

Reviewed Work:

Klaus Schwabe. *Weltmacht und Weltordnung: Amerikanische Außenpolitik von 1898 bis zur Gegenwart. Eine Jahrhundertgeschichte.* (World Power and World Order, from 1898 to the present. A history of the Twentieth Century). Paderborn: Schöningh, 2005. ISBN: 978-3-506-74783-9.

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Introduction by Thomas Maddux, California State University, Northridge

All of the reviewers agree that Professor Klaus Schwabe has had a leading role in the scholarship of German academics writing on U.S. foreign policy and in the training and mentoring of a new generation of German specialists working in this field. His books and essays have been influential in both Germany and the U.S., especially his study on Woodrow Wilson and the Versailles Peace settlement. H-Diplo appreciates Professor Schwabe's willingness to participate in this roundtable on his latest work as well as the contributions of the reviewers, a respected group of European and American historians and political scientists with significant publications in the field.

Since many H-Diplo members may not be as skilled in German as the author and reviewers—the roundtable editor has not read much German since barely making it through a Ph.D. reading exam decades ago—we will use the issues raised by the reviewers to provide some background on the focus and major assessments of the book. Schwabe's response to the reviews is also a revealing and professional engagement with their assessments. Both Schwabe and the reviewers raise a number of issues worthy of further discussion.

1) Focus: Schwabe's focus is on the period from 1898 to the present. He started to write the book before George W. Bush's arrival in the White House and has two limited chapters on the post-Cold War period. To suggestions that he should have started the study in an earlier period in order to discuss the foundations of American attitudes and approaches to foreign relations before 1898, Schwabe replies that this would indeed have been valuable if space and time had permitted. Schwabe's objective is to move beyond German-language studies that focus on specific aspects of the U.S. role in the 20th century and write, for the German market, a "full-length treatment of that subject as a whole ... and to provide a reliable factual basis as a prerequisite for any informed and politically unbiased discussion."

2) Thesis: Schwabe's perspective for interpreting 20th century American foreign policy is to emphasize the different ways in which U.S. policymakers and the American public sought to find an international order that would provide reliable security. Schwabe does not suggest that Americans moved with consensus or a clear understanding of costs and consequences through the century. Instead, Schwabe stresses that from the War of 1898 to the current Bush administration the U.S. encountered a good amount of unanticipated consequences and reversals that affected generations of policy makers and the attentive public. The emphasis on security, however, does shape Schwabe's coverage and influences what he emphasizes with respect to areas of focus, categories of analysis, and schools of interpretation. Within this approach, Schwabe notes three different, recurring approaches: isolationism to avoid entanglements, unilateralism to impose U.S. ideals and interests, and the multilateralism of working with liberal democracies to deal with threats and create

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international institutions to address a wide range of issues. Schwabe clearly believes that the third approach has produced the most success for the United States.

3) The U.S. mission as symbol of active engagement: Several reviewers note that Schwabe also explores the most important question of how the U.S. has attempted to implement its self-image as a free, democratic-capitalistic society. Should the U.S. stand as a symbol and provide encouragement and assistance when requested or more actively engage to spread its ideals and further its interests? Schwabe explores the different American approaches from the post-1898 challenge of dealing with Cuba and the Philippines to President Woodrow Wilson's wartime crusade to George W. Bush's revival of Wilsonian idealism in a neoconservative quest in the Middle East.

4) Schwabe covers all major U.S. presidents but devotes considerable attention to Wilson, FDR, and Reagan. The reviewers note his well-grounded understanding of Wilson's shift from staying out of WWI to intervention and his quest to shape a new security structure in the League of Nations and promote the spread of democracy. Throughout the study Schwabe gives important weight to domestic politics such as in his assessment of Wilson's failure with the Senate on U.S. entry into the League. FDR receives a sympathetic assessment with respect to his pre-1941 maneuvering to undermine isolationist sentiment and aid the Allies against Nazi Germany. However, Schwabe is critical of FDR's expectations with respect to Stalin and the President's negotiating style in dealing with Stalin's demands.

5) Reagan provides a very revealing challenge for Schwabe who emphasizes the importance of historians "who feel obliged to judge historical developments on their own merits." As he notes in his response, "personally, I vividly recall the devastatingly poor reputation he had in Germany during the first phase of his administration—an estimate I personally shared in those early days. Seen from hindsight, however, there can be no doubt that without Reagan's success in both intimidating and ultimately winning over the Soviet leadership to his concept of détente there would not have come about the big sea change in Europe of 1989/1990." On the other hand, Schwabe notes Reagan's "nonchalance in conniving at terrorist activities and his unstoppable liking for public simplification. But what looked intellectually revolting turned into an asset whenever Reagan had to deal with the American public." Schwabe does criticize Reagan for his unilateralism and his Reagan Doctrine that supported anticommunist freedom fighters around the globe.

6) On the Cold War Schwabe is solidly in the containment camp and emphasizes the success of Washington in its multilateral approach with the European democracies versus the difficulties it encountered with a unilateral approach in Vietnam without very many allies. He gives little weight to revisionist attempts to put significant responsibility for the Cold War on the White House or suggestions that a relaxation of the Cold War could have been worked out with Stalin vis-à-vis Germany or with the post-Stalin Soviet leadership.

7) In response to criticism from some German historians and some of the reviewers that he pays insufficient attention to the influence of historical categories of analysis such

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as economics, cultural relations, and gender, Schwabe responds directly within his focus of addressing the major issues that shaped the U.S. quest for security:

- A. On economics, Schwabe is familiar with William A. Williams' Open Door thesis but suggests that it "would be reductionist to assign to a given economic interest—like the American espousal of free trade—an all overarching function in explaining America's role in international affairs. In this sense, the occasional neglect of economic factors in my text is not accidental. I just do not believe, to offer an absurd example, that in 1940-41 F.D. Roosevelt turned America into an 'arsenal of democracy' in order to boost the American steel production. The Marshall Plan, to offer another example of the limit of the economic paradigm, was politically motivated, although it was an economic measure."
 - B. In response to gender as a category of analysis and Joan Scott's historic demand in "Gender as a Useful Category of Historical Analysis" (1988) that gender has to be a significant factor in evaluating decisions for war and peace, Schwabe affirms his understanding that in international relations "gender-related questions may additionally illustrate, but never really explain the motives of diplomatic decision makers."
 - C. While the linguistic turn of post-modernism "may have been good for linguistics," Schwabe argues that "for the historian, especially of foreign relations, it leads to a dead-end street."
 - D. Schwabe considers the cultural approach, "as long as traditional standards of historical research are upheld," as more promising in the sense of culture-forming mentalities that "may be capable of offering clues to the understanding of individual foreign policy decisions of long term significance."
- 8) Cultural factors should reinforce international history. Schwabe hopes that his book will be "an international history based on an international pluralistic perspective" within the context of familiar challenges to historians: "knowledge of foreign languages, multiarchival research and, if possible, a personal exposure to cultures that are not one's own."

—Tom Maddux