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Politicians and Defence: Studies in the Formulation of British Defence Policy, 1845-1970

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was the fanatical sense of dedication felt by the North to unify the country. This led to the North's ability to accept tremendous casualties and physical destruction from the bombing campaigns with equanimity. While hardly a new thesis concerning the war, Mr. Karnow's workman-like and reasoned analysis represents a centrist view of the conflict. He manages to discuss the US involvement in Vietnam without becoming emotional or biased, and carefully points out the various stages of American presence and the political decisions that motivated the action. The author is particularly cogent on the subject of Vietnam today (1983), showing a country that is learning that winning a war can be easier than running a country. The Vietnamese Gulags and the story of the boat people are told well under Mr. Karnow's steady approach.

From a critical standpoint, there are a few problems with the volume. The scope of the war, of course, was vast. It would hardly be possible to complete the history of the US involvement in less than 10 volumes, as one group of writers is currently doing. Additionally, the war wasn't prone to dividing up into neat segments as Mr. Karnow presents it. There was, of course, much overlap between the stages of the war; yet Mr. Karnow seems to provide little transition between many of the chapters—giving one the sensation that the war was only a series of vignettes, connected only by the geographic theater. One could also fault the author for an excess of color

and anecdote at the expense of larger events, particularly in a volume that calls itself "The First Complete Account of Vietnam at War."

But these are relatively small concerns when compared to the overall effort of the work. Mr. Karnow has contributed a solid, reportorial volume to the literature of America's longest war. One leaves *Vietnam: A History* with a sense that a good deal of work and tribulation went into the book. It is a large canvas that Mr. Karnow seeks to paint, and he does a credible job of covering the detail and the sweep of a long and bitter struggle.

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Beckett, Ian, and Gooch, John, eds. *Politicians and Defence: Studies in the Formulation of British Defence Policy, 1845-1970*. Manchester, NH: Manchester University Press, 1983. 202pp. \$20

Too little has been researched and written in the field of defense policy-making, and this work by two academic men, the coeditors, and authors of two of the eight articles, is a well-written addition. Ian Beckett, Senior Lecturer in War Studies at Sandhurst, and John Gooch, Lecturer in History at the University of Lancaster, have researched and written in the field of defense policy-making in which too little work has been done. *Politicians and Defence* is principally concerned with several British cabinet ministers responsible for the Army, and two of those more

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recently in charge of overall defense policies. There is relatively little here on the Royal Air Force. The last two chapters chronicle efforts to coordinate all the services under one minister, Duncan Sandys (Minister of Defence, 1957-1959), and Denis Healey (1964-1970).

The book is not a continuing history and analysis of political leaders of the services, but rather a series of twenty-page selections by different authors. These subjects are Earl Grey, Secretary of State for War in the mid-nineteenth century; Lord Cardwell, who dealt while in office in 1868-1874 with the purchase of commissions; H.O. Arnold-Forster, caught in the controversies following the Boer War; his brilliant successor, Lord Haldane, in office into World War II; the popular but ill-fated Earl Kitchener, a career soldier pushed into the frock coat of a wartime cabinet minister; and Leslie Hore-Belisha, charged with preparing the Army just before World War II.

The chapters on Arnold-Forster and Haldane give some new insights on the Esher Committee, the formation and early work of the Committee of Imperial Defence, and the pre-World War I intrigues among politicians and the military. That on Hore-Belisha enlarges our understanding of the role of his *éminence grise*, Captain B. H. Liddell Hart, which so weakened the Secretary's position in the government and the army.

defense in peacetime Britain, in spite of its large budget compared with other departments of state, and its key role in the Government's responsibility for national survival. In peacetime, ministers for defense and the services have increasingly been felt unneeded in the inner cabinet, as their constituencies have shrunk in numbers and importance, contrasted with the advocates of the welfare state. And defense ministers may do threatening things such as drafting voters' sons, or demanding expensive deterrents against a war which may never occur, or sending soldiers to defend a few colonists and large sheep meadows. Ambitious politicians tend to avoid these portfolios.

The difficulties of these men who were (except for Haldane and Kitchener) quite uninformed on taking office as to the complexities of strategic planning and weapons systems, were compounded by the existing procedure of rendering professional advice. Unlike the political heads of all other departments of state, they received *two* streams of overlapping and often conflicting official advice prior to collegial policymaking in the cabinet. They received reports from the civil service manager of the War Office, the Permanent Secretary, as well as the uniformed head of the Army, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, backed by his various staffs. A chief scientific adviser might well add another strong view. After World War II, this flood of expert recommendations, now tripled by bringing the three services into a single

ministry, brought governments (in the United States and Canada, as well as Britain) to structure a process which would, at least in theory, reduce the options before the elected decisionmakers.

The effort to induce coordination of defense policy, and relate it to foreign policy, has been long and hard fought. The problems of interface in a democracy between the cabinet and the professional military level led Leonard Beaton to write in *The Guardian* a quarter century ago, "America is moving gradually and Britain imperceptibly towards a central authority commanding and controlling the separate Services." That this movement took place at all in a Britain whose overseas responsibilities were steadily declining and whose people were demanding the transfer of defense costs to America, the new superpower, was largely due to Sandys and Healey. Sandys was well-connected politically, ambitious and possessed of an unusual level of *chutzpah*. Healey had nearly six years in office and thus was not a member of the unfortunate postwar "defence minister of the month club." But he inherited a greatly strengthened central machinery from its chief architect, the late Admiral of the Fleet Earl Mountbatten.

Even though Mountbatten did not accept the Secretaryship of State for Defence when it was offered to him and remained as Chief of the Defence Staff (CDS), he is entitled to more than the half-dozen sentences allotted to him in this book. He served as CDS

under Sandys, Markinson, Thorneycroft and Healey, bringing his talents, contacts experience and commitment since World War II to interservice and interdepartmental reforms.

A complication to the policy-making process which was just beginning to make its appearance during Healey's regime has been the demand to be heard by the Select Committee on Expenditures of the House of Commons. Politicians deeply involved with defense are now not only in the cabinet and among a few retired Colonel Blimps in Parliament, but they now serve on the Subcommittee on Defence and External Affairs, made up both of the governing party and the opposition.

More effective policies may come out of this development, but the committee investigations, debates and reports will surely focus public opinion more pointedly upon the Secretary of State and the cabinet. This will doubtless include both such examples of strong opposition to government war policy as Suez, and of support, such as the Falklands. And possibly this added Parliamentary involvement will improve the decisionmaking in all its complexity of those politicians mentioned in the authors' Introduction, who are, "... transient figures, dependent upon professional advice and, whatever the administrative structure, reliant on winning the respect and confidence of both political and professional colleagues if they are to have much chance of success."