the growth of the U.S. intelligence community. Again and again, he argues, a combination of dramatic, frightening events at home and technological advances in intelligence gathering have led to reorganization, proliferation, and expansion of intelligence agencies. He also fills in the gap Nelson left by detailing the not-very-successful attempts of the 1970s to bring the CIA under control. Charles Chatfield provides a history of opposition to various aspects of America's great power role from the 1920s to the present—a subject, alas, that is too broad to get much more than a schematic treatment in a single chapter.

The topic of each of the above contributions is sufficiently broad to set the reader thinking about the Cold War as a whole. Other chapters are much narrower in scope. In "The Military-Industrial Complex: Lobby and Trope," Alex Roland both investigates the events that led to Eisenhower's coining the term in his farewell address and looks at the meanings it acquired later in the 1960s. Benjamin O. Fordham, in "Paying for Global Power," provides a well-documented survey of patterns in Cold War military spending and illustrates some of its domestic consequences as well. James Burk makes a complicated argument about changes in the expectations, rights, and privileges of soldiers during the second half of the twentieth century in "The Changing Moral Contract for Military Service." William L. O'Neill explores various

cinematic approaches to war since the 1930s in an essay marred by some mistakes and at least one bizarre omission. U.S. mortal casualties in Vietnam are too high for 1968—over sixteen thousand died of all causes, not twenty thousand. He confuses figures for deaths from all causes and deaths directly resulting from hostilities. In addition, although O'Neill discusses Oliver Stone's *Platoon* (1986) and *JFK* (1991) at length, he omits any discussion of Stone's *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989), which was based on a true story and probably did the best job of any Vietnam movie of putting the experience of the war and its aftermath in historical perspective.

How important, eventually, will the Cold War seem to be? Within another thirty years, I predict, those few historians who can still think big thoughts will see it quite clearly as a postwar, rather than a prewar era, a quite natural result of the Second World War, and similar, though far more heavily armed, to the half-century that followed the defeat of Napoleon in 1815. The critical question that various contributors here raise is whether the United States is indefinitely to view its relation to events in various troubled parts of the world in ways similar to those of the Cold War—in other words, if we are to continue to believe that we must pick a dog in every fight, and back our chosen ally, if need be, with military force, all the while trying to remake more of the world in our own image. It seems to me that this is going to be more and more difficult. No contributor to the collection makes this point, but the size of our military forces, as a percentage of either our own or of the world's population, is only slightly larger now than it was in 1940, and we have discovered over the last seven years the limitations that that imposes on us. We do not yet know whether the Bush administration's newly assertive interventionism will open a new chapter of American empire, or close a whole series of them.

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