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# Churchill and Strategic Dilemmas before the World Wars:Essays in Honor of Michael I. Handel,

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government on Afghanistan—specifically, the discussion on various debates among the CIA, the State Department, and the National Security Council—which were wide-ranging and often contentious. After reading these accounts one is left with the distinct impression that there was no overarching policy or strategy to attack al-Qa'ida. Instead, U.S. government policy comes across as ad hoc, driven by current contingencies or spurious information about Osama Bin Laden's whereabouts.

In the final section, Coll documents the often frantic and uncoordinated interagency campaign to find Bin Laden. Despite George Tenet's declaration in December 1998 that the CIA was at war with al-Qa'ida, the U.S. government as a whole never fully came to grips with the threat posed by terrorism. For many in Washington, terrorism represented only one threat among many facing the United States in the post-Cold War era. Although terrorism did elicit concern among top U.S. policy makers, it rarely moved into a sustained, interagency strategy to combat the threat.

Prospective readers of this book should be aware that it is lengthy and requires close attention. Characters and events discussed in part 1 are revisited. Coll helps the reader along with a list of principal characters at the front of the book. Despite its length, however, *Ghost Wars* will provide valuable insights for anyone working within the interagency process, as well as scholars and regional observers interested in how the United States got Afghanistan and Bin Laden so tragically wrong.

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Maurer, John H., ed. *Churchill and Strategic Dilemmas before the World Wars: Essays in Honor of Michael I. Handel*. London: Frank Cass, 2003. 164pp. \$79.95

One of three volumes of essays (two focus on different aspects of strategy) published in Handel's memory, this work is based on a conference held in Newport, Rhode Island. It offers four scholarly papers on Churchill's assessment of the German naval challenge before the First World War, Pacific security and the limits of British power between the wars, Churchill and the German threat in the late 1930s, and Churchill's views of technology. Each assesses a different aspect of Churchill's changing role.

Editor Maurer focuses on the early 1900s' battleship naval race with Germany. Brought in as First Lord of the Admiralty after the Agadir crisis of 1911, Winston Churchill is seen here as fully aware of the danger to Britain if its fleet were to be seriously disabled. The Admiralty tried to maintain at least a 60 percent advantage in dreadnought construction against Germany. Churchill sought to impress the Germans with the futility of trying to catch up with, let alone outbuild, Britain. Cognizant of the costs of this race, however, in 1913 he proposed a naval "holiday" to stretch out the construction of projected new ships over more time, hoping to reduce the pace. Maurer reviews the important domestic political battles that underlay this naval arms race.

Christopher Bell, who teaches history at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia, assesses Churchill's concern over the growing threat posed by Japan in the interwar years. He notes a 1928 Churchill comment that "of all the wars

in the world, [war with Japan] was the least likely to happen.” After all, the two countries shared an alliance that dated to the beginning of the century. Extension of the “ten-year rule,” first promulgated in 1919, saw war in the Far East as highly unlikely for at least another decade. As Bell makes clear, this rule underlay a compromise between the Treasury, concerned about costs, and the Admiralty, which sought completion of its Singapore naval base and more ships. By the mid-1930s, an out-of-office Churchill began to change his position, now expressing (as were Whitehall ministries) growing concern about Japan’s intentions. However, his greater worry about a rearming Germany dominated naval needs in the Far East. Even in 1939 he argued the unlikelihood of a Japanese attack on far-off Singapore, just as he (and others) felt naval power alone could hold off aggression. Events, of course, proved this to be wishful thinking.

B. J. C. McKercher, the sole revisionist here, teaches history at the Royal Military College of Canada. He sees Churchill’s famous speeches against Hitler’s Germany in the late 1930s as revealing a politician on the make: “Quite simply, he sought the premiership above all else; thus, his criticisms of British foreign and defense policy were less selfless than either he or his disciples later claimed.” McKercher’s arguments help balance excessive praise (years later) of Churchill’s stance in this period. He strongly defends prime ministers Stanley Baldwin and Neville Chamberlain as working to rebuild British defenses just as Churchill was attacking their seeming inaction. Munich is seen here—as by other revisionists—as a vital play for time to allow rearmament to reach full

effect. Churchill’s years in the political wilderness “resulted from his own follies, primarily his antipathy to Baldwin and Chamberlain,” during which, he argues, “Churchill consistently exaggerated threats.”

David Jablonsky teaches at the Army War College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, and makes clear Churchill’s fascination with what technology offered to overcome potential enemies. There are a host of interesting Churchill quotes on the impact (sometimes literally) of newly developed dum-dum bullets, improved pistols, and later the tank and the airplane. At the same time, Churchill was often concerned about possible unintended effects of technological choice, as well as the ethics of applying certain approaches. As the author notes, “The basic problem, Churchill came to realize, was that technology had changed the scale of warfare.” Before and during the war, he was fascinated with technical options, not all of them workable. Those that did work—such as signals intelligence—made a huge difference in the outcome.

This is a very useful collection, carefully researched and written, adding insight to what we know of Churchill’s varied diplomatic and military roles in a world that moved from cavalry charges to hydrogen bombs. Michael Handel would surely be pleased.

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Mullis, Tony R. *Peacekeeping on the Plains: Army Operations in Bleeding Kansas*. Columbia: Univ. of Missouri, 2004. 273pp. \$40.50

Tony Mullis, a serving officer in the U.S. Air Force, takes a close look at a