



**James McAllister.** *No Exit: America and the German Problem, 1943-1954.* Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2002. viii + 283 pp. \$39.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8014-3876-9.



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## The Latent Potential of IR Theory

Some of the best books in international history these days are being written by political scientists. In embracing the techniques of “qualitative research,” these scholars are bucking the relentless drive toward quantification that dominates the agenda in most political science departments. They go to archives in search of evidence, sometimes work in foreign languages, and present their findings in narrative form.[1]

In picking up James McAllister’s book, then, one is immediately tempted to read it as history. But its goal is explicitly theoretical: McAllister wants to develop one of the unexplored dimensions of Kenneth Waltz’s neo-realist paradigm. In his monumental *Theory of International Politics*, Waltz identifies bipolar systems as inherently stable. The clarity of power relationships and the great gap in capabilities between the two “poles” (the superpowers) and the other states means that alliances are fairly insignificant. Under bipolarity, there is no need for a mad, confusing, destabilizing scramble for allies.

The problem with this theoretical scenario, according to McAllister, is that it does not accord very well with the early history of the Cold War. After all, the United States

and the Soviet Union devoted considerable attention to shepherding their alliances. Why did both sides stake so much on the contest in Europe? McAllister suggests that this period should not be understood as one of established bipolarity; instead, it was a “latent tripolar system” (p. 11). Washington and Moscow both anticipated the re-emergence of Germany as a major power center in Europe. But whereas the Soviet Union hoped to prevent this outcome by keeping Germany weak, the United States actively fostered the establishment of a “third force” including Western Germany. An independent European deterrent would, it was hoped, allow for the permanent withdrawal of American forces from the continent of Europe. By the mid-1950s, however, it was clear these plans for a “third force” had come to naught. There would be “no exit” for American soldiers after all.

McAllister fleshes out this argument in four swiftly moving chapters that carry the story from the Roosevelt administration’s early postwar planning to the Eisenhower administration’s stubborn fixation on the European Defense Community (EDC). Along the way he addresses a range of familiar issues: the meaning of the

“Morgenthau Plan,” the feasibility of Kennan’s “Program A,” and the effect of the Korean War on the military posture of NATO. For the most part, McAllister does not offer any fundamentally new perspectives on these problems; he reinforces interpretations found in the work of Carolyn Eisenberg, Tom Schwartz, and Marc Trachtenberg.[2] However, his concise treatment of the long sweep of American decision-making in this period has its merits. McAllister’s theoretical training allows him to hone in on the essentials—for example, his observation that only the presence of American forces in Europe could overcome France’s security dilemma and thus make German rearmament palatable. One would be hard pressed to find a more elegant explanation for the inherent unworkability of the EDC project.

Disappointingly, McAllister does not use the concluding section to elaborate further on his ideas about latent power. One can imagine applying the concept in other contexts. In the 1920s, actual German capabilities had been curtailed by the Treaty of Versailles; but the Weimar Republic’s potential great-power status led the Soviets and the Western Europeans to bid for its sympathy. And what of China’s latent power in the present day? To what extent does China’s future potential tend to condition American behavior in Asia and the world—producing behavior at odds with what neo-realists might expect in this “unipolar” situation? To be sure, McAllister’s decision to focus upon a single historical scenario does allow him to treat the evidence seriously. His archival diggings are less extensive than those of a typical diplomatic historian,

but he goes well beyond the published record in *FRUS*. Ideally, the author might have consulted German and especially French sources in order to bolster his remarks about the security dilemma in Europe; but in a theoretically informed work on American policy, the absence is probably forgivable. In the end, historians need have few reservations about consulting this work or even assigning it to graduate students. It provides a compelling example of how IR theory can help to define clear and significant research agendas for historians as well as political scientists.

#### Notes

[1]. See, for example, Andrew Moravcsik, *The Choice for Europe: Social Purpose and State Power from Messina to Maastricht* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998); also Hope M. Harrison, *Driving the Soviets Up the Wall: Soviet-East German Relations, 1953-1961* (Princeton, 2003). Admittedly, Harrison now works as a historian, but her book is framed as a study of alliance dynamics.

[2]. To his credit, McAllister is aware of his debt to these authors (above all Trachtenberg, one of his dissertation advisers). See Carolyn Eisenberg, *Drawing the Line: The American Decision to Divide Germany* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Thomas A. Schwartz, *America’s Germany: John J. McCloy and the Federal Republic of Germany* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991); Marc Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement, 1945-1963* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

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