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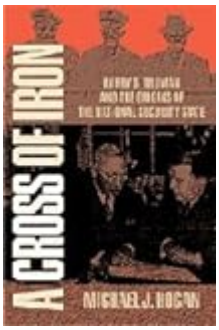

Michael J. Hogan. *A Cross of Iron: Harry S. Truman and the National Security State 1945-1954.* New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. xii + 525 pp. $34.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-521-64044-2.

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Published on H-Pol (August, 1999)

CONSTRUCTING THE NATIONAL SECURITY STATE

With some justification, much recent work on the history of the Cold War has focused on new sources in former communist countries.[1] Michael Hogan's impressive new book reminds us that we still have much to learn from the American side. *A Cross of Iron* examines the enormous changes in the American state during the early years of the Cold War. Far from being an unproblematic response to international events, these changes were the subject of intense domestic controversy. Hogan's central argument is that the institutions of the national security state reflected not only the concerns of those focused on the Soviet threat, but also the fears of those who worried that the United States might evolve into a garrison state.

Hogan's narrative relates a series of conflicts over the construction of new state institutions between adherents of an ideology of national security and those who represented an older American anti-statist tradition. Hogan argues convincingly that a coherent ideology of national security emerged from the Second World War. The wartime experience taught the adherents of this new ideology that the United States confronted an age of total war demanding a much deeper mobilization of civilian society to support military preparedness. The postwar confrontation with the Soviet Union made this mobilization an immediate need. As Hogan puts it,

"[i]n the national security ideology, then, the nature of the Soviet regime put a premium on military preparedness, the immediacy of the Soviet threat made preparedness a matter of urgency, the long term nature of that threat required a permanent program of preparedness, and the danger of total war dictated a comprehensive program that integrated civilian and military resources and obliterated the line between citizen and soldier, peace and war." (p. 14)

The additional argument that peace and freedom worldwide were indivisible made the national security ideology's conception of international threat even more terrifying. A threat to these ideals in one area of the world would inevitably develop into a threat to them in an entire region, and eventually the entire world (p. 15). The domino theory was a premise of national security thinking in the United States from the beginning of the

Cold War.

The elements of the national security ideology as well as the names of many of its proponents are familiar from many works of Cold War history concerned with the American response to international environment during the early Cold War era. Their opponents have received far less attention, however. The national security ideology threatened those who took their political inspiration from the longstanding tradition of a limited government role in the economy and society, as well as minimal involvement in international politics. Conservatives committed to these political traditions were suspicious of the expansion and centralization of the military establishment, the growth of international political and military commitments, and the increasing burden of financing all these activities. For many of them, the national security state was a particularly dangerous extension of the New Deal. *A Cross of Iron* makes some of its greatest contributions in explaining how these critics of the national security state influenced its development.[2]

After introducing these two conflicting ideological poles in American politics, the book follows their proponents through the most important episodes in the development of the postwar national security state. In each case, Hogan finds that the institutions constructed indeed expanded the state and extracted greater resources from American society, but fell short of what the most strident proponents of the national security ideology had sought. The National Security Act established crucial institutions such as the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Central Intelligence Agency, but none of these organizations had all the powers their advocates had originally envisioned. Similarly, Congress ultimately approved a system of peacetime selective service, but it defeated a more ambitious program of universal military training. Hogan argues that even the enormous military buildup prompted by NSC 68 and the Korean War was limited in some respects by concerns about excessive growth in the power of the state. Congressional conservatives hampered the administration's efforts to implement wage and price controls to prevent inflation during the rearmament. In every case, the institutions of the national security state bore the marks of both their advocates and their opponents.

Hogan returns again and again to debates over the national budget, another great strength of the book. The national security ideology's stress on preparedness implied an enormous commitment of national resources, bringing the budget to the center of the political debate. Conservatives also viewed the budget as a critically important indicator of where the country was heading, elevating efforts to balance it to a kind of moral crusade (p. 69). As a practical matter, decisions about financing the national security program forced American leaders to set priorities. Some of the most important political conflicts of the postwar era were not over the intrinsic merit of policy goals such as maintaining a strong national defense, but rather over their relationship to other objectives, such as limiting the tax burden or maintaining a balanced budget. The budget process forced political leaders to determine in a very tangible way which of these goals were really more important. Although ideological differences between national security managers and their conservative critics might be papered over in some areas, agreement was more difficult on the budget.

Not surprisingly, the budget fueled some of the most intense political battles of the early Cold War era, including the inter-service conflicts over roles and missions. Even organizational issues, such as the level of authority the Secretary of Defense should have over the individual service secretaries, became problems primarily because of their implications for the budget. The National Military Establishment was consolidated into the Department of Defense in 1949 primarily because the first Secretary of Defense, James Forrestal, had been unable effectively to reconcile competing service demands for a greater share of the military budget (200-8).

Decisions about spending and taxation also revealed most clearly the tensions in Harry Truman's world view. Truman occupies a critically important position in Hogan's narrative, embodying the conflict between the ideology of national security and anti-statist political traditions. Although he subscribed to many elements of the national security ideology, he was also committed to maintaining a balanced budget (pp. 71-2). Thus, when it came to funding the new national security state, Truman often found himself on different sides of the same debate, depending on whether he was confronting hawks within his own administration or economy-minded Republican members of Congress. As Hogan points out, Dwight Eisenhower found himself in a similar position as president, noting that each administration "often looked like a battleground between economizers, on the one hand, and national security managers, on the other" (p. 7). Given the range of views within their political coalitions, it seems unlikely that either president could have avoided this situation.

The pattern of conflict and compromise Hogan iden-

tifies is very useful for understanding the development of the national security state before 1950. However, like all useful generalizations, it has its limits. It is difficult to characterize the military buildup that followed NSC 68 and intervention in the Korean War as another compromise like those that had preceded it. The advocates of the national security ideology ceded little to their opponents in this episode than they did at other points, so it does not fit as well into the book's broader narrative. Hogan overstates the importance of efforts to limit the buildup. Marshall and Lovett indeed eventually reduced the projected size of the military budget for the five years after fiscal 1951 to $190.6 billion from the $287 billion military planners had originally proposed (p. 308). However, these limits still contemplated an annual budget more than three times larger than that proposed before NSC 68 and Korea. In some years, it would exceed what the entire federal budget had been in fiscal 1950! This kind of economizing is radically different from the plans fiscal conservatives had put forward only months earlier to reduce the fiscal 1951 Pentagon budget below the $13.9 billion Truman had originally proposed (p. 285). The budgetary concerns of people like Robert Lovett–an early backer of NSC 68 (p. 300)–are of a different order than those of the genuine critics of the national security state. After 1950, national security managers could afford to economize at the margin because they had defeated their serious budgetary opponents. By treating the military buildup as another in the series of compromises that took place between 1945 and 1949, Hogan blurs the enormity of the break with the past it constituted.

Hogan's treatment of the domestic side of the Cold War raises some important questions the book does not completely answer. Although McCarthyism was an important feature of the domestic politics of the early Cold War era, and has been linked to the development of the national security state by others, it is not examined at great length in this book. *A Cross of Iron* is ambivalent about the origins of McCarthyism, and the Red Scare's relationship to the national security state. Hogan does not include concern about domestic subversion as part of the ideology of national security in the opening chapter (pp. 10-18). He notes later that those most concerned about domestic communism were conservatives, many of whom opposed most other aspects of the national security ideology. The Truman administration was merely "a reluctant partner in the anti-Communist crusade" (pp. 315-6). Later, however, he offers several examples of the linkage between the "national security mentality" and domestic anti-Communism among intellectuals (pp. 420-6). If, as Hogan implies, domestic anti-Communism is not a necessary adjunct of the national security ideology and the institutions associated with it, the reader is left to wonder how this linkage developed.

Overall, *A Cross of Iron* is a great contribution to our understanding of how the United States fought the Cold War. Moreover, it is an interesting case study of state making in an industrialized, democratic society. Hogan's use of the work of historical sociologists on state making draws attention to the importance of institution-building, the extraction of resources from society, and resistance to these efforts. His use of the vocabulary they provide for the discussion of these issues increases the relevance and usefulness of his work for those interested in similar questions in other historical settings. Understanding the national security state is important not only for historical reasons, but also for understanding contemporary American politics and foreign policy. Although the Cold War has ended, the institutions created to wage it remain with us. *A Cross of Iron* should remain a standard work on the origins of these institutions for some time.

NOTES

[1]. For a review of this literature, see Melvyn P. Leffler, "What Do 'We Now Know'?," *American Historical Review* vol. 104, no. 2 (April 1999), pp. 510-24.

[2]. There has been some previous work on this topic. See, for example, Justus Doenecke, *Not to the Swift* (Lewisburg, Penn.: Bucknell University Press, 1979).

Citation: Benjamin O. Fordham. Review of Hogan, Michael J., *A Cross of Iron: Harry S. Truman and the National Security State 1945-1954.* H-Pol, H-Net Reviews. August, 1999.

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