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Articles reviewed:

Holger Nehring and Helge Pharo. "Introduction: A Peaceful Europe? Negotiating Peace in the Twentieth Century." 277-299.

Frédéric Bozo. "The Failure of a Grand Design: Mitterrand's European Confederation, 1989–1991." -412.

Jay Winter. "Imagining Peace in Twentieth-Century Europe." 413-422.

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Review by **William R. Keylor**, Boston University

The two world wars of the twentieth century caused more than thirty-five million deaths in Europe as a result of the deliberate policies of governments and the behavior of the military and paramilitary forces they deployed against "enemies" foreign and domestic. From the suicidal and murderous offensives on both fronts in the early months of the First World War to the Anglo-American strategic bombing of densely populated German cities right up to the end of the Second World War, what has been called "The Thirty-Years War of the Twentieth Century" certainly qualifies as the most lethal period in the history of the Old Continent. The interwar years were but an interlude between these two remarkable instances of human slaughter on a massive scale. In addition to the millions of deaths on the battlefields of Europe, the old distinction between combatants and civilians was erased, resulting in striking acts of inhumanity from the Armenian Genocide to the Holocaust. Mark Mazower's characterization of Europe in the first half of the twentieth century as the "dark continent" is an appropriate epithet for this economically, politically, and culturally advanced corner of the earth that

succumbed to what Freud had already labeled at the end of the First World War “the death instinct.”¹

Then, what a miraculous transformation occurred in Europe after 1945! The dark continent became a beacon of light in the world. While other regions suffered from periodic outbreaks of bloody wars, civil wars, and genocide, Europe became the place of peace. With the two notable exceptions of Northern Ireland and the former Yugoslavia, organized violence had vanished from the European scene. The old dream of establishing norms of international conduct that would preclude the resort to armed force, which had been nurtured by humanist philosophers since the Enlightenment, became a reality in the postwar life of the old continent.

In an attempt to make sense out of this stunning reversal, Holger Nehring and Helge Pharo organized a special issue of the journal *Contemporary European History* titled “A Peaceful Europe? Negotiating Peace in the Twentieth Century.” In a lengthy and thoughtful introduction to the collection of articles contributed by a distinguished group of scholars, the co-editors ask “what we can gain from exploring how peace was established and maintained in the wake of wars in various European societies” (p.277). Taking up issues addressed by Robert Kagan, Tony Judt, James Sheehan, and others who have chronicled Europe’s anomalous transformation from a charnel house to an oasis of peace, stability, and security in the world, the two editors frame the essential question that is addressed by the individual contributors: How to explain the shift from violence, genocide, and material destruction to small defense budgets, long vacations, medical care for all, and the pleasant prospect of living one’s entire life without fear of invasion from across the border, systematic persecution by one’s own government, or outbursts of vigilante violence perpetrated by fanatical devotees of this or that political ideology.²

The assignment of this reviewer was to assess the contributions to this impressive series by two of the most perceptive observers of modern European history, one American and the other French. The American paints with a broad brush, imaginatively examining the interplay of war and peace in the entire twentieth century. The Frenchman paints in miniature, focusing on one fleeting attempt by a former president of his own country to ensure that the peaceful Europe of the postwar era would not revert to its old violent ways after the recession of Soviet power in the eastern half of the continent and the possible resurgence of national rivalries and tensions amid the resulting vacuum of power.

No one has written with more verve and poignancy about the terrible reality of war than Jay Winter. His studies of the First World War have deepened our understanding of that

¹ Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe’s Twentieth Century* (2000).

² Robert Kagan, *Of Paradise and Power: America and Europe in the New World Order* (2003); Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945* (2004); James Sheehan, *Where Have All the Soldiers Gone? The Transformation of Modern Europe* (2009)

critical turning point in the history of modern Europe. But in recent years this chronicler of conflict has turned his attention to its opposite. His *Dreams of Peace and Freedom* explores the heroic efforts of a handful of individuals and the movements to which they belonged to put an end to the seemingly endless cycle of state-sponsored or state-tolerated violence.³ In his contribution to this issue, titled “Imagining Peace in Twentieth-Century Europe,” Winter has produced what can only be described as a paean to the cause of perpetual peace that will warm the hearts of latter-day Kantians. After briefly reviewing the horror stories of the two wars and the genocides that they spawned, he focuses on a concept that offers the possibility of overcoming the sad and depressing legacy of old Europe: that is the concept of human rights. As long as citizenship is conceived of in national terms, with loyalty to the sovereign state as its defining characteristic, international conflict and the suffering and death that it produces are inevitable. Such was the most salient lesson of the two world wars. Winter reminds us that an alternative to this nation-state-based method of organizing human affairs had been launched at the end of the nineteenth century and in the first decade of the twentieth at the two Hague Peace Conferences (1899 and 1907). But the idea of universally recognized international conventions that would oblige national leaders to settle inter-state conflicts without resort to armed force was an idea ahead of its time that was buried in the summer of 1914.

In his essay Winter ignores Woodrow Wilson’s role in promoting the rebirth of that noble idea at the end of the Great War. Instead, he concentrates on the contribution of the Frenchman René Cassin, a severely wounded veteran of the trenches whose subsequent work at the League of Nations on behalf of disarmament, arbitration, and a redefinition of sovereignty set the stage for his crowning achievement -- in collaboration with other dedicated defenders of Enlightenment ideals -- after the Second World War: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). This document represented the ultimate challenge to the doctrine of state sovereignty, for it required of all signatories a pledge to respect a lengthy list of rights that derived not from citizenship in a particular country but rather from membership in the human race. As Winter concedes, the United Nations proved “a poor channel for the development” of this revolutionary concept, with the result that “Human rights were diverted and ignored in the early decades of the Cold War.” For Winter, the real turning point for the principle of human rights came at the Helsinki Conference (1975): The acceptance by the Communist states of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union of the “basket three” provisions of that high-level gathering’s Final Act affirmed the right of their citizens to basic protections and established a mechanism for monitoring the state’s compliance with this obligation. Winter’s assertion that the Helsinki prescriptions on human rights “helped to end the Cold War” may be disputed by those who would ascribe much greater importance to the economic decline of the Soviet Union from the 1970s and the serendipitous accession of Mikhail Gorbachev in 1985. But none can deny that the idea that basic human rights could not be trampled on by

³ Jay Winter, *Dreams of Peace and Freedom: Utopian Moments in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2008)

governments was an important influence on decisions by organizations on the Western side of the Iron Curtain such as the European Court of Human Rights, on which Cassin sat and over which he presided until 1968, when he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his long record of service to the cause.

Cassin represented the legalistic approach to international politics, which asserts that only by establishing universally respected codes of conduct can the ultimate goal of peace --both within and between nations -- be attained. But the next question to be asked, which Winter does not address in his essay, is the question of who enforces those rules? Only a supranational organization with no axe to grind and under no obligation to pursue a particular “national interest” (however that might be defined) will be capable of responding to violations of international law in a just and impartial manner. In short, as long as the world community continues to be organized on national lines, as long as individual governments enjoy a monopoly on the instruments of force, it is likely that nations or groups of nations linked by old-fashioned military alliances will assume the primary duty of deterring or repelling aggression. The widespread expectation at the end of the Second World War that the successor to the League of Nations would succeed, where its predecessor had failed, in replacing the old system of exclusive alliances and the balance of power with a new system of collective security supported by all of the organization’s member states, was dashed with the advent of the Cold War. The original plan to endow the new international organization with an on-call military force and a permanent general staff to back up its dictates with the force of arms was stillborn. Instead, the two superpowers proceeded to form military alliances and engage in a competitive arms race. The balance of terror replaced the balance of power as the guiding concept of the nuclear age. The brief flurry of hope, at the end of the Cold War, that the United Nations would belatedly live up to the fond hopes of its founders within a “New World Order” was promptly snuffed out. In its place emerged the concept of a unipolar international system, in which one power—the United States—would arrogate the right and duty to preserve peace and security in a world in which no power or group of powers could credibly challenge its global predominance.⁴

If the United Nations has been unable to assume the role of the “world alliance,” as the League of Nations was hailed by its proponents, are all hopes for enforcement of the norms of international conduct dead in the water? Winter asserts that the most promising sign of the survival of the tradition of Kant and Cassin after the Second World War is the achievement of European integration, which has imposed severe constraints on the national sovereignty of its member states and institutionalized stringent safeguards for human rights. But it is worth noting that peace and security in (Western) Europe after World War II was made possible in part by a method of statecraft that is hardly part of the movement for human rights whose history Winter so admirably recounts in his article: the old-fashioned military alliance among sovereign states. The

⁴ Among many other treatments of the concept of a unipolar world, see Andrew Bacevich, *American Empire: The Realities and Consequences of U.S. Diplomacy* (2004).

security guarantee of the United States to the non-Communist half of Europe provided the latter with a dual insurance policy: Europe could pursue its peaceful agenda without having to worry about threats from the Soviet bloc or from a revival of German militarism. The triple purpose of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), in the pithy, oft-cited observation of its first Secretary General, Lord Ismay, was to “keep the Americans in, the Russians out, and the Germans down.” I do not wish to challenge Winter’s claim that Western (and eventually, Eastern) Europe’s conversion to the cause of human rights after the Second World War played a significant role in the continent’s repudiation of its blood-soaked past and its successful quest for a peaceful future. I would merely suggest that American policy may also have helped to facilitate Europe’s spectacular shift, in the metaphor popularized by Kagan, from Mars to Venus. With West Germany firmly linked to its non-Communist neighbors in NATO and American soldiers stationed on the territory of the Federal Republic, the old fear of German aggression vanished. The American policy of extended deterrence removed the more recent fear of Soviet aggression. In the absence of these fears, the governments of Western Europe could concentrate on protecting the rights of their citizens and providing them with the good things in life. With the end of the Cold War, these benefits were extended to the peoples of Eastern Europe as the Germans reunited and the Russians departed.

If there is any truth to the claim that postwar Western Europe was able to enjoy peace and security because the Russians were kept out and the Germans were kept down, there were some who bristled at the fact that the Americans remained in and showed no interest in leaving. This concern about the overweening power and influence of the United States on the continent through its domination of NATO was a central tenet in the foreign policy of French President Charles de Gaulle.

After establishing a presidential system at home and abandoning a colonial policy that drained French human and financial resources, de Gaulle focused his attention on putting an end to what he regarded as the unacceptable security environment of Europe during the Cold War. He derisively denounced this state of affairs as the heritage of Yalta: The two semi-European superpowers that had defeated Nazi Germany proceeded to divide the old continent into spheres of influence that were dependent on and subservient to their respective superpower patrons. De Gaulle was convinced that if Western Europe could mend its fences with the Soviet satellites in Eastern Europe, they would gravitate to the West and restore the unity of the continent that had been sundered at the end of the war. The Soviet Union could be induced to allow the satellites to spin out of its orbit, he believed, if Western Europe succeeded in loosening its ties to the United States. This “Grande Europe,” emancipated from Washington and Moscow, would become an independent force in world affairs. Recognizing that France was incapable of managing this process of European liberation by itself, he enlisted the support of West Germany in 1963. A Paris-Bonn Axis would serve as the nucleus of an independent Europe. He knew that France would be the senior partner in such an arrangement, because it enjoyed two advantages that West Germany did not: membership in the nuclear club (with the political influence and prestige that such membership conferred) and national unity (with

the sense of security and normality that such unity provided). De Gaulle's project failed, largely because the West Germans were unwilling to forego the security guarantee from Washington that Paris was in no position to replace.

Thirty years after de Gaulle left the French political scene in 1969, another French president attempted to revive the old Gaullist dream of a Europe united and independent of external influences. François Mitterrand had been a vigorous political opponent of de Gaulle from the very beginning of the General's tenure in the Elysée Palace. But the Socialist President of the French Republic shared his conservative predecessor's distaste for the "Europe of Yalta." In the momentous year of 1989, as the French people celebrated the bicentennial of their revolution against monarchical tyranny and the peoples of Eastern Europe staged their revolutions against Communist tyranny, Mitterrand sensed that the time had finally arrived to bring de Gaulle's old project for "Une Grande Europe" to fruition. It is this episode that engages the attention of Frédéric Bozo, one of France's most perceptive commentators on European affairs and transatlantic relations. Titled "The Failure of a Grand Design: Mitterrand's European Confederation, 1989-1991," Bozo's article traces the advent, evolution, and demise of the French chief of state's campaign to reshape the political architecture of Europe as the Soviet Union's satellite empire in Eastern Europe crumbled and the movement toward Western European political and economic unity gathered steam after a long period of stagnation. As the title of the article reveals, Mitterrand's ambitious project at the end of the Cold War was no more successful than de Gaulle's abortive grand design three decades earlier.

Bozo's arresting narrative of the French president's initiative is based in part on archival sources to which he appears to have enjoyed special access--the footnotes are replete with references to "private papers." In his earlier work, which is also based on a careful examination of archival materials, Bozo challenged and, in my view, successfully discredited the widespread claim that Mitterrand waged a rear-guard campaign behind the scenes to forestall or at least delay the process of German reunification after the fall of the Berlin Wall.⁵ In the article currently under review, Bozo shows that, while less concerned about the prospect of a reunited Germany than contemporary observers had claimed, the French president was very apprehensive about the consequences of the collapse of Soviet power in Eastern Europe. He worried above all about the possible reappearance of national rivalries that had been effectively suppressed by the heavy hand of Moscow during the Cold War. His nightmare scenario was a return to "the Europe of Sarejevo" (referring backward to the summer of 1914, not forward to the later events of the early 1990s), in which the political vacuum caused by the collapse of Communism would be filled by the old ethnic animosities that had caused Europe so much grief in the past.

Bozo deftly traces the evolution of Mitterrand's ambitious project to put in place an effective institutional barrier against the reemergence of aggressive nationalism in Europe

⁵Frédéric Bozo, "Mitterrand's France, the End of the Cold War, and German Reunification: A Reappraisal," *Cold War History*, 7, 4 (2007), pp. 455-478.

after the end of the Cold War. The proposal was unveiled in the French president's New Years Eve address on December 31, 1989. In that speech he proposed the creation of a "European confederation" that would include the Eastern European countries that had just been liberated from Soviet rule and were eagerly embracing Western-style political democracy. Mitterrand's proposed vehicle for the establishment of such a European confederation was the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE, later renamed the Organization for Cooperation and Security in Europe, OSCE), the institution that had been formed at the Helsinki Conference of 1975. To Mitterrand, the CSCE was the ideal mechanism for the implementation of his confederation plan because it was the only intergovernmental organization that had from its inception included all of the states of Europe—Communist and Non-Communist—including the Soviet Union. In responding to Mikhail Gorbachev's striking call for the creation of a "Common European home," Mitterrand was reviving de Gaulle's long-forgotten reverie of a Europe "from the Atlantic to the Urals." But, as Bozo is at pains to emphasize, there were two stumbling blocks to this objective of employing the CSCE to promote the political stabilization of post-Cold War Europe: The first was the presence of two non-European states as charter members of the organization that had been founded at Helsinki: the United States and Canada. Did the neo-Gaullist French president really want the two transatlantic powers, particularly the United States, to participate in the construction of a purely European entity? The second was the complicating presence of the European Community (soon to become the European Union). What would the relationship be between an existing organization with an already formidable infrastructure and the projected European confederation? Why not simply absorb the former Communist states of Eastern Europe into the European Community?

The question of the proposed European confederation's relationship with the European Community was the source of intensive debate within the French government. Simply put, Mitterrand and the French foreign ministry were cool to the idea of the community's "enlargement" until the process of "deepening" had been completed. They therefore saw the proposed confederation as a means of offering the former Soviet satellites a link to Western Europe without granting them early accession. Bozo does not explore in detail the reasons for this French reluctance to endorse the expansion of the European Community eastward: The inclusion of the former Soviet satellites would dilute France's power in the Community. If the center of gravity of the Community moved so far eastward from its original location along the Rhine, West Germany (or the united Germany that was already on the horizon) would be the principal beneficiary, while France would be increasingly marginalized at the western fringe of the reunited continent.⁶ As Bozo observes, the confederation project offered a means of preventing such a challenge to France's privileged place in the EC by establishing a multilateral

⁶ This reviewer offered this interpretation of France's opposition to the enlargement of the EC at the very time that Mitterrand was cooking up his confederation project. William R. Keylor, "France Faces Glasnost and Détente," Bernard Rubin and Ladislav Bittman, eds., *Shock Waves: Consequences of Glasnost and Perestroika* Program for the Study of Disinformation Papers, College of Communication, Boston University (Vol. 2, No. 6, Fall 1989), pp.19-35.

framework “in which a united Germany’s increased influence and preponderance in central and eastern Europe could be contained or diluted.”

But what about the position of the two superpowers in this proposed European confederation as the Cold War drew to an end. As one of Mitterrand’s key advisers put it, the plan was a good way to “keep the U.S. at a distance” in non-security matters while avoiding “irritating” the Soviet Union, whose cooperation in the project was thought to be essential to its success. In short, both de Gaulle’s “Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals” and Gorbachev’s “Common European home” included one of the two Cold-War superpowers and left the other out. The exclusion of the Soviet Union would provoke “strong resentment,” Bozo notes. “[W]hile the USSR was not democratic, the best way to achieve this was to keep it firmly attached to Europe.” As for Moscow’s old Cold War rival three thousand miles across the Atlantic, its connection to the proposed European confederation would be confined to the long-standing security relationship embodied in NATO.

As French diplomats circulated the Mitterrand proposal to European governments, objections began to emerge in the course of the following year. The Czechoslovaks, who had originally voiced strong support for the idea, began to express caveats. They, along with the Poles, were already envisioning some type of relationship with NATO. In Prague President Václav Havel bristled at France’s insistence that the United States be excluded from the scheduled meeting in the Czechoslovak capital in June 1991 to discuss the confederation project. Havel’s vociferous objections forced Mitterrand to back down and allow the Americans in. In the meantime West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, another earlier supporter of the plan, began to drag his feet when it became clear that the project displeased the United States. As in the time of de Gaulle, whenever Bonn was forced to choose between Washington and Paris, the Germans invariably opted for the former. The Bush administration conveyed the stern message to France, through the good offices of West Germans, that Washington would not accept “being used by the Europeans for security and kept aloof in other domains.” Bozo’s recounting of the Mitterrand government’s reaction to these American warnings is reminiscent of de Gaulle. Paris regarded Washington’s rejection of the confederation project, he notes, as “part of an all-out offensive to reassert U.S. leadership in Europe after the Cold War.” U.S. Secretary of State James Baker’s speech in Berlin a few days after the Prague confederation conference calling for an “Atlantic community from Vancouver to Vladivostok” confirmed France’s worst fears.

Mitterrand’s plan for a European confederation died shortly after it was formally debated at the Prague meeting. Opposition from Washington, objections from other European governments, and the spreading instability in the Soviet Union that culminated in the abortive coup in August 1991 drove the final nail into the coffin of this French bid to influence the political transition in Eastern Europe. Mitterrand’s government had to abandon its hope of delaying the expansion of the European Community amid the relaunching of the movement of European construction that resulted in the Maastricht

Treaty and the formation of the European Union (EU). Despite the reunification of Germany and eventual accession of the former Soviet satellites to the EU, the concerns that France's power would be diluted in this larger European entity proved unfounded. The French imprint on the European project at each stage of its development, from the era of Jean Monnet through the era of Jacques Delors to the era of Nicholas Sarkozy in our own day, is unmistakable. The other motive behind Mitterrand's abortive confederation scheme so ably treated by Bozo—the fear of a resurgence of nationalist tensions in the former Communist states to the east—also proved to be exaggerated.⁷ It is worth noting that the French president was not alone in this apprehension. One of the most prominent members of the “realist” school of political thought in the United States, John Mearsheimer, was expressing similar concerns during the same period.⁸ The fact that the emancipated countries of Eastern Europe did not return to the violent practices of a bygone era enabled them to join the movement of European construction that their neighbors to the West had created. The extraordinary achievement of peace and security that Jay Winter hails as the hallmark of post-1945 continues. Whether it can serve as an inspiration for other parts of the world that have not been so fortunate remains to be seen.

William R. Keylor is Professor of History and International Relations, Acting Chair of the Department of International Relations, and Director of the International History Institute at Boston University. He is the author of *Academy and Community: The Foundation of the French Historical Profession* (1975); *Jacques Bainville and the Renaissance of Royalist History in Twentieth-Century France* (1979); *The Twentieth-Century World and Beyond: An International History since 1900* (5th rev. ed., 2005); *The Legacy of The Great War: Peacemaking 1919* (1997), edited with an introduction; *A World of Nations: The International Order Since 1945* (2nd rev. ed., 2008); *Encyclopedia of the Modern World*, (2006); as well as dozens of articles in scholarly journals and book chapters on twentieth-century history. He has been a Guggenheim, Fulbright, and Woodrow Wilson Fellow, elected to the International Institute for Strategic Studies, named Chevalier de L'Ordre National du Mérite by the French government, and has served as the president of the Society for French Historical Studies.

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⁷ Except for the unique case of Yugoslavia, where the weakening of Marshal Tito's repressive political apparatus eventually resulted in the type of ethno-nationalist conflict that Mitterrand feared would engulf the former Soviet satellites.

⁸ John J. Mearsheimer, "Back to the Future: Instability in Europe after the Cold War," *International Security*, Vol. 15, No. 4 (Summer 1990), pp. 5-56.

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—*Commissioned for H-Diplo by Diane N. Labrosse*