

# Pacific Historical Review

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unrestricted transit of the Suez Canal (including the passage of oil tankers to the idle British refinery at Haifa, Israel) and the failure of U.S.-U.K. efforts to establish a Middle East command headquartered in the Canal Zone (pp. 117-128).

The book corrects some common misconceptions concerning the motives behind U.S. policy initiatives. Regarding the 1950 Tripartite Declaration on shipment of Western arms to the Near East, for example, the State Department sought, not to restrict such shipments, but to enable the receiving countries to defend themselves against Soviet invasion. The proviso that arms would be provided only on condition that the receiving country would not attack another Near Eastern state was stipulated in order to allay misgivings of Israel's American supporters (pp. 100-102).

This book is recommended as a solid contribution to an understanding of this critical period in American relations with the Middle East.

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Inc Rev  
Ltd Book

*The Vietnamese Revolution of 1945: Roosevelt, Ho Chi Minh and de Gaulle in a World at War.* By Stein Tonnesson. (Newberry Park, Calif., Sage Publications, 1991. xiv + 458 pp. \$60)

During the entire dreadful and ruinous saga of Vietnamese history since 1939, the single most important brief period was undoubtedly the summer and fall of 1945, the time of the August, 1945, uprising in Hanoi leading to the short-lived Vietnamese Republic under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh. It was a time of crisis in the original meaning of this overly used term: a period where events could have followed one of several and fundamentally different routes. Unfortunately for American historians, it is also a period that is very poorly covered in English language historiography. When it appears, it is usually as a prelude to the much later American stage of the war and interpreted according to the author's approach toward these later events. It has been dealt with often in France, frequently with extreme rancor, touching, as it does, not only the debacle in Indochina but also the whole issue of collaboration and resistance. What is needed is a contemporary, detailed account of this brief, but momentously important interlude. Norwegian scholar Stein Tonnesson has gone a long way toward filling this void in *The Vietnamese Revolution of 1945: Roosevelt, Ho Chi Minh and de Gaulle in a World at War*.

Although the events of 1945 are covered in great detail, the book ranges throughout the war. Indeed, the author is very concerned to put the policies of the participants within the context of the war as it developed, a wise approach that explains why everyone's policies toward Indochina were frequently altered. This approach also has the virtue of illustrating the uncertainties and confusion that permeated Southeast Asia during this period.

Naturally there are holes in the narrative. Neither China nor Vietnam has adopted an "Open Door" policy toward foreign scholars. Furthermore, the records of the *Surette* and other nations' clandestine policy organs, which Tonnesson uses frequently, must be treated like a scholarly hand grenade. The same can be said for the interviews of Vietnamese officials that he gathered in 1989. Furthermore, wars are very bad times for record keeping because of the push of events, and the reluctance of powerful men to play their hands straight (especially with a secretary in the room). Keeping these difficulties in mind, the author's work is the most complete we have and consequently becomes a "must read" for every serious student of Vietnam.

Although Tonnesson's narrative is valuable and many of his judgements thought provoking, I think he misses some targets very badly. Although not the first to do so, Tonnesson grossly overstates Franklin D. Roosevelt's interest in Southeast Asia and in doing so mangles his account of relations between the U.S., the Free French, and the U.K. It is true that FDR speculated early in the war about replacing French rule in Indochina with an ill-defined trusteeship. The point, of course, is that speculation early in the war meant nothing. The Allies were losing the war and planning for peace was not a serious endeavor. The point was also raised at Yalta, but was far down the agenda and not acted upon in any obvious way. FDR liked to talk, he liked to sound people out, and he was a notorious manipulator. However, reading Tonnesson's account it is easy to forget that the China-Burma theater of the war was at the absolute bottom of the strategic barrel. The proof of the pudding is in the eating. What did the U.S. actually do in the Southeast Asian area during the war? Nothing would be a pretty good summation, despite the crushing blow to Japan that would have followed from an early Allied presence in Cochin (both land and sea communication with the Japanese empire would have been cut with Japan itself). Relations with Europe (and England) were and remained primary.

Concerning France, it is true that FDR hated De Gaulle (so did many people), and he dismissed France early in the war. No

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Allied leader in his right mind would have kept the Free French informed about major military moves in advance, considering the very real possibility that either the Free French or the resistance forces were penetrated by enemy intelligence. No wonder De Gaulle felt left out and mutual suspicion bred. Yet as De Gaulle and his forces grew stronger, the U.S. took him far more seriously. As an illustration of actual U.S. policy, Ike's decision, supported by Washington, to allow Free French forces to liberate Paris was far more important than any of FDR's ramblings. Toward the end of the war, when postwar planning had genuine significance, there was no serious talk in the U.S. of a unilateral destruction of the European empires.

Tonnesson errs in a related matter. He claims that Roosevelt's hope of wresting Indochina from France never wavered and that after his death, elements within the U.S. apparatus, such as the OSS, played a pivotal role in helping Ho establish his republic. While it is true that American prestige was immense in August 1945, the U.S. ability to shape the outcome of events, if it existed at all, was not exercised. On the spot, the Americans were the least important force, not the most important. It was what the U.S. did that should impress the historian. Who had the guns? Who had the forces? Where was the money? Compared to other parts of the world, despite a precious few remarks from FDR, Southeast Asia was a zero for Washington. There were other matters, after all, to deal with, such as the coming invasion of Japan and the reconstruction of Europe, the cultural and ethnic parent of the vast majority of Americans in 1945.

The entire issue of trusteeship is dealt with poorly. According to Tonnesson, "Franklin D. Roosevelt, unlike Woodrow Wilson, did not base his vision of future peace on the concept of 'collective security.'" The truth is the opposite. FDR was Wilsonian to his toes. He considered himself more realistic than Wilson, but the major role of the United Nations, FDR's personal creation, was to lead the way toward the end of imperialism and the creation of a peaceful, collaborationist, and capitalist world. The "policemen" were a means toward that end, not the basis of a new Metternichian system. In the short run, the only thing we can say with some certainty about FDR, this enigmatic figure, was that he intended to continue the close coalition with great Britain. The issue of the USSR is for another book and review.

Tonnesson's account of Ho Chi Minh is also open for scrutiny. He speaks with confidence at times, when, in fact, we know almost nothing about the inner workings of the Communist party during

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this period (and not much later). He goes to great length to show, correctly, that Ho and the party did not plan the August Revolution. In doing so, however, he misses an enormous forest: the nature of Vietnamese Leninism. As Gabriel Kolko has pointed out in *An Anatomy of a War*, the Vietnamese party was the "quintessential Leninist party" in the third world. At its core this observation implies a belief that the ends justify the means in revolutionary politics, and that a revolutionary organization, operating under "democratic centralism," should be lean, well disciplined, and thus capable of acting when the critical moment arrived. These techniques, learned by Ho from the Comintern, laid the groundwork for events in 1945 after four years of tenacious struggle. The party was not large, nor was Ho well known. Just as Lenin had done earlier, Ho presided over bitter disputes within the party. Yet in the land of the blind, the one-eyed is king. Hanoi in August 1945 was Petersburg in 1917. The ultimate result of the two periods was the same: calamity for the country involved.

These criticisms aside, and they are opinions, not matters of record, Tonnesson has taken on an enormously complex and very important task. In general he acquits himself well, and scholars in the field should welcome this work warmly.

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*In the Name of Democracy: U.S. Policy toward Latin America in the Reagan Years.* By Thomas Carothers. (Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1991. xiii + 309 pp. \$29.95)

Thomas Carothers, a Washington, D.C., attorney and former State Department official in the Legal Affairs and AID offices during the Ronald Reagan years, sets out in this book to analyze the Latin American policy of that administration from the standpoint of its efforts at promoting democracy in the hemisphere. What results is a clearly written and cogent treatment of the Reagan team's diplomacy that suggests, not too surprisingly, that rhetoric outdid responsible policy-making most of the time, and that what passed for a sincere effort to bring the blessings of the U.S. democratic system to its southerly neighbors was done either out of cynicism or a need to curry favor with a skeptical Congress that held the diplomatic purse strings (until the National Security Council and Oliver North found a way to create their own). Carothers concludes that only a few moderates in the foreign policy-making structure really believed that promoting democracy in Latin America was a respectable and responsible end in itself. And even