EUI Working Papers

MWP 2009/29
MAX WEBER PROGRAMME

TOWARD A MILITARY HISTORY FOR THE COLD WAR:
A BIBLIOGRAPHIC ESSAY

Ingo Trauschweizer
Toward a Military History for the Cold War: 
a Bibliographic Essay

INGO TRAUSCHWEIZER
Abstract

This essay discusses the historiography of the Cold War from the perspective of American policy and strategy, civil-military relations, and politico-military culture. It presents the history and historical literature of the Cold War in two parts, focusing first on the superpower confrontation in the early decades of the conflict before turning to the Vietnam War era and the global Cold War. It is intended as a guide to secondary sources as of mid-2009. There is no particular argument, other than to support the notion that scholarship has to consider the Cold War as a global event and should not regard either 1945 or 1991 as zero hours. Also, this essay makes no claims at an overarching conclusion, but suggests that while Cold War military history remains fragmented, it represents a more comprehensive picture than many students of the era have thus far come to recognize.

Keywords

Cold War, military history, international and diplomatic history, United States policy and strategy, defense policy, strategy, origins of the Cold War, Vietnam War, civil military relations
The Cold War can be defined in most general terms as a state of hostilities between the United States and the Soviet Union. Neither its beginning nor its end can be sharply defined, although 1945 to 1991 serves as a useful approximation. Odd Arne Westad, a leading proponent of international history, suggests that we need to consider the Cold War as a global event and that it is counterproductive to treat it as an era distinct from what preceded it and what followed. It is crucial to read this essay on Cold War military historiography with a sense of that context. Indeed, viewing either the end of the Second World War or the collapse of the Soviet Union as ruptures may preclude historians from assessing broader trends of American military history. This essay presents the historiography of the Cold War in two parts: the first section considers military aspects of the superpower confrontation until the mid-1960s whereas the second section shifts emphasis on the Vietnam War and the relationship of the superpowers and the Third World in the later decades of the twentieth century. Moreover, it is far from clear what constitutes “military” history in the complex international environment of the recent past. This essay will be primarily concerned with scholarly debates and arguments about U.S. strategy, policy, and international security; civil-military relations; and the question of a peculiarly American culture of war. Primary emphasis is on the most thoroughly developed debates among Anglo-American historians: the question of the Cold War’s origins and the era of the Vietnam War. Other literature addresses a variety of subjects and often leaves the impression of a fragmented picture. Cold War military history remains a work in progress, but it is more comprehensive than many students of the era have yet recognized. This essay does not intend to advance a novel argument, but it is based on general agreement with the notion that events during the Cold War, particularly since the 1960s and specifically in the Third World, have shaped the world and the complex international security environment that we are confronted with today.

Military History for the Cold War, 1945-1965: the Superpower Confrontation

Much like American political leaders, diplomatic historians during the early decades of the Cold War blamed the Soviet Union and its leader Josef Stalin and contended that the United States merely reacted to hostility driven either by ideological desire to spread communism or by more traditional Russian expansionism. But at the end of the 1950s William Appleman Williams argued that US foreign policy was motivated by economic needs and by the desire to spread liberal capitalism. In the turbulent climate of the 1960s a revisionist school of thought emerged on the basis of Williams’s core argument and scholars including Joyce and Gabriel Kolko, Walter LaFeber, Thomas J. McCormick, Thomas G. Paterson, and Lloyd Gardner all suggested that the Cold War was the result of American policies. From the beginning of the 1970s, post-revisionist historians placed

---

1 This essay presents an updated and expanded version of two lectures that were originally written for the Masters of Military History Program, Norwich University (Vermont). Norwich and MMH retain the copyright for the original lectures, but the program director and the Dean of Graduate Studies have graciously given permission to revise and publish them as an EUI working paper.


greater emphasis on investigating the nature of “the long peace” and on assessing both domestic and international aspects of U.S. foreign policy than on apportioning blame for the outbreak of the Cold War. Since the end of the Cold War, however, the leading post-revisionists have revived and embraced traditionalist accusations made of Stalin. Recent scholarship has moved toward deeper analysis of the Eastern Bloc, based on newly available sources, and into the direction of international history.

There are few outright military histories of the Cold War. The best is Lawrence Freedman’s narrative of how expectations of war changed toward various forms of limited war and how technology and arms control contributed to the nature and course of a conflict in which the main protagonists never fought one another. Freedman has investigated questions of nuclear strategy, limited war, and deterrence for over three decades. Next to Freedman, the pertinent chapters in Russell F. Weigley, _The American Way of War_, remain most useful, despite Brian Linn’s valid points of critique and his own recent study that could have superseded Weigley’s if not for its emphasis on land forces in an age that was at least equally defined by air and naval power. Michael D. Pearlman, a history professor at the US Army Command and General Staff College, considers America’s wars against other nation-states and argues that military strategy has been shaped by the executive, legislature, political parties, bureaucrats, the states, the military, and even enlisted men. The result has been an incoherent development because in a democracy linearity is impossible to attain. His discussion does not focus on the Cold War per se, but includes critical chapters on the Korean and Vietnam Wars. Moving beyond traditional military history and into the realms of diplomatic and international history as well as policy and institutional history, however, presents a more thoroughly developed body of literature.

At the end of the Second World War the United States had at its disposal a highly experienced military establishment of more than 12 million officers and men. By June 1947 that number had been

---


reduced to less than 1.5 million. The rapid demobilization process was perfectly consistent with American tradition and with the predominant attitude that large military establishments were expensive, unnecessary in peacetime, and a serious threat to freedom. From 1947, however, the Truman administration developed policies that were characterized by economic and military assistance to allies and led to a change in the nature of the American state. In the mid-1970s, Daniel Yergin offered the first detailed scholarly account of the national security state, centering on America’s Wilsonian instincts, Soviet intentions, and the rise of national security as an ideology. Melvyn Leffler argues that President Truman and his advisers created the national security state because it permitted both a vehicle to maintain the global reach and governmental power the United States had built up during the Second World War. Michael Hogan refines Leffler’s thesis, arguing that the Truman administration maneuvered deftly between conservative adherents of an anti-statist tradition and radical voices that called for permanent mobilization of all resources for the Cold War. He concludes that Truman and his successor, Dwight D. Eisenhower, codified the national security state, but also holds that its nature could have been even more extreme. The National Security Act of 1947, in which many crucial agencies were founded, including the Defense Department, the independent US Air Force, Central Intelligence Agency, Joint Chiefs of Staff, and National Security Council, emerges as the moment when US foreign policy became fundamentally militarized. Wilson Miscamble, on the other hand, concludes that the Truman administration exhausted all means of peaceful co-existence before turning to a reactive militarized strategy.

But war has always been central to American identity and diplomacy and military force have been closely intertwined with an American mission toward global hegemony and thus the national security state that came into focus during and after the Second World War may not have been as novel as historians have claimed. The question of the pervasiveness of the national security state remains central to historical debate. Michael Sherry argues that a warfare state emerged out of the Second World War, but he concludes in the hopeful spirit of the 1990s that it may no longer be needed. If that were the case, Paul Kennedy’s warning that debt accrued from military spending and power projection brought an end to most historical empires and would lead to the collapse of the Soviet


Union but also to the passing of American hegemony, would sound less ominous. But the seeds sown in the 1940s may have grown into an uncontrollable apparatus and those who hold that traditional American distrust of a powerful central government remains too strong to be overcome currently find themselves in the minority. Two recent books have opened a new line of inquiry in considering the Cold War and the post-Cold War periods as an evolving historical continuum. Of particular note, James Kurth argues that the American way of war is best defined as a combination of superior numbers of men and material, superior transportation and communication, and high-tech weaponry. He concludes that World War II and the Cold War witnessed two marked additions to this tradition: the need to manipulate public support and the mobilization of allies. Adrian Lewis posits that culture has influenced military organization and philosophies of war and has shaped the American way of war. He argues that the shift from citizen-soldiers to professionals in the wake of the Vietnam War has weakened the ties of the nation to its military and has given presidents much greater power to go to war without direct public concern. Much of these developments hinged on how the Second War ended and the early stages of the Cold War evolved.

The end of the Second World War conditioned the age that followed. In Europe, questions of influence and expansion of the Soviet Union were unresolved and historians continue to debate the centrality of Germany to the outbreak and course of the Cold War. In the Far East, the war ended with the American atomic bombardment of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, an event that has spurred great controversy among historians. Representative of the scholarly mainstream, Samuel Walker presents a balanced argument for the use of the bombs and J. Robert Moskin offers a highly readable narrative of the crucial decisions at the end of the war. Revisionists have claimed that use of the bombs was unnecessary to end the war with Japan and found the real motivation of the Truman administration in trying to impress the Soviet Union. Ronald Takaki and John Dower have emphasized race as a

---


---
The nuclear age offered serious challenges to military and civilian leaders. Traditional notions of strategy and conventional doctrines of the armed forces no longer applied. It can be debated whether August 1945 represents a “revolution in military affairs” but it is clear that the challenges of the post-war world were of a different intensity than they had been before the war. The Truman administration responded gradually by installing a policy of containment that was bolstered by a strategy of deterrence and eventually militarized during the Berlin Air Lift of 1948-1949 and through the formation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1949, and the intervention in the Korean War. Atomic weapons figured prominently as a means to counter the much greater reservoir of conventional forces of a Soviet Union that was viewed as increasingly hostile. Military plans...
NATO was founded as a political coalition more than a practical military alliance. It was intended to complement economic recovery initiated by the Marshall Plan. It had a military committee structure, but no clear commitments of national forces and no military commands. It was a symbolic response to the assumption that the Soviet Union and its allies could mobilize hundreds of army divisions, leaving Western Europe vulnerable and perhaps indefensible unless it was explicitly protected by American nuclear weapons. The outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950 altered NATO structures, as the member states moved rapidly toward a joint military command under Supreme Allied Commander, Europe, General Dwight D. Eisenhower. By 1952, the United States and its partners had agreed on far-reaching rapprochement objectives, both in terms of conventional and nuclear forces.


nuclear forces. In the formative years of the alliance, nuclear deterrence was critical as conventional forces were being built up, but from 1950, plans for the defense of Western Europe began to consider conventional military defense and deterrence. The tension between emphasis on nuclear deterrence and conventional arms would remain throughout the Cold War, even as NATO adopted originally American strategies of nuclear deterrence in the mid-1950s and a more flexible approach in the mid-1960s. Conventional defense was to be bolstered by the accession of West Germany into NATO in 1955, but in the event, despite immediate American military aid and advice, the buildup of the West German armed forces lasted into the 1960s. Nevertheless, as the 1950s progressed, NATO presented the image of determined defense and thus became a more effective deterrent.

Beyond questions of international politics and alliance, nuclear weapons posed a terrific challenge to the armed services, but they also opened paths into the future. The US Air Force benefited most immediately, first through its creation as an independent service in 1947 and then through vastly increasing budgets throughout the first decades of the Cold War. There is no comprehensive history of the US Air Force for the Cold War and the early decades are in particular need of further study. Strategic air power was predominant in theory and practice and it offered the air force leverage in political and budgetary questions. David Rosenberg has concluded that air force


operational plans at times were elevated to national strategy. Both army and navy have received more scholarly attention. Policy-makers and the general public questioned the utility of ground forces in the atomic age and the army was dramatically reduced in size, from a wartime high of eight million officers and men in eighty-nine divisions to a mere ten combat divisions and 591,000 officers and men on the eve of the Korean War. Brian Linn discusses the army’s difficult period of adjustment while Adrian Lewis offers a comprehensive discussion of the changing nature of the Cold War army from conscript force to professional military as it fought in Korea, Vietnam, and the Persian Gulf while preparing for war in Europe. Considering strategy, doctrine, and technology, another argument has it that the army evolved gradually into a force capable of nuclear and conventional combat in response to budgetary constraints, evolving strategy, threat perceptions, and political needs of the U.S. and its allies. The navy also found itself fighting for its share of the defense budget and its role in national strategy, but with its three arms (surface fleet, naval air power, and submarines) it presented a more modern image for the nuclear age. The first military crisis, however, arose in an unexpected area, the Far East, and posed a more conventional challenge.

1949-50 was a critical turning point. The Truman administration introduced more confrontational policies in response to the Soviet atom bomb and the Chinese Revolution, i.e., the defeat of the ruling Nationalist regime of Jiang Jieshi by Mao Zedong’s Communists. In the United States, a climate of fear and accusations led suspected communist sympathizers to leave government offices, particularly in the State Department. The mere fact that Congressmen, journalists, and publishers who supported Jiang forced the resignation of Secretary of State George Marshall shows both the paranoia and partisan vitriol at this critical juncture of the Cold War. The State Department and the U.S. intelligence community lost their expertise in East Asian affairs just as that region

became more important to American Cold War strategy. In January 1950 the State Department’s Policy Planning Staff recommended greater emphasis on conventional as well as atomic armament in its strategy paper NSC-68, which recommended defense budgets of up to $50 billion per year until 1954.

Harry Truman was a fiscal conservative. It is unlikely that he would have adopted NSC-68 if North Korean forces had not invaded South Korea in June 1950. The subsequent war, emerging from a civil war in Korea, drew in the United States and several allied nations under the nominal command of the United Nations, but also Communist China and Soviet advisers and pilots. William Stueck, a leading diplomatic historian of the conflict, argues that the Korean War served as substitute for a third world war. It signified the globalization of containment and the militarization of the Cold War and persuaded American policy-makers to accelerate rearmament and expand their network of alliances into the Middle East and Southeast Asia. Of course, the most immediate problem was halting the North Korean offensive. The United States had four infantry divisions on occupation duty in Japan, but they were neither equipped nor trained for combat in a large-scale war and their emergency detachments were overrun along with the South Korean army.

Following the initial sweep of North Korean armored formations into the southernmost parts of the Korean Peninsula, UN forces, including the army of the Republic of Korea, recovered in the late summer and early fall of 1950. After the successful amphibious landing at Inchon, commanded by General Douglas MacArthur, the Truman administration decided to attack across the 38th Parallel, the pre-war border between the artificially divided Korean states that had emerged from the Second World War, pursuing the goal of decisive victory and reunification of Korea. MacArthur expressed great

---


confident that China would not join the conflict. When it did, in late October and November, UN forces were caught flat-footed and soon pushed back far south of the 38th Parallel. MacArthur himself advocated the use of atomic weapons against targets in China, a notion that President Truman seemed to entertain briefly before rejecting it in part due to pressure from his European allies. His strained relationship with Truman and general dissatisfaction with being forced to pursue a limited war, led to MacArthur’s dismissal.\(^5^9\) His successor, General Matthew B. Ridgway, managed to halt the Chinese offensive, UN forces went on the attack again, and eventually stalemate settled in roughly along the 38th Parallel.\(^6^0\)

The Korean War had serious consequences for American Cold War policies. The North Korean invasion of June 1950 was widely seen as a move directed by Moscow and Western European governments feared that a more general offensive could be aimed at their nations. As already outlined, NATO developed military structures and General Dwight D. Eisenhower was appointed as Supreme Allied Commander, Europe. The fear generated by the Korean War also facilitated the rearmament of West Germany, even though the practical steps of German integration into the western alliance were debated until 1954 and the original plan for a European Defense Community failed due to a negative vote in France.\(^6^1\) In the course of the 1950s, U.S. and Western European forces developed a credible conventional as well as nuclear deterrent and NATO’s defenses were shifted from the Rhine River, where they had been fixed in 1950, to the intra-German border.\(^6^2\) The Korean War also showed that limited war in the nuclear age remained possible. This recognition led to the emergence of a body of theory on limited war that came to influence American policy towards Vietnam.\(^6^3\) Posture for limited war, i.e., any war short of an intercontinental nuclear war, included the introduction of tactical nuclear weapons for use on the battlefield.\(^6^4\)

In November 1952, with the front-lines still hardened in Korea despite ongoing armistice negotiations, Dwight Eisenhower was elected president. During the campaign he had promised to go to Korea and had spoken of a more aggressive form of containment and of the liberation of Eastern


Europe. Stalin’s death in March 1953 and perhaps also Eisenhower’s threat to end the Korean War with atomic weapons led to a breakthrough in armistice negotiations and fighting stopped in June. In the meantime, President Eisenhower had come to the conclusion that the Cold War might continue for several decades and he feared that excessive emphasis on military mobilization would undermine the robust economy of the United States and its fundamental political freedoms. Following a thorough review of defense policy, his administration proposed nuclear deterrence as a cost-effective alternative to conventional military forces. John Foster Dulles, Eisenhower’s Secretary of State, provided the catchphrase “Massive Retaliation,” i.e., the threat of striking with nuclear weapons at targets inside the Soviet Union in response to any aggressive act of the Soviets or their allies. With the shift in emphasis on nuclear weapons and tougher talk in Washington, however, came few direct changes in the foreign policy of the nation and the Eisenhower administration quickly found itself reacting to crises just like its predecessor had done.

The first such crisis came in Berlin in June 1953, when East German workers confronted the regime of Walter Ulbricht. The uprising quickly collapsed when Soviet military forces appeared.

Three years later the Soviets negotiated a settlement with recalcitrant Polish national communists and emboldened reformers in Hungary. When Imre Nagy came to power and announced that Hungary would leave the Warsaw Pact, the defense organization of the Eastern Bloc that had been founded in 1955 in response to West German accession to NATO, Soviet tanks rolled into Budapest and obliterated the poorly armed rebels. Radio Free Europe and other American outlets had fueled the flames of the uprising, but the US lacked practical means to intervene. Moreover, the West was

---


66 This was based on the assumption that regional allies would provide ground forces and that tactical nuclear weapons would account for any shortfall in numbers. Peter J. Roman, “Ike’s Hair Trigger: U.S. Nuclear Predelegation, 1953-60,” in: *Security Studies*, 7 (Summer 1998), pp. 121-165 and Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace*, pp. 146-200 suggest that Eisenhower pre-authorized the use of nuclear weapons by NATO commands.


mired in its own crisis in the fall of 1956 when British and French forces, operating in alliance with Israel, appeared on the Sinai Peninsula in order to force Egypt to reopen the Suez Canal. But the allies had failed to inform Washington and Eisenhower responded with surprising toughness, forcing them to withdraw from Egypt and thus causing a significant political crisis within NATO. In the wake of the Suez Crisis, the United States became more active in the Middle East and soon found itself opposing attempts by Egypt’s president Gamal Abdel Nasser to create a pan-Arab movement that was aligned neither with the U.S. nor the Soviet Union. In the zero-sum game of the Cold War, neutrality was regarded as tacit support for the other camp.

In recent years, historians have discovered the significance of propaganda and psychological warfare for the Truman and Eisenhower administrations. New agencies, first and foremost the CIA, became involved in influencing elections in allied or friendly countries, most famously in Italy in 1948. In 1953 the elected nationalist government of Iran was ousted in a coup d’état that elevated the political power of the Shah. The coup was at least partly driven by American interests and clandestine operatives. This was followed by the CIA-engineered overthrow of Jacobo Arbenz Guzman, the left-leaning president of Guatemala, who had committed the cardinal sin of nationalizing economic entities. Both events could be interpreted as successes of American Cold War policy, but they led to a brutal military dictatorship in Guatemala and latent anti-Americanism among Persian elites and the eventual Islamic Revolution of 1979.

While he was negotiating the obstacle course of international conflicts, Eisenhower attempted to improve relations with the new Soviet leadership. Initially, proposals for arms limitation and greater transparency were taken up at the summit meeting in Geneva in 1955 where the arrival of Nikita Khrushchev seemed to suggest a more peaceful coexistence. Instead, the realities of the Cold War soon took over and crisis management trumped a spirit of cooperation in spite of Khrushchev’s visit to the United States. The arms race was accelerating and the Soviet Union beat the U.S. into outer space by launching Sputnik, the first man-made satellite, in October 1957. This caused great consternation in Washington because it suggested that the Soviets would soon possess the capability to launch

---


intercontinental ballistic missiles against targets in the United States. Consequently, the Eisenhower administration and Congress accelerated scientific and military programs. Mutual assured destruction, the strategic paradigm of the 1960s expressed beautifully in Stanley Kubrick’s film Dr. Strangelove, appeared an immediate probability. Eisenhower himself was uneasy about institutionalized collaboration of government, armed services, the academy, and manufacturers in the defense sector. In his Farewell Address he warned of the great danger that an emerging military-industrial complex posed to the democratic principles of the American republic. In a sense, he was back to where he started and while he had succeeded in balancing the budget in three out of his eight years in office—three more than any of his successors during the Cold War—he had done so at great cost.

The transition from Eisenhower to John F. Kennedy was marked by a sense of crisis. First, the personal relationship of Eisenhower and Khrushchev suffered greatly when Soviet air defenses shot down an American U-2 spy plane in May 1960. Second, the Cuban Revolution of 1956, led by the young lawyer Fidel Castro, placed a potentially pro-communist regime at the southern flank of the United States. American policies of the late 1950s did much to persuade Castro to seek support from the Soviets, but so did his brother Raul who had previously adopted communism. By 1961, the US and Cuba had cut diplomatic ties and the CIA was preparing to overthrow Castro. The Sputnik shock had convinced many military officers, congressional leaders, and even John Foster Dulles, that dogmatic adherence to Massive Retaliation was no longer feasible. Practicing brinkmanship, another of Dulles’s memorable terms, as in the Taiwan Strait Crisis of 1954–55 was no viable. The second crisis in the Taiwan Strait, in 1958, was resolved with less imminent danger of nuclear war. But, as in Korea, the resolution included a militarized armistice between the United States and a local client—in this case Jiang Jieshi’s remnant Nationalist China—and the Chinese. More ominously, the 1960 election brought charges that the Soviet Union had overthrown the United States in nuclear weapons technology and in the numbers of missiles, an assertion Eisenhower knew to be false but one that he could not refute without revealing top secret intelligence.

John F. Kennedy vowed at his inauguration to “pay any price and bear any burden” to assure American victory in the Cold War. His election represented a generational shift and with Kennedy

---

entered a group of young academics and business leaders who intended to move U.S. policy onto a more pragmatic footing. Kennedy and his Secretary of Defense, the brash and self-assured Robert S. McNamara, announced that the U.S. would now pursue a strategy of “Flexible Response,” retaining the option of nuclear retaliation, but placing more emphasis on proportional response to enemy actions. In doing so they opened dangerous paths: as the Cold War began to engulf the Third World, Flexible Response raised the likelihood of military intervention in so-called “low intensity” conflicts. The first crisis, however, occurred closer to home and CIA, Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the White House were all equally embarrassed by the failure of American-equipped Cuban exiles to ignite a revolution against the Castro regime after they landed at the Bay of Pigs. This episode convinced President Kennedy not to trust his military advisers, led to a personal feud between the Kennedy brothers and Castro that still reverberates in American politics, and pushed Kennedy into greater activism in other crises that developed in 1961 and 1962.

The United States had been involved in Southeast Asia since the French Indochina War, an issue that will be discussed below. In 1961, the Kennedy administration was faced with a civil war in Laos in which the anti-Communist side expected American intervention. After learning that the military required large forces and possibly even the use of nuclear weapons, Kennedy and the equally weary Soviet leadership negotiated a temporary settlement that diffused the international aspects of the conflict. Laos itself would soon be drawn into the Vietnam War. In Berlin and Cuba, the world came close to nuclear war. The Berlin Crisis had begun in late 1958 and remained unresolved until Kennedy’s election. In 1961, it escalated, as East Germany was losing a steady stream of its most highly educated citizens to the West. In August 1961 the East German regime, ultimately backed by an initially cautious Kremlin, took the drastic step of building border fortifications to keep its own people contained. The Kennedy administration protested, but Americans were quietly relieved that the immediate crisis had passed and they understood that the Berlin Wall could become a powerful symbol for the oppressive nature of communist regimes. A war scare followed later that fall due to an


incident at a checkpoint between the American and Soviet sectors that led to a stand-off of American and Russian tanks. The Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962 represents the climax of the early Cold War. Following the Bay of Pigs invasion, Castro had turned to Moscow for military assistance and for strategic, political, and ideological reasons, Khrushchev decided to install a missile command in Cuba. Crisis erupted after American planes photographed a missile site. The Kennedy administration, based on the deliberations of an executive committee within the National Security Council, determined – falsely – that there were no nuclear warheads in Cuba and settled for a naval blockade and an embargo of the island. The crisis ended with a secret agreement negotiated by Robert F. Kennedy, the President’s brother and Attorney General. The Soviets withdrew their missiles in return for an American public promise not to invade Cuba and a secret one that the U.S. would withdraw its own missiles from Turkey.  

The intense fear of nuclear war in 1961 and 1962 contributed to greater desire for arms control and led to the Partial Nuclear Test Ban Treaty of 1963. But the assassination of President Kennedy in November and the downfall of Nikita Khrushchev and an emerging split between China and the Soviet Union added greater complexity to the Cold War. The new president, Lyndon B. Johnson was faced with opposition from the allies, most notably France but also West Germany, uncertain leadership in the Soviet Union, a revolutionary China under Mao who now saw himself as the premier leader of the communist bloc, crises in Africa, the Middle East, and the Caribbean, and an escalating civil war in Vietnam. He chose to continue the foreign policies of his predecessor and retained the strategy of Flexible Response. Within eighteen months, U.S. forces would find themselves embroiled in a land war in Vietnam.

Military History for the Cold War, 1965-1991: the Making of the Contemporary World

The previous section focused primarily on the superpower conflict and the early stages of the Cold War. But the Cold War was also a global competition for access to resources, markets, skilled labor, and military bases, as well as a conflict between opposed visions of modernity, and it featured rising regional powers and involved former colonies and developing countries of the Third World. The global dimensions of the Cold War took on greater prominence in the 1960s when both Soviet and American leaders regarded the Third World as political, ideological, and sometimes also military battleground. From the mid-1960s, crises and hot wars played out primarily in Asia, Africa, and Latin America and these events have been equally as important to the superpower confrontation over Europe in shaping world politics and international security in our time. The latter decades of the Cold War

98 Westad, Global Cold War.
naturally will become more central to the historiography with the passage of time. As yet, the literature is more fragmented than that addressing the first decades of the superpower confrontation, but a picture emerges that is characterized by insurgencies, guerrilla warfare, civil wars, and a spectrum of threats that still included conventional and nuclear war. All but nuclear war could be observed in Vietnam.

Historians have exhibited great fascination with the Vietnam War, a watershed event in American culture. Broad surveys of the Vietnam War have fallen into two categories: revisionist histories that stress Vietnam as the wrong war, at the wrong time, against the wrong enemy and consensus-oriented texts that attempt to bridge the deep divide between anti-war sentiments and a desire to honor the fallen and celebrate the heroism of individual soldiers without conceding that the war itself may have been necessary. Recently, a third category has emerged with the appearance of scholarly studies concluding that the war was necessary and could have been won if the U.S. had applied its military and political resources differently. Most general histories of the Vietnam War focus on the American effort and pay little attention to Vietnam and the Vietnamese.

Studies of the origins of American involvement in Southeast Asia suggest a progression similar to the early Cold War in Europe. U.S. policy evolved from financial, economic, and military support for allies to militarization and subsequent intervention. In 1945 France reclaimed Indo-China (modern-day Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia) from Japan. But in Vietnam a coalition of nationalist and communist forces had emerged, led by the charismatic Ho Chi Minh. In August 1945, Ho, hoping for American support, proclaimed independence. Instead of receiving American recognition,


Ho’s Vietminh soon found themselves at war with the French. American involvement in the First Indochina War (1946-1954) evolved from tacit approval of French actions to financial support and the provision of arms and U.S. military advisers. The Korean War and the perception of a coordinated communist offensive elevated a colonial war in Southeast Asia to a battle for containment.

The war progressed through the stages of guerrilla warfare outlined by Mao Zedong in the late 1930s: mobilization and establishment of local power bases, protracted struggle to erode the enemy’s morale and resources, and set-piece battles and a general offensive to win the war. It culminated with the defeat of French forces after a siege of the outpost Dien Bien Phu. During that siege France requested U.S. air support, perhaps extending to the use of atomic weapons. Until then, President Eisenhower had followed Harry Truman’s policy of extending financial aid and deploying military advisers. Eisenhower denied the request, but there is some evidence that the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff had previously assured French officials of a different outcome and newly released archival sources suggest that Eisenhower himself had instructed Admiral Arthur Radford and secretary of state John Foster Dulles to base policy initiatives on the assumption of American intervention. In this reading, skeptical Congressmen, European allies, and the outspoken opposition of army leaders forced Eisenhower to reconsider. The crisis of 1954 complicated relations between France and the United States.

Great-power negotiations at Geneva created two Vietnamese states. The settlement called for general elections to reunite the country in 1956, but by then the governments of Ho Chi Minh and Ngo Dinh Diem were entrenched in Hanoi and Saigon. Diem, a devout Catholic, found support in Washington and his regime came to be regarded as the keystone that kept Southeast Asia from falling to communism. Despite his alliance with the Eisenhower administration, there were relatively few

---


American military advisers in Vietnam in the 1950s and Eisenhower had no intention of accelerating U.S. support even as Diem faced organized opposition and a military insurgency by 1960. The Kennedy administration increased aid for South Vietnam and raised the number of American military advisers. The assassinations of Diem and Kennedy in November 1963 represent a turning point. Historians continue to debate whether Kennedy had planned to withdraw American forces. Diem was replaced by a military junta, but leadership of South Vietnam remained highly unstable until Nguyen Van Thieu came to power in 1967.

American policy-makers and military officers were faced with the questions of what kind of war to expect and what kind of a South Vietnamese military to construct. They emphasized conventional over counterinsurgency warfare. Veterans and historians alike have been critical of the U.S. Army in particular for its unwillingness to develop a coherent doctrine and organization for counterinsurgency warfare despite political demands from 1961 onward. The question why the same politicians who tried to steer the army toward “small wars” continued to fund the build-up of the conventional Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) has received little scrutiny. The charge that the U.S. Army was wedded to a culture of big-unit wars instead of small wars neglects putting Vietnam in its global context and downplays the need to be prepared for war in Europe.

The question how a “sub-limited” war should be fought was far from easy to answer. The French had failed to defeat a poorly armed enemy and had never regained control of the countryside, even after they created a loyalist Vietnamese army. Despite its history of Indian wars and the Philippine-American War, American experience with insurgencies was limited. The recent example of British success in Malaya pointed at the need to isolate guerrillas from the population. But the argument that the U.S. Army failed in Vietnam because unlike the British army it was unwilling to learn and adjust seems too static. It also does not account for the success of Philippine forces and


119 See Trauschweizer, Cold War U.S. Army.


American advisers against communist insurgents in the decade after the Second World War. Vietnam presented a difficult challenge: the Buddhist population majority was indifferent to the regime in Saigon and sympathetic to nationalist aspects of the communist cause; North Vietnam offered supplies and took over the brunt of the fighting after 1965; and neighboring Laos and Cambodia provided a refuge. Programs to isolate insurgents by placing the rural population in guarded villages, so-called strategic hamlets, failed in a country where ancestry worship deepened ties to the land.

Several parallel and overlapping wars were fought in Vietnam. The insurgency of the National Liberation Front (Vietcong) gradually evolved into a civil war that involved North Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. Americans had some success in counterinsurgency operations, but political and military leaders emphasized the conventional land and air war. A growing body of works on counterinsurgency, guerrilla warfare, and special operations underscores the significance of irregular warfare since the Second World War. It seems of particular value to consider the linkages of irregular operations and strategies of attrition. In Vietnam, clandestine operations such as the Phoenix Program that targeted Vietcong cadre became part of the American war effort. In 1966 pacification programs were consolidated in Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS), which emphasized the relationship of establishing security and destroying the insurgents’ infrastructure to rural development initiatives. CORDS showed promising results, but it ultimately


failed along with the American war effort because clandestine, psychological and economic programs were poorly coordinated with military operations and further illustrated the dependence of the government in Saigon on the United States.\textsuperscript{132}

North Vietnam and the Vietcong had a clear sense of purpose and from it derived a strategy of attrition. The U.S. failed to develop a winning strategy. Truman, Eisenhower, and Kennedy emphasized military and economic assistance, culminating in the concept of nation-building.\textsuperscript{133} Lyndon B. Johnson chose escalation but also set clear limitations in part so as not to upset his far-reaching domestic reform agenda.\textsuperscript{134} Richard Nixon pursued an ambiguous course of escalation, withdrawal, and negotiations. But strategy requires defining the relationship of means to ends in order to achieve a political objective. In Vietnam, and in Washington, the United States failed to establish that relationship or even to define the objective.

In 1965, the Johnson administration escalated the war.\textsuperscript{135} The year before, Johnson had used vague reports about an attack on navy destroyers operating off the coast of North Vietnam to secure a blank check from Congress.\textsuperscript{136} This gave him authority to order the armed forces into action at any time. In immediate response to the alleged attacks, Johnson ordered the air force to attack targets in North Vietnam. After Vietcong fighters attacked American bases in February 1965, the U.S. initiated a permanent bombing campaign against North Vietnam. Operation Rolling Thunder would last until November 1968, but it soon became apparent that conventional air power could not force Hanoi into submission.\textsuperscript{137} Marine combat units entered South Vietnam in March 1965 and in June the first regular army units followed. Throughout the decision-making process, military leaders had recommended a tough course of action against North Vietnam but expressed ambivalence about entering into a land war.\textsuperscript{138} Johnson and secretary of defense Robert S. McNamara distrusted military advice and chose a course between all-out war and a fundamental review of American assistance to South Vietnam.\textsuperscript{139} The Joint Chiefs of Staff understood the risk: their war games had forecast the course of the war with

[\textit{Ingo Trauschweizer}]


\textsuperscript{139} For the pursuit of limited war in Vietnam see George C. Herring, \textit{LBJ and Vietnam: A Different Kind of War}. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994.
shocking accuracy. Their failure to oppose the president prior to escalation implicated the military in the escalation of the war in Vietnam.140

The commander on the ground, army general William Westmoreland settled on the operational approach of “search and destroy.”141 The basic tenet of American strategy was to kill more enemy fighters than the Vietcong could recruit and the People’s Army of (North) Vietnam (PAVN) could infiltrate south of the Demilitarized Zone. Ultimately, Westmoreland’s operational plans and McNamara’s data-driven notion of the body count called for nearly 600,000 American soldiers in Vietnam and even they proved insufficient. The need to build and maintain infrastructure left few actual combat forces and the one-year rotation policy – in the case of the army – assured loss of expertise and lack of continuity.

American soldiers won the few major battles the enemy offered, but their collective experience in Vietnam was shaped more by insecurity and vulnerability to guerrilla attacks than by set-piece engagements.142 In the case of big-unit actions, helicopters provided vehicles to transport air cavalry into battle.143 They added close air support and a much-needed means to extricate casualties. But army units operated under the assumption that once the enemy was fixed he was to be annihilated by air strikes or long-range artillery. This approach led to high civilian casualties and it persuaded the Vietcong and PAVN units to seek close combat with the Americans.144 Classic guerrilla tactics frustrated American troops and their ability to blend in with the local population provided an advantage for the enemy. The uncertainty over who the enemy was in a war without front-lines led some soldiers to consider anyone an enemy and contributed to massacres of civilians, most infamously at My Lai in March 1968.145 That war of long patrols, running engagements, and occasional battles or sieges of American fire bases put the communists on the defensive, but the Ho Chi Minh trail, a network of supply lines through Laos and Cambodia, allowed for supplies and fresh forces to arrive


steadily from North Vietnam. North Vietnamese leaders understood that they could afford to be patient because the American public would eventually tire of a protracted limited war with growing numbers of casualties.

By January 1968, North Vietnamese leadership felt the time had come to go on the offensive, attack high profile American targets, capture the cities of South Vietnam, and break the morale of U.S. forces. The Tet Offensive met with early success but it turned into a rout of the Vietcong and bloodied PAVN units. For the U.S. it nevertheless became a turning point: the mainstream media lost confidence in the war, the anti-war movement gained strength, and President Johnson announced that he would not seek reelection. Ironically, as public opinion shifted against the war, the country elected Richard Nixon over the liberal Democrat Hubert Humphrey. Accusations of conservatives, including Nixon, that the media lost the Vietnam War are unconvincing in light of the political, strategic, and military nature of the defeat.

Nixon promised to end the Vietnam War but events from 1969 to 1972 suggested that he did not have a coherent plan. Instead, Nixon and national security adviser Henry Kissinger pursued a dual course of turning over the land war to South Vietnamese troops and negotiating with the communist leaders in Hanoi. Negotiations had started under Johnson, but Nixon and Kissinger linked their desire to achieve a settlement that permitted South Vietnam to survive as an independent nation-state to a general reorientation in the Cold War that became known as détente. China and the Soviet Union had drifted apart since the death of Stalin and clashed over questions of Chinese modernization policies, nuclear energy, leadership in the communist bloc, and their contested border. By the end of

---


the 1960s, both were seeking allies against one another.\textsuperscript{154} Western Europe and the United States remained allied, but NATO had suffered from a tense debate over strategy – the European allies finally accepted Flexible Response in 1967 – and France’s decision to leave the military committee and remain solely involved in political and diplomatic functions.\textsuperscript{155} Nixon proclaimed the emergence of China, Japan, and Western Europe as great powers. In this environment, the U.S. opened relations with China and entered into arms-limitation agreements with the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{156} Détente raised hopes for the future, but it did not increase the chances for peace in Vietnam.\textsuperscript{157}

Ho Chi Minh had died in 1969, but his successors proved equally disinterested in a settlement short of unification of Vietnam under their leadership. For American forces the war brought further frustration. Westmoreland’s successor, General Creighton Abrams, placed greater emphasis on pacification and shifted operations to clearing and holding contested territory.\textsuperscript{158} But while this new approach showed some promise, American forces were withdrawn in great numbers. Nixon decided to concentrate American air power against communist supply lines and ARVN and American forces attempted cross-border operations into Cambodia and Laos in 1970 and 1971.\textsuperscript{159} The casualty count increased but the realities on the ground did not shift.\textsuperscript{160} In 1972, North Vietnamese forces went on the offensive but were held off and the U.S. returned to bombing targets in North Vietnam, yet ultimately Nixon and Kissinger accepted a peace agreement that was little more than American withdrawal.


dressed up as compromise for public consumption. Nixon had failed to achieve “peace with honor” and had instead settled for “a decent interval” between American withdrawal in 1973 and the fall of Saigon in 1975. South Vietnam had been abandoned by its patron. The Vietnam War led to the termination of the draft in the United States. Instead of a mixed force of volunteers and conscripts, the armed services became all-volunteer organizations. This presented opportunities, but it contributed to a growing isolation of soldiers from the public and made it easier for presidents to order troop deployments. It also facilitated the emphasis on technology in the American way of war and the more recent phenomenon of presuming that small elite formations would replace conventional units. Carl von Clausewitz suggested in On War less well-equipped states could resist superior power by waging absolute war. He concluded that any state engaged in warfare needed to seek a political objective. After Vietnam, it remained unclear how the application of advanced military technology could solve political problems, but the U.S. military rediscovered Clausewitz. Military officers took solace in a reading of On War that held war was the continuation of the political by other means. Army generals used that justification to re-emphasize the defense of Western Europe and the deterrence of nuclear war. Abrams initiated reforms that integrated active and reserve units so that the U.S. Army could not be deployed without calling up the reserve. In the 1980s Caspar Weinberger and Colin Powell elevated the emphasis on overwhelming force and extricating American soldiers once the fighting had stopped to defense doctrine. Some historians

---


165 Most clearly expressed in Lewis, American Culture of War.


168 Stuart Kinross, Clausewitz and Vietnam: Strategic Thought and Practice from Vietnam to Iraq. London: Routledge, 2008 cautions that at the end of the Cold War technology came to be seen as a panacea and concludes that the U.S. finds itself in a similar conundrum today than it did in Vietnam. For a full bibliography visit the website maintained by Christoper Bassford: http://www.clausewitz.com/readings/Readings.shtml (accessed 16 June 2009).


and analysts of the Vietnam War advanced the argument that the United States had lost because politicians had imposed undue limitations on the military.\textsuperscript{172} But instead of thoroughly investigating all aspects of its defeat, the army chose to ignore the lessons of Vietnam and returned to the business of the Cold War.\textsuperscript{173}

The result of the army’s reorientation after Vietnam was integration of tactical and operational thought with new weapons and communications technology.\textsuperscript{174} In emphasizing the close relationship of land and air operations, the army moved closer to the air force, which had undergone its own reorientation from strategic bombing to more specifically targeted tactical applications.\textsuperscript{175} Despite the complimentary nature of their philosophies of war, the armed services had to be ordered by Congress in the 1986 Goldwater-Nichols Act to cooperate more fully and the position of the secretary of defense was elevated at the expense of the service chiefs.\textsuperscript{176} The air force’s transformation reflected the innovative thinking of pilots like John Boyd, who argued that operational planning should be based on observation, orientation, decision, and action.\textsuperscript{177} Army and air force officers contributed to the recognition of operational art as a binding link between tactics and strategy. The rediscovery of Clausewitz was significant, but the adoption of operational art presented a more practical legacy of the period of reorientation that followed the defeat in Vietnam.

A similar development to the military’s reorientation toward the superpower confrontation and Europe can be detected in contemporary scholarship. Where political scientists after the Korean War had developed a body of theory on limited war their successors in the 1970 and 1980s returned to questions of nuclear deterrence. One school of thought held that the uneasy peace in Europe was based on nuclear deterrence and mutual assured destruction.\textsuperscript{178} This was not a novel argument, but it was now challenged by scholars who considered the extent of NATO’s conventional armaments and concluded that these were not simply a tripwire that would set off nuclear retaliation, but rather a conventional deterrent force that helped prevent war. By the late 1980s theories of extended deterrence matched applications of U.S. and NATO strategy.\textsuperscript{179} Following the arguments of John Mearsheimer,
Samuel Huntington, and others, students of military science came to recognize the significance of operational art to land warfare, particularly given the promulgation of new weapons and communication technologies. For practitioners, operational art was hardly new; the Soviet and German armies had developed concepts in the interwar period and both applied them to some extent during the Second World War, but neither the U.S. army nor contemporary observers appear to have recognized the term or the concept until the late 1970s (in the case of army doctrine) or even 1980s (in the case of scholarship). Parallel to America’s entanglement in Vietnam and despite superpower détente, the Cold War expanded in the 1960s and 1970s. The history of the later decades of the Cold War remains somewhat elusive, owing to the dearth of publicly accessible records as well as to the proximity of events. As a consequence, historiography from the 1970s on is still primarily a compendium of memoirs, journalistic accounts, government histories, and political-science literature. In the Middle East the Arab-Israeli conflict, which had begun as an issue apart from the Cold War, became a Cold War battleground. Following greater involvement in the region, expressed by the Eisenhower doctrine and intervention in Lebanon in the late 1950s and the construction of an alliance with Israel, the U.S. found itself party to diplomatic attempts to achieve a lasting settlement after the wars of 1967 and 1973. The October War in 1973 presented a case study for the U.S. Army: the outnumbered Israeli Defense Force, armed primarily with American weapons and vehicles, conducted a successful mobile defense against Egyptian, Syrian, and Iraqi forces armed with Soviet equipment. Despite a peace treaty between Israel and Egypt negotiated by the Carter administration, tensions in the region have erupted periodically and the Middle East today presents one of the fundamental challenges for American and international security. Its alliance with Israel made relations with Arab and other Muslim countries more difficult, but the U.S. succeeded in building strong ties to Egypt and, until 1979, could count on the support of Iran. The overthrow of the Shah, however, changed the strategic

(Contd.)
balance and the emergence of an Islamic republic has led to a lasting crisis in US-Iranian relations, beginning with the hostage crisis of 1979-1981 and continuing to the complex issue of Iranian nuclear power today.  

Elsewhere, local conflicts also were subsumed in the Cold War. India and Pakistan fought three wars over their ill-defined border and the status of Bangladesh. Today both are nuclear-armed powers and the instability of Pakistan presents another major challenge to international security. As Indian power grew, China and the U.S. established friendly relations with Pakistan. Indonesia, a hotbed of colonial, religious, and ethnic conflict in the post-war decades, attained a degree of stability at the expense of a dictatorship. The Philippines charted a similar course. Both became regional allies of the United States, as policy-makers in Washington dropped reservations against dictators as long as they were anti-communist. A similar pattern could be perceived in Latin America. Most prominently, the U.S. was involved in the military coup in Chile in 1973 that ousted socialist president Salvador Allende. The image of the United States in the region was tainted and it hardly improved when President Reagan funneled military aid to the Nicaraguan Contra rebels, who fought against the leftist Sandinista regime in the 1980s. In the first major military intervention since Vietnam, American forces overran Grenada in 1983 and in 1989 U.S. troops invaded Panama to depose president Manuel Noriega who had been linked to drug cartels and to re-establish democracy. In Africa the U.S. supported anti-Soviet dictatorship of Ethiopia and Somalia to South Africa, although in the latter case close ties to the Apartheid regime were eventually loosened. Through aid and equipment, the U.S. was indirectly involved in civil wars in Angola, Mozambique, Southwest Africa (Namibia), Ethiopia, and Somalia from the 1970s on, often in an uneasy partnership with China.

It is as yet difficult to assess comprehensively the defense policies of the Carter and Reagan administrations. Carter regarded human rights as a central issue and he put pressure on Moscow on


the basis of the 1975 Helsinki Accords. In 1979 the Carter administration and Soviet leaders agreed on a second strategic arms limitation treaty, but the Senate rejected its ratification amidst rising tensions and détente finally broke down over the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the deployment of new intermediate range ballistic missiles in Europe by both sides. A still developing debate among scholars holds that Carter’s defense policy shifted toward confrontation prior to the seismic changes of 1979, but the arguments put forward tend to downplay that Carter had pursued a dual course – confronting the Soviets on nuclear weapons and human rights while placing greater emphasis on human rights in US foreign policy – from the beginning of his presidency. Oil and energy came to be seen as vital issues of national security and the 1970s saw a shift of power toward oil producers with the emergence of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). Carter left office amidst a national crisis of self-confidence. But the Helsinki Accords emboldened opposition groups behind the Iron Curtain and encouraged dissent. Ronald Reagan talked up American strengths, classified the Soviet Union as an “evil empire,” significantly raised the defense budget and extended aid to anti-communist forces from Afghanistan to Nicaragua, and launched a policy to install a missile shield in outer space. His confrontational approach was balanced by summit meetings with the new Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev and by nuclear disarmament negotiations. But the U.S. also became actively involved in conflicts with terrorist groups and their state sponsors, such as Libya. For most of the 1980s, this precursor of the war on terror was fought between Israeli forces and Palestinian fighters. Reagan ordered U.S. troops to Lebanon, following an Israeli invasion, in order to stabilize the pro-western government. In October 1983, 239 Americans, most of them Marines, died when a truck bomb exploded at Marine Corps headquarters in Beirut. The U.S. withdrew its remaining troops less than half a year later.

The superpower confrontation ended peacefully with the collapse of the Soviet Union. Military issues contributed to the downfall. The Soviet war in Afghanistan bled the country’s resources and led the Soviet Union into a guerrilla war with Afghan and foreign fighters supported primarily by Arab states and the U.S. through Pakistan. The war and subsequent civil war left

(Contd.)


Afghanistan in a shambles and set up the failed state from which Al-Qaeda could attack the U.S. on September 11, 2001. In the event, the Soviet empire was brought down by a combination of local and global factors ranging from American policies to the determination of Pope John Paul II and the mostly peaceful revolutions by the people of Eastern Europe. Gorbachev’s decision not to fight back and the intervention of Russian president Boris Yeltsin during a military coup in August 1991 diffused an explosive situation. The extent to which American defense spending forced the Soviet Union to follow suit and whether it bankrupted the foe remains contested.

By the end of the Cold War, U.S. military commitments were of a global scale and tremors of future crises and wars were already apparent. In 1991 the United States fought a war against Iraq and expelled the forces of Saddam Hussein from Kuwait. The U.S. had supported Saddam in his war against a common enemy, Iran, in the 1980s. Unfortunately, the outcome of the Gulf War was less decisive than it seemed. The U.S. military had distinguished itself against a formidable foe—at least when measured in numbers and equipment—and President George H.W. Bush could claim that the U.S. had overcome its Vietnam trauma, but Saddam Hussein remained in power and settled in for a decade of UN sanctions and a cat-and-mouse game with nuclear weapons inspectors. U.S. forces remained in the region and the Clinton administration struck against Iraqi targets after violations of the no-fly zones that the UN had implemented to protect the Shiites in the south and Kurds in the north. By 2001, the situation had deteriorated to a point where neo-conservative advisers could tell George W. Bush that Iraq should be included in the military response to the September 11 attacks. Soon the Bush administration asserted that American strategy should be based on preventive war. From the incomplete termination of the 1991 Gulf War thus arose a decade of tension that culminated in the American invasion of Iraq in 2003, setting off a war that was easily won on the conventional level but then led to an insurgency and quagmire outwardly resembling Vietnam.

The war in Afghanistan offers another example for Odd Arne Westad’s argument that the last decades of the Cold War shaped our time profoundly. But in the decade between the end of the Cold War and the war on terror, the U.S. military was called upon to end wars or help keep the peace in many places from the Balkans to Somalia. The latter deployment ended after a battle with the forces of a local warlord. Events in Mogadishu may have contributed to American inaction during the genocide in Rwanda and inattention to the war in eastern Congo, perhaps the bloodiest conflict since the end of the Second World War. Even in former Yugoslavia, the U.S. entered late, but then forced an

(Contd.)
end to the fighting in Bosnia-Herzegovina. NATO forces commanded by U.S. Army general Wesley Clark attacked Serbia in a surprisingly ineffective air campaign to stop the violence in Kosovo, where Serbs attempted a policy of ethnic cleansing to rid a province central to their national mythology of its Albanian majority population. What may seem like a relatively quiet decade was in fact characterized by a host of military operations and intervention.

Did the United States win the Cold War? That remains a controversial question. It is safer to state that the Soviet Union—and communism as a practical political ideology—lost. Did the Cold War change the United States? That question may be more pertinent and it has led to serious investigation of the national security state and of American militarism. Perhaps most critically, historians and political commentators have been able to argue persuasively that U.S. strategy for international security did not change fundamentally after the Cold War and that it has come to resemble a drive for global hegemony. The most pressing problems today are exhibited in the ominously entitled Long War, formerly known as the Global War on Terror, which in itself is a characterization that does not inspire great confidence in peace, security, or stability.

Ingo Trauschweizer
Max Weber Fellow 2008-2009


