

Book Review

The Bomb and American Foreign and Defense Policies

The Winning Weapon: The Atomic Bomb in the Cold War, 1945-1950.
By Gregg Herken. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1980. Pp. xi, 425.
\$15.00.

Reviewed by Williamson Murray†

Gregg Herken's *The Winning Weapon*¹ purports to be a detailed examination of the impact of the atomic bomb on the post-war world, particularly on American foreign and defense policy.² The author aims to show the effect of the bomb on American domestic politics, on American strategic thinking, and, perhaps above all, on American policy toward the Soviet Union after World War II. Herken begins his discussion in September, 1945. He attempts to analyze the bomb's impact on American diplomacy and the interaction among scientists, politicians, and civil servants. A large part of the book addresses "the military dimension," the atomic bomb's influence on American strategic planning. He concludes his work with the explosion of the first Soviet atomic device and the end of the American monopoly of atomic weapons.

This topic is immensely important to an understanding of our world. Despite considerable research, Professor Herken unfortunately has provided us with a flawed study. The author shows little understanding of the issues faced by politicians and military planners and the nature of the world that arose from the ashes of war. In fact, the author presents only a narrative chronology of who said what to whom. It is an old fashioned approach and makes his argument often difficult to discern. One consequence is an apparent failure to grapple directly with the issues of military power in peace or in war.

If one can identify a theme in the early sections of the book (admit-

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1. G. HERKEN, *THE WINNING WEAPON: THE ATOMIC BOMB IN THE COLD WAR, 1945-1950* (1980) [hereinafter cited by page number only].

2. See, e.g., pp. 4-8 (scope of study).

tedly stated only by insinuation), it is the suggestion that somehow the United States missed an opportunity to reach agreement over international control of the atomic bomb and put the genie back in the bottle. Central to a realistic evaluation of such a theory must be an examination of the nature both of the Soviet regime and Soviet foreign policy. But, like too many of his colleagues who have turned American diplomatic history into a parochial discipline, Herken does not discuss the nature of Stalin's regime, much less his post-war security policy. Instead, he presents his account as if American discussions and arguments over the bomb took place in a vacuum and as if Stalin and his colleagues were players who need little discussion and less analysis. While *The Winning Weapon* does cite Adam Ulam's *The Rivals*³ there is little evidence in the text that Herken has addressed the issues Ulam discussed and it is revealing that Ulam's far more complete study of Soviet foreign policy, *Expansion and Coexistence*,⁴ does not even appear in the bibliography.

As a result, the author's analysis lacks an international context, a point his treatment of the Baruch Plan makes clear. The Baruch plan became a formal American proposal to create an International Atomic Development Authority that would have a monopoly over the worldwide development and use of atomic energy, including raw materials, and the power to license research and production. The Authority would have the power to punish violators and no State would have a veto in this international organization. The Authority thus would have differed from the structure of the U.N. Security Council. The United States proposed to hand over all its atomic weapons to the Authority, once it was established, and cease building any others. Emerging from Herken's careful prose seems to be the view that this plan unduly emphasized sanctions against violators and thus lost the conciliatory tone of an earlier proposal put forward by a committee whose membership included Dean Acheson and David Lilienthal.⁵ The Acheson-Lilienthal plan would have given control of all atomic energy with potential for dangerous use to an international body. Such a body would not open up the Soviet Union, as the Baruch plan appeared to require in order for the Authority to take control of all atomic raw materials, but it would have some monitoring power so that "vivid danger signals would be provided to show whether and when that control was being evaded."⁶ As Ulam points out, neither plan had the slightest chance of being accepted by the U.S.S.R. because of Soviet mistrust of the inter-

3. A. ULAM, *THE RIVALS* (1971).

4. A. ULAM, *EXPANSION AND COEXISTENCE* (2d. ed. 1974).

5. See pp. 153-70.

6. D. ACHESON, *PRESENT AT THE CREATION* 152 (1969).

national community and sensitivity to the prying eyes of inspectors.⁷ By ignoring the Soviet side of the story, Herken implies—he rarely takes a clear position—that there was something about the Baruch plan itself that made it unacceptable to Stalin. Herken thinks that the flaw in the Baruch plan was that by emphasizing punishment of violators and phased implementation—the tone of which concerned Acheson—it stupidly⁸ or perhaps even malevolently⁹ required an intolerable sacrifice by the Soviet Union, unlike the more approvingly described Acheson-Lilienthal plan.¹⁰ In the end, the real problem with the tone of the Baruch plan, as Acheson later observed, was that it allowed the Soviet Union to score the propaganda victory.¹¹

Even more revealing is Herken's ignorance of military history. Among the author's more astonishing claims is his statement that the *Strategic Bombing Survey*¹²

showed that the strategy of bombing 'bottleneck' industrial targets in daylight precision raids had been too costly in terms of casualties for its dubious effect. The peak of the strategic-bombing offensive against Germany had coincided with the peak of German industrial production [*sic*]. Equally, the famed 'carpet bombing' of the war, although it resulted in fewer military losses than precision bombing, had killed a vast number of German and Japanese civilians without significantly affecting industrial production or breaking the enemy's morale.¹³

This comment not only misrepresents what the *Strategic Bombing Survey* says but disregards the vast historical literature that has accumulated since 1946, including among others Wesley Craven's and James L. Cate's massive study, *The Army Air Forces in World War II*,¹⁴ and particularly Sir Charles Webster's and Noble Frankland's, *The Strategic Bombing Offensive Against Germany*.¹⁵ The author apparently has read neither of these basic works, not to mention the many other works that have appeared since, and he is therefore unable to understand why military planners might have developed contingency plans for bombing oil targets in the Soviet Union during the period covered by his book. (Herken states that the air offensive against oil targets in 1944 was "ul-

7. A. ULAM, *supra* note 4, at 414-15.

8. *I.e.*, by inadvertently killing its chances of success.

9. *I.e.*, by purposefully killing its chances for success.

10. Pp. 155-58.

11. D. ACHESON, *supra* note 6, at 156.

12. U.S. STRATEGIC BOMBING SURVEY, *THE EFFECTS OF STRATEGIC BOMBING* (1946).

13. P. 209.

14. U.S. OFFICE OF AIR FORCE HISTORY, *THE ARMY AIR FORCES IN WORLD WAR II* (W. Craven & J. Cate eds. 1948-1958) (comprehensive 7 volume study).

15. C. WEBSTER & N. FRANKLAND, *THE STRATEGIC AIR OFFENSIVE AGAINST GERMANY, 1939-1945* (1961) (comprehensive 4 volume study).

timately of dubious worth against Germany,"¹⁶ surely a mischaracterization of bombing attacks that had brought the German army to a virtual halt and had grounded most of the *Luftwaffe* by the end of 1944).

These errors and omissions suggest the existence of a larger issue. Far too many studies of U.S. foreign and defense policy share *The Winning Weapon's* vision of their subject as a branch of American rather than of international or transnational history. Too often the result, as here, is a distorted presentation of the past.¹⁷ At some length, for example, the author examines the Baruch plan for international control of atomic weapons; he gives the Soviet response to it but two pages.¹⁸ Apart from the suggestion inherent in such a treatment that the author does not view the Soviet Union's position worth serious analysis in a book on American foreign and defense policy (despite the broad gauge of the title), the failure to deal systematically with Soviet policy leaves the reader without an analysis of what it was American policy-makers reacted to and tried to plan for.

In the recent past the historical community in the United States has come to regard military history as beneath its dignity as a subject of study. Less than twenty per cent of American colleges and universities have a military historian on their faculties. The attitude implicit in this pattern of faculty recruitment has had a wholly deleterious effect on students of diplomatic history. Much work dealing with international issues ignores military problems and is thereby rendered irrelevant. In discussing the effect of the bomb with no knowledge of the earlier debates over bombing doctrine that had begun as early as the end of World War I and reached a peak in the second great world war, Herken can make little sense out of the tangled conflicts even between the air power advocates in the post war era. Because the author knows

16. P. 220.

17. An example is Herken's treatment of the invasion of South Korea. See pp. 330-33. He considers the war's impact on the evolution of American policy papers but does not examine the conflict in terms of Soviet objectives. His references betray his approach. Even the most standard works, e.g., D. REES, *KOREA: THE LIMITED WAR* (1964), are missing. Only thus can he conclude, as he does at pp. 339-40, that nuclear weapons are not an asset to diplomacy. Whatever this observation may mean, surely it misstates the impact of the bomb on the different endings of the Korean and Vietnam wars. On the threat to use atomic weapons in Korea, see D. REES, *supra*, at 416-20. Herken dismisses such threats as mooted by the signing of the Korean armistice. He skirts the question whether noises about the possible use of atomic weapons produced or at least helped produce the armistice. See p. 336.

18. Pp. 174-76.

little of Douhet¹⁹ or Trenchard²⁰ or the Air Corps Tactical School²¹ in the pre-war period or the real differences between Bomber Command's area bombing campaign (completely misnamed by the author as "carpet bombing"²²) and Eighth and Fifteenth Air Forces daylight precision bombing, he is unable to perceive the nature of the debate after World War II. Ignorant of military history and air doctrine, he misses the historical and strategic context of the arguments over post-war American strategy: that "counter force" and "counter value" strategies have existed since before World War II and played a major role in the evolution of strategic planning after the war. By missing this important—perhaps essential—point, Herken misinterprets and muddies the debates that took place. Consequently he can make little sense out of his research. Indeed, even his consideration of the moral questions posed by weapons of mass destruction occurs without showing awareness of the long history of moral debate about new military inventions.²³ Perhaps he presumes a knowledgeable audience. For readers who believe that war and policy, military power and diplomacy, are inseparable (who have, in other words, read Thucydides and Clausewitz), and who believe that the study of diplomacy and strategy requires consideration of a much wider context than what one branch of a government said to another, this book is profoundly unsatisfactory.

19. See pp. 195, 209, 211 (reference to Douhet as discredited theoretician without analyzing his ideas). On Douhet, see Warner, *Douhet, Mitchell, Seversky: Theories of Air Warfare*, in *MAKERS OF MODERN STRATEGY* 485 (E. Earle ed. 1952).

20. On Trenchard, see C. WEBSTER & N. FRANKLAND, *supra* note 15, at 36, 37, 39, 40, 43, 46.

21. See, e.g., Cate & Craven, *The Army Air Arm Between Two Wars, 1919-1939*, in 1 U.S. OFFICE OF AIR FORCE HISTORY, *supra* note 14, at 17, 46, 51-52 (Air Corps Tactical School doctrine).

22. P. 209.

23. Pp. 283-87. In this connection, see generally M. HOWARD, *WAR AND THE LIBERAL CONSCIENCE* (1978).