

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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Stable URL: <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/roundtables/PDF/Weltmacht-und-Weltordnung-Schwartz.pdf>

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Review by Thomas Schwartz, Vanderbilt University

Klaus Schwabe might be surprised at this, but I recently used his book to illustrate a point to my Vanderbilt freshmen in an American history survey class. I had given them the assignment to place themselves in the United States Senate in February 1899. They were asked to prepare a speech either in favor of or opposed to ratifying the Treaty of Paris which ended the Spanish-American War. In effect, I was asking them whether or not they agreed to the annexation of the Philippines, and to the formal acquisition of an American Empire. Not surprisingly, in these days of the Iraq surge and general disillusionment with the direction of American foreign policy, they voted overwhelmingly to reject the treaty. The few who took the contrary position sounded very much like the current Administration, as they asked their fellow students, "Well, what is your plan?"

How does the Schwabe book figure in this? Although only one student could translate the title—a sad commentary on foreign language knowledge perhaps—I used it to show the students that to many Europeans, and especially to this distinguished German historian, 1898 was the year of America's ascendancy, when Europe discovered the American "threat," and saw a new power emerging in international relations. In that sense Schwabe follows in a long tradition whose founding father might be considered George Kennan, who in his *American Diplomacy 1900-1950*, saw in the Spanish-American War—now titled the Spanish-American-Cuban-Filipino War—the true beginning of American foreign policy. It was not a terribly auspicious beginning, as Kennan noted, "that in the reasons governing our resort to war and the determination of the character of our military operations, there was not much of solemn and careful deliberation, not much prudent and orderly measuring of the national interest." (p.19) Schwabe does not disagree, although rather than indict policymakers in the way Kennan did for their "legalism-moralism" approach, Schwabe seeks to explain the fairly half-hearted approach of the United States to imperialism, the hesitations and constraints that existed within the American political system. Far more than most foreign observers, Schwabe recognizes how important America's domestic politics are to the conduct of its foreign policy.

Thomas Schwartz teaches courses in the history of American foreign relations, with an emphasis on the twentieth century. He is the author of *America's Germany: John J. McCloy and the Federal Republic of Germany, a study of U.S. policy toward Germany immediately after World War II*, and *Lyndon Johnson and Europe: In the Shadow of Vietnam (2003)*, an examination of alliance politics during the Vietnam War. Schwartz's research interests include the interaction between domestic politics and foreign policy, transnational coalitions and alliance politics, the role of the American presidency in alliance leadership, and the new international history of the Cold War. He is currently working on two book projects: one is a short history of the Cold War, tentatively entitled, *The Long Twilight Struggle*, and the other is a biography of the former Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, tentatively entitled, *Henry Kissinger and the Dilemmas of American Power*.

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Not surprisingly, given his own earlier research and extensive writings, Woodrow Wilson looms large in the story that Schwabe tells. Schwabe recognizes Wilson's roots in America's Progressive reform movement, and the contribution that this thinking makes to his most important and revolutionary contribution to American foreign policy, the concept of collective security and the League of Nations. My only reservation here is that we need to avoid the temptation of reading some of our current struggles back into the contest between Wilson and his opponents, men like Senator Henry Cabot Lodge. Schwabe terms Lodge and his associates "unilateralists," making them sound like the intellectual ancestors of the current Bush Administration. However, many of those in the Lodge camp actually favored multilateral security arrangements with countries like Britain and France, but were dubious about Wilson's more universal and global vision, with its reluctance to make important distinctions between central and more peripheral American security interests.

The next great figure in Schwabe's story is Franklin D. Roosevelt, who led America into the Second World War. Schwabe is sympathetic to Roosevelt's dilemma in leading an isolationist-inclined America to recognize the genuine threat which Hitler's victories posed. He presents Roosevelt's efforts in a sympathetic light, even while recognizing that they involved a fair amount of deception and misleading public statements. Interestingly enough, and counter to a great deal of revisionist historiography, Schwabe is quite critical of Roosevelt's overly generous attitude toward Stalin and the Soviet Union, arguing that the President underestimated Stalin's determination to remain in control of the territory he conquered and to dominate the rest of Europe as well. Although Schwabe is clearly aware of the revisionist literature on this subject, he is not persuaded. And with good reason, for as Wilson Miscamble's recently published *From Roosevelt to Truman* makes clear, Roosevelt's legacy of attempting to conciliate Stalin greatly complicated the first months of Truman's administration.

Schwabe's treatment of the Cold War era invites comparison with the widely acclaimed history by John Gaddis, *The Cold War: A New History*. Schwabe is more favorably inclined toward John F. Kennedy, seeing a link between Kennedy's strong stance against Soviet missiles in Cuba and his resistance to Soviet pressure on Berlin that some American historians like Gaddis tend to doubt. Schwabe is also tougher on Reagan than Gaddis, whose high estimation of the leadership qualities of the 40th President has also stirred controversy. Although willing to give Reagan more credit than most European historians for his unyielding stance on the stationing of American missiles in Europe, and the impact that this may have had on Soviet leaders, Schwabe is more critical of some the more misguided efforts of the administration in Central America and the Middle East. Schwabe's book is even kinder to George H.W. Bush, whose skillful handling of the issue of German reunification may eventually win him more distinction among American scholars, but who still languishes in historical estimation because of his overwhelming re-election defeat in 1992.

Schwabe's treatment of a century of American foreign policy reflects the scholarly perspective of a postwar German generation, strongly influenced by the relationship with

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the United States that brought about their country's recovery and renewed strength, while at the same time occasionally disappointing them in its mistakes and tragic policy errors, including both Vietnam and now Iraq. Not surprisingly, the book has been received in Germany as an important corrective to the recent public discourse, which at times has been over-the-top in its condemnation of the United States. (One wonders—and doubts—whether Schwabe's generation will have a successor willing to be as understanding or sympathetic to American policy.) Schwabe's book is a balanced treatment of the United States, yet still calls on American leaders to recognize that America's victory in the Cold War was less about armaments or forcing the Soviet Union to its knees as some Reagan hagiographers present it, and more about America's political and moral legitimacy as a superpower leading an alliance of democracies, and exercising its power through such multilateral forums such as NATO. This was a legitimacy the Soviet state never acquired.

I have very few strong disagreements with the story that Schwabe tells. I would rather that my contribution to this roundtable rest in raising two issues. The first is where we should begin the study of American foreign policy. In such works as *Ideology and US Foreign Policy* by Michael Hunt, *Special Providence* by Walter Russell Mead, and *Dangerous Nation* by Robert Kagan, scholars are making the case that the pre-1898 period, the years in which America was both a colonial outpost of Europe and the first 122 years after the Declaration of Independence, are much more important to understanding American foreign relations than scholars following the Kennan lead have considered. Whether it is factoring in American racial prejudices, as Hunt does, or categorizing particular schools of American thought – the Hamiltonians, Jeffersonians, Jacksonians, and Wilsonians—as Mead does, or in recognizing how aggressive, dangerous, and even revolutionary the rest of the world saw the young United States, as Kagan discusses, all these authors and others have suggested that we neglect the era before 1898 at our peril. More than a decade ago that dean of American diplomatic historians, Walter LaFeber, lamented to me that so many history departments were only offering American foreign relations as a one semester, 1898 to the present, course, leaving out the narrative, controversies, and even personalities—John Quincy Adams was one of LaFeber's favorites as Secretary of State—that laid the foundations for American foreign policies. For my own part, I am as guilty as many in the profession of emphasizing the 20th century, and especially the post-1945 period. But in my recent work, I have been struck by how much the United States behavior toward Latin America in its earlier history may offer some guidance to explaining its response to the post-1989 era. Just as the United States dealt with the many smaller and less powerful Latin American countries from its position of hegemony with a mix of military and economic tools, there have been echoes of this in the lone superpower, "indispensable" nation period of the 1990s and post 9/11 eras. Perhaps this is where a book like Schwabe's calls for a companion volume dealing with this earlier era in American diplomatic history.

The second point I would raise is the struggle between unilateralism and multilateralism in American foreign relations. Schwabe caps his critique of George W. Bush and his foreign policy failures with a strong argument on the need for the United States to exercise its power through multilateral institutions. Schwabe, like so many Europeans, and especially

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Germans, sees this as central to a renewed legitimacy for American power. As sympathetic as I am to this argument, I also see it as reflecting a difference between American and European thinking. The new German state that grew up after 1945 was thoroughly integrated in multilateral and European institutions in a manner which fundamentally shaped the political culture of that state. It still pursued national interests like reunification, but it did so, as Timothy Garton Ash's book *In Europe's Name* argued, through such institutions as the European Union and NATO. To Germans, there is not the tension that sometimes exists for Americans between our own governing institutions and multilateral bodies like the United Nations or the World Court. Although I would also applaud the way in which the first President Bush organized a coalition to oust Sadaam Hussein from Kuwait, it is still somewhat jarring to read in his memoirs that he believed that the UN Security Council's vote in 1991 authorizing the use of force was all the justification that he needed, and that he would have ignored a Senate vote that opposed military action. In fact, of course, he was able to carry the Senate—by a very narrow margin - but I use this to illustrate some of the tension that does exist between American ideas about democracy and accountability, and the exercise of power through multilateral or international institutions. After all, the Security Council authorizing the use of force contained such democratic countries as China, Yemen, Zaire, and Zimbabwe! Why should any American necessarily accord it a greater right to legitimate the use of force and the possible loss of American lives and treasure? Without sounding like a right-wing Republican hostile to the United Nations, I do think this is a legitimate question that holds no easy answer.

However, neither of these two points should detract from the admiration and praise I have for this book. I have known Klaus Schwabe for more than twenty years, and consider him both a friend and a very distinguished collaborator in this field. He has produced an outstanding work of scholarship and synthesis.