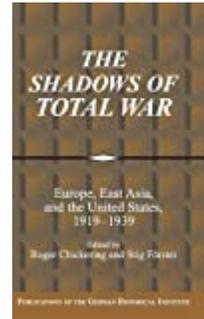




**Roger Chickering, Stig Förster, eds.** *The Shadows of Total War: Europe, East Asia, and the United States, 1919-1939*. New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. 364 pp. \$65.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-521-81236-8.



**Reviewed by** David Thomas Murphy (Department of History and Political Science, Anderson University)

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### The Troubled Mind of an Anxious Peace

At one point in *The Waste Land*, which appeared in 1922, T. S. Eliot's pilgrim in the postwar world is told that he will see something different from "your shadow in the morning striding behind you, or your shadow in the evening rising to meet you: I will show you fear in a handful of dust." Eliot's evocation of a fearful world poised between darkneses, one receding in the immediate past and the other looming in the imminent future, aptly characterizes the collective mentality of Western political and military elites during the interwar era. As the eighteen contributions collected in this useful, sometimes fascinating, volume make clear, the world after Versailles had to grapple in unexpected ways, not only with the traumatic legacy of the Great War, but with the awareness that the peace was unlikely to endure, and that some actually welcomed the prospect of yet another round of violent struggle.

These essays originated in the fourth of a series of five conferences on "total war," this one convened in Switzerland in 1999, bringing together scholars from North American and European institutions. In order to lend the collection a sense of thematic unity, the editors

have grouped the writings in four subsections: "Reflections on the Interwar Period," "Legacies of the Great War," "Visions of the Next War," and, somewhat cryptically, "Projections and Practice." This device works well as an aid to the reader, since the essays cover a wide range of topics, from strategic planning to interwar pacifism to health care and psychiatry. The editors' introduction provides some account of the results of prior conferences (also published by the German Historical Institute) and tries, ultimately without success, to frame a generally accepted definition of the term "total war." "Any analysis of total war," they write, "must emphasize the mobilization of the belligerent societies" (p. 11). At the same time, they are forced to acknowledge that social mobilization for warfare was neither peculiar to the modern world, nor was it ever "total," nor were the pretensions to total social control of highly mobilized societies like the Soviet Union ever fully realized in practice. The volume opens with general "Reflections on the Interwar Period" from Gerhard L. Weinberg, Hew Strachan, and Dennis E. Showalter. Writing with the clarity and literary elegance characteristic of all his work, Weinberg suggests that two factors above all shaped the politics of the era;

“the dominating memory of the ‘Great War’ ... and the reality of continued conflict in some portions of the world” (p. 23). The great problem for Europe, he contends, was the incomprehension of the “worldwide aims” of Hitler and the Nazi movement. Despite the fact that Hitler was quite frank about his global agenda (and recognized and exploited the fact that he was not taken seriously), few could credit anyone genuinely desiring another war, particularly with such aims. “It was assumed then—and is frequently assumed now—that political leaders neither believe nor intend what they say, or at least those things they say that seem preposterous” (p. 29).

Still, it may be unfair to be too harsh on those interwar leaders who failed to believe that Hitler really meant to take over the world. There were then, and are now, some reasons to question whether the Nazi movement as a whole intended any such thing. Richard Overy has recently noted, for example, that when Nuremberg prosecutors, at the instance of the Americans, tried to recruit the emigrant and former National Socialist Hermann Rauschning as a prosecution witness on behalf of the “general conspiracy” charge, he balked, declaring that “in his opinion not over half a dozen men in Germany planned conquest of the world ... he personally doubted if Hitler had any such plan.”<sup>[1]</sup> Strachan and Showalter are both concerned with what Showalter terms strategic cultures, “a comprehensive way of viewing and making war” (p. 58). Their work demonstrates that the urgent concern of such cultures between the wars was to avert a repetition of the bloody stalemate on the Western Front and for the military commanders in particular, to restore to war-making the sense of control which had been lost as events took on a life of their own in the late summer of 1914. This is unsurprising, and the point has been made often enough. Conventional considerations of this aspect of interwar planning, however, focus on the theories of massed armor championed by de Gaulle and Liddell Hart, or the air power enthusiasms of Douhet. Strachan and Showalter, refreshingly, illuminate in new and insightful ways the extent to which military and political elites sought to avoid a renewed war of attrition through resort instead to ideological and economic devices. While British planners recognized that the wartime blockade had little demonstrable impact on action at the front, they believed, correctly, that the growing dependence of modern armies on strategic resources such as metals and oil might enhance the effectiveness of blockade. German strategists, on the other hand, noted only that their submarine blockade had failed, not that it had come nearer than any other device to knocking England out of the

war and consequently failed to construct the undersea arm that might have brought a war-winning capability in the early 1940s. And some, particularly in states such as Italy and the USSR, whose ruling movements conceived of themselves as revolutionary, believed that the answer lay in mass armies infused with and impelled by commitment to some “transcendent idea,” be it working class solidarity or the dream of a corporatist future.

“Legacies of the Great War” examines by turns interwar political culture in Germany and the war’s impact upon the interwar health professions in Great Britain and Germany. Hartmut Lehmann’s discussion of Paul Tillich’s migration away from pacifism calls to mind a reductivist but not entirely misleading American political adage according to which “a conservative is a liberal who has been mugged.” Motivated by sympathy with the humane ideals of socialism, Tillich in the 1920s joined the Social Democratic party and affiliated himself with those former students of Ernst Troeltsch who described themselves as Religious Socialists. By 1931, according to Lehmann, “he embraced the ideal of peaceful societies whose coexistence did not require the use of force or threat thereof” (p. 90). His idealism reaped its reward when he became one of the first to lose his academic position under the Nazis. Thus mugged by “the reality of Nazi Germany,” Tillich emigrated to the United States, a move facilitated in part by Reinhold Niebuhr, where he quickly modified his ideas about the relationship between morality and political action (p. 90). “More than ever before, as he argued in his essays and speeches, he was convinced that the responsible use of power was necessary to regain and safeguard world peace” (p. 94).

Even without the Nazi accession to power, pacifism would have been a difficult position to maintain in interwar Germany, as James Diehl makes clear in his essay on the “militarization of politics.” Diehl focuses on the role of the Great War in this process, detailing the ways in which the civil guards of the post-armistice disorder evolved after the Kapp Putsch into the *Wehrverbände* and still later into the paramilitary organizations not only of the right, of course, but also of the center and the left, until “virtually every hue of the political spectrum was represented by a paramilitary organization” (p. 108). In a political milieu thus “intensively organized for domestic conflict,” as Diehl cites a contemporary observer, “the Nazis did not appear all that strange” (p. 111). While Diehl’s brief synopsis of the paramilitary subculture of the era is useful, his contribution seems particularly valuable for its careful attention to continuity with the political culture of the Imperial era, pointing out that the

tendency of elites to portray the nation as divided into the pro-government “national” elements and the *Reichsfeinde*—be they Catholic, socialist, or working class—had already propagated a militarized conception of the state’s purpose.

The appalling human costs of the war are treated here in two essays: Debra Cohen’s comparative study of disabled veterans in Great Britain and Germany; and an examination of British psychiatry contributed by Edgar Jones and Simon Wessely. While disabled British veterans returned to a government that provided almost no assistance, preferring instead to leave them to the (generally adequate) mercies of a philanthropic public, German veterans returned to a state that provided generously for their material welfare and worked diligently to reintegrate them into society. Ironically, the British government’s cold shoulder failed to incur the wrath of spurned veterans, while the generous Weimar state became the target of bitter resentment among the disabled German veterans. “In Britain,” Cohen explains, “philanthropy bound veterans closer to their society and diminished their rightful claims on the victorious state. In Germany, by contrast, the state’s regulation of charity isolated the disabled from their public” (p. 127).

Jones and Wessely conclude that the real watershed for the psychiatric professions in England was the Second, and not the First, World War, which may surprise those familiar with standard images of emotionally devastated veterans which populate the first war’s literature. Despite the numbing brutality of combat at the Western Front, “the conflict of 1939-1945 was more ‘total’ than that of 1914-1918, and exposed large numbers of civilians to hazardous situations,” they argue. “As a result, psychiatrists found themselves working at key posts not just in military hospitals but in civilian practice, and in the selection, training, and management of personnel” (p. 147). Their observations led not only to new basic approaches to treatment, but also to the recognition of a broader range of mental disorders.

The third portion of the collection, “Visions of the Next War,” is concerned primarily with biography and historiography. Roger Chickering and Thomas Rohkr  mer recount and analyze the postwar mutations of thought exhibited by Erich Ludendorff and Ernst J  nger, respectively. From the time he fled the revolution for Sweden in November of 1918, Ludendorff pursued two predictable obsessions; refuting his own responsibility for the debacle and pointing fingers at other culprits. These, again unsurprisingly, turned out to be

the post-Enlightenment reactionary’s favorite evil trinity of “supranational forces”: Freemasons, Jesuits and Jews. Chickering’s description of Ludendorff is an entertaining sketch of a life that evolved into a towering exemplar of proud public lunacy, tracking the general’s intellectual meltdown from the innocuous conclusion that Germans lacked sufficient will to win to the conviction that “malevolent forces” had destroyed his armies to immersion in occult enthusiasms so juvenile they might have made a Wiccan blush. This is a man who saw Hitler as a tool of the Vatican. Enough said. Chickering notes that Ludendorff still lacks a scholarly biography. Subscribers seeking a subject guaranteed to sustain a grim hilarity through the grueling stages of research and early writing, take note.

Rohkr  mer’s essay traces how J  nger “learned to love total war,” but it might also have been entitled “How Ernst J  nger Learned to Love Technology.” J  nger’s glorification of the “will to power” and belief in the redemptive value of extreme violence are well known, but Rohkr  mer provides an insightful critique of the war’s transformative impact upon J  nger’s thinking about machines. His youthful rejection of the “artificiality of the modern world,” as Rohkr  mer describes it, initially embraced the technical products of that world. Under the influence of war and its chaotic aftermath, he gradually evolved into the “champion of a new technocratic order,” who believed that “humans could break their slavery to technology not by resisting it, but by learning to exploit it” (pp. 193, 192).

Three concluding essays in this section examine the war’s impact upon military thinking about future wars in Great Britain and France, Germany, and the United States. In all four states, as throughout the West, the war drove generals, military historians, and armchair strategists into a desperate search for the means to prevent a repetition. Speculation focused variously on tanks, aircraft, blockade, chemical weapons, wars of extermination versus what might today be called “surgical strike” wars, and a host of other options. Judging from the discussions presented here, no one reached any widely accepted conclusions. “Military history could provide no answer to the question of how such a conflict could be avoided in the future,” as Markus P  hlmann concludes in his discussion of the Germans (p. 238). What is perhaps most striking in these essays, though unremarked upon by their authors, is the degree to which military intellectuals themselves constituted a “supranational” elite. In every country, leading military journals were remarkable for the degree to which they afforded literate foreign

thinkers, including presumable eventual adversaries, to elaborate upon their ideas. To take a single noteworthy example, in November of 1939, the American *Infantry Journal* invited a member of the German general staff, Hasso von Wedel, to submit an article explaining the stunning success of the German campaign in Poland. Although Williamson Murray and Allan Millett, among others, have explored a transnational view on international military developments in this period, a great deal of research remains to be done on the degree to which military elites in this era of nationhood still reflected the pre-modern, supranational and aristocratic ideal of earlier military elites.

The final section of this work, "Projections and Practice," assesses war-making and war preparation during the interwar era, and is especially notable for Hans-Heinrich Nolte's contribution, "Stalinism as Total Social War," and Giulia Brogini KÅ½nzi's brief but informative study on "Total Colonial Warfare: Ethiopia." As Nolte makes clear in his discussion of the communist genocide in the Ukraine, the Bolshevik regime attained a degree of social control over its people that remains unrivaled in the West. Ironically, the extent of their depredations in their own society both encouraged Nazi aggression—it "convinced the Nazis that Russia would be easy to conquer"—while at the same time preparing the eventual triumph of the USSR over the National Socialist state. "The Soviet Union was well practiced in the mobilization of society," by the time hostilities erupted, Nolte writes, "and it had laid the foundations for winning an industrial war" (pp. 310, 311). Nolte also notes the relevance of his work to the *Historikerstreit* of the 1980s, observing that while Hitler was aware of Soviet terror and exploited it to help legitimate his own state, "the Nazis' resort to violence predated Soviet collectivization" (p. 310).

KÅ½nzi provides a fascinating brief appraisal of the historical memory of the seven-months' war waged by Italy to acquire its Ethiopian colony as part of an inquiry into whether this particular colonial war was in any way "total." In fact, the Italian effort was vast, when viewed in relation to the nation's industrial capacities. By May 1936, Italy was maintaining in Ethiopia 330,000

Italian and 87,000 allied native troops, with over 100,000 support workers. Fourteen thousand vehicles, hundreds of tanks and aircraft, and thousands of artillery pieces and machine guns added to the Italian burden of conquest. "The daily petrol consumption of these machines exceeded Italy's *total* petrol consumption during World War One" (emphasis added, p. 316). Just as in the Great War, however, this effort exhausted Italy's capacity to make war, as would become evident during Mussolini's subsequent martial adventures in support of his Nazi allies, particularly the woeful Italian efforts in southern France and in Greece. And the Italian effort was as extensive in terms of intelligence and propaganda, with a Ministry of Propaganda established in 1935 to confront the challenge of the Ethiopian War and expansion of all the military intelligence arms accompanying the course of the war.

Taken as a whole, this volume is a useful and carefully-produced contribution to the contemporary literature on the aftermath of large-scale war. Many of its contributions will be valuable to scholars working on related topics with a different temporal focus, particularly historians interested in the impact of warfare on public policy, the social costs of military violence, and the ways in which elites work out contested visions of the relationship between societies and their ability to wage war. It is interesting to note, incidentally, that these topics still seem in many ways to attract an overwhelmingly male cohort of scholars—of twenty contributors or co-authors in this collection, only three are female. Although there is no bibliography, each contribution is extensively footnoted with references to new and very recent literature. Many, though not all, are based on original research in primary sources. The editors have done a fine job of maintaining a high standard of syntactical, grammatical, and orthographical quality, and both they and the GHI are to be commended for their industry, through which a large community of their colleagues may now profit.

#### Note

[1]. Richard Overy, *Interrogations: The Nazi Elite in Allied Hands, 1945* (New York: Viking, 2001), pp. 50-51.

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