

Walter, Dierk: *Zwischen Dschungelkrieg und Atombombe. Britische Visionen vom Krieg der Zukunft 1945-1971*. Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, HIS Verlag 2009. ISBN: 978-3-86854-202-8; 538 S.

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This work sets out to analyse the image of future war which is to be found in British military publications following the Second World War up to 1971, the year when the last British troops left their garrisons in Asia. The study is laid out very clearly in three parts, the first covering structures, ideas and mentalities, followed by a second which investigates views on a Third World War, while the concluding section examines 'other wars', in particular limited wars, colonial wars and the 'Cold War'.

The study is based on an assessment of over 3,400 individual contributions to military journals, supplemented by books by military authors. There are no obvious gaps from the list of journals selected, which cover all three armed services. The excursion made by Walter in the introduction into the value of military journals as a source is thoughtful and convincing. Occasionally, one would have wished for clearer indications as to the identity of a particular writer; the Czech émigré, F.O. Miksche, for instance, was not British and also published in American and European journals. But the approach adopted by Walter certainly does not exclude non-British and non-military contributors to journals, since he rightly regards them as part of the debate.

An approach which concentrated on military debates purely through the prism of journal articles for any period after 1945 would be methodologically rather questionable, given the expanding secrecy in many military fields – and not simply the scientific and technological. Even in the interwar period, when there was a remarkable openness in the debates in Britain on military affairs, private correspondence between officers and between journal editors and military writers, shows that some contentious areas were discussed in private and never found their way into print. Dierk Walter has, however, not fallen into the trap

of assuming military debates can be taken to be the same thing as debates in journals. Very wisely he has included a range of official primary sources in his analysis, among them the annual parliamentary Statements on Defence, as well as material produced by, among others, the Chiefs of Staff, the Joint Intelligence Committee and the Cabinet Defence Committee.

In a preamble to the three main parts of his study, entitled 'Defence Policy and Strategy 1945-1971', Walter observes that one of the central themes of the military debate in Britain in the period was the growing discrepancy between shrinking resources and largely unaltered strategic goals. Yet, it was only in the period between 1968 and 1971 that the first attempts to address the problem of squaring the circle occurred. He explains this failure to confront the new strategic realities as being caused by, first, a socio-economic sea-change, which saw Great Britain's slice of world trade shrink from 19.8% to 8.7% between 1955 and 1976, a development which the political elite never anticipated. Even when it had become a confirmed trend, there was a general refusal to recognise it as such. Second, the armed forces were confronted with a range of new tasks, made necessary by the onset of the Cold War, among these the strategic requirement to base an army on the European mainland and to defend the British Isles against a range of threats from both air and sea. In addition, political and military elites could not bring themselves to give up Britain's perceived role as a world power and the cost of maintaining the country's overseas possessions continued to rise. A further problem was presented by the different types of armed forces which the commitment to a continental land force and the occupation of bases in the Far East, and in Africa and other parts of the globe, required. And, the over-extension of Britain's armed forces was made worse by the defence structure which allowed each of the service chiefs to appeal directly to the government of the day, hence creating the perfect conditions for inter-service rivalry in Whitehall. Still, the increasing dependence on allies and alliances acted as a counter-balance to those factors which appeared to hinder any broad recognition that the United Kingdom had become

over-extended in its military commitments.

It is against this background that Walter begins by examining the ideas and mentalities which emerge from a close study of the military debate in the second half of the 1940s and the following two decades. What is striking in this first analytical section is the range of ideas which can be found in the debate, from clear conceptions of Britain as a world power, notions of civilisation competing against barbarity, an obvious anti-Communism, through to more familiar thinking on aid as an alternative to military presence and the armed forces as part of a European defence force. This section also pays some attention to thinking on the atomic bomb and deterrence.

In the second section the dimensions of a third world war as perceived by many military authors are examined in considerable detail. Here, in what is possibly the most interesting and successful part of the book, Walter outlines the contours of this debate. In addition to potential scenarios for the outbreak of war, a number of important themes are identified: surprise, whether conventional operations would be possible under nuclear conditions, the use of chemical and bacteriological weapons, strategy and in what way a war might develop. There are also separate sub-sections on how such a conflict would affect the United Kingdom, the defence of Western Europe, the strategic air offensive and the Middle East and other 'secondary theatres'.

The final section of the book, which is rather misleadingly titled 'Other Wars', is in fact more concerned with concepts of wars and other forms of conflict. Hence, in addition to the identification of competing terminology such as colonial war, counter-insurgency and guerrilla war, thinking on the character of the conduct of war, the Cold War, terrorism and psychological war is also covered.

Overall, Walter's book is both well written and well structured. He provides an easily accessible overview of the military debate in Britain which unfolded in the two and a half decades following the Second World War. One could have reservations about his methodology in as far as individuals and their very different biographies have no real place in the tightly organised chapters. But such a criticism would misunderstand the author's

actual intention. What Walter achieves in his study is to provide a very good introduction into post-1945 military thought in Britain. Not only does he identify a range of military concepts, at the same time he shows that new concepts could co-exist alongside older ones. Those seeking an overview in German of military terminology, themes and concepts as they emerged in British military circles after the Second World War will find much of value here, especially historians and political scientists interested in debates on nuclear weapons and the Cold War.

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