

Gerhard L. Weinberg. *Visions of Victory: The Hopes of Eight World War II Leaders*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. xxiv + 292 pp. Maps, notes, bibliography, index. \$25.00 (cloth), ISBN 0-521-85254-4.

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“And in Today Already Walks Tomorrow” (Samuel Taylor Coleridge)

Prolific and highly regarded military and diplomatic historian Gerhard L. Weinberg has produced an interesting, yet risky, analysis of what he believes eight leaders of major World War II combatant nations hoped the world would look like when the fighting ended. The analysis is risky because several of the leaders did not place much of their post-war visions on the record. In Josef Stalin’s case, for example, one must usually observe what the USSR actually did and the positions Stalin’s minions took in negotiations in order to infer Stalin’s desires because he made remarkably few public statements and speeches. However, the same paucity of evidence exists with respect to Tojo Hideki, about whom very little has been written, either in Japan or the West. In still another case (Charles de Gaulle), relevant wartime papers still are not available to researchers.

Weinberg takes pains to note that his analysis is handicapped by “often fragmentary evidence” (p. 2), that there is a “speculative element” (p. 2) involved, and that “alternative readings are possible” (p. 2). Thus, he assumes the role of historical detective bedeviled by sparse and sometimes conflicting evidence. Even so, he willingly puts himself on the line, historically speaking, by drawing reasonable, though sometimes arguable conclusions about the post-war worlds that the eight leaders struggled to establish. As such, this approach invites naysayers and conflicting readings of the evidence despite his eminent stature in the field. But, we are much better off for his effort, for very few other historians have the ability to interpret and integrate such a massive amount of material in a fashion that provides generous source references even while it is clear that he is not attempting to overwhelm the reader.

Weinberg’s eight leaders, in the order considered by him, are Adolf Hitler, Benito Mussolini, Tojo Hideki, Chiang Kai-shek, Josef Stalin, Winston Churchill, Charles de Gaulle and Franklin D. Roosevelt. Harry Truman is only mentioned tangentially. Hitler’s astonishingly grandiose and often absurd plans for the world are outlined and the *Führer* appears to edge out Stalin for the title of greatest demon in Weinberg’s eyes. He attributes extensive and outlandish territorial goals to Mussolini, who emerges as the improvident gambler who loses all. Weinberg’s treatment of Tojo is the least informative, primarily because so little has been written about him. The portrait of Chiang is sympathetic and mildly reconstructionist. Stalin is depicted as an immoral, often ill-informed, but substantially successful proponent of the USSR’s interests who ultimately also would see the post-war world develop in ways antagonistic to him. Admiration for Churchill’s inspiring leadership and the “extraordinary feat” (p. 226) he accomplished is strongly balanced by the estimation that the post-war world turned out to be a far cry

from the world for which Churchill fought. Weinberg's distaste for de Gaulle's frequently obstreperous behavior is coupled with recognition of his success in obtaining many of the things he wanted when the war ended. Both de Gaulle and Churchill are deflated by Weinberg fingering them as individuals who were captives of their nineteenth century outlooks. Roosevelt is painted as the most idealistic, least rapacious and ultimately most successful leader.

Adolf Hitler

Weinberg persuasively argues that Adolf Hitler's short-term and long-term aims were enunciated clearly in the 1920s with the publication of *Mein Kampf* [1] and his speeches. Subsequently, Hitler wrote his less famous and much shorter "second book," apparently in 1928, in which he focused primarily on Germany's need for *Lebensraum* and international topics. Interestingly, it is Weinberg who uncovered the manuscript in 1958 and edited a translation by Krista Smith [2]. The Jews once again were identified as depraved international criminals, while the United States was identified as a long-term enemy that only an Aryan state such as Germany could counter.

About Hitler, Omer Bartov has commented, "He Meant What He Said," [3] and Weinberg aptly demonstrates this. Hitler had well identified plans for the subjugation of Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals and fairly well defined plans for the Middle East. His thoughts about sub-Saharan Africa were fuzzy except for his intention to establish a client Aryan state in South Africa. Plans for the Americas and Asia were similarly ill-defined except that the United States had to be subdued in a future war. Weinberg displays Hitler's ignorance of many parts of the world when he observes that the *Führer* believed New Zealanders "lived in trees and had not learned to walk upright" (p. 16).

One of Weinberg's most interesting disclosures is the plan that Germany and Japan cooperatively developed in December 1941 to divide their world influence roughly along the 70th degree east longitude. Actually, the German *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht* (OKW) proposed a slightly different division of spoils that would have given Japan all of today's India, Pakistan and Afghanistan west of 70 degrees, but in return would have granted Germany valuable iron ore and coal deposits in Siberia up to Chinese border and the Yenisei River. Of course, nothing came of this agreement, but it is instructive because it reflects the immensity of Hitler's global plans, which were to be fulfilled by a series of wars.

Weinberg's disclosures concerning Hitler's racial policies inside Germany and throughout Europe have been written about many times. He does supply new focus, however, on Germany's program of forced sterilization and its secretive program to exterminate severely disabled veterans. He comments that "Germany's defeat saved not only innumerable old people, handicapped individuals, and persons in mental institutions inside and outside the prewar Third Reich, but also tens of thousands of Germany's own seriously wounded veterans from death at the hands of their own government" (p. 17).

Weinberg also forthrightly states that Hitler had an “obsessive hate” (p. 36) of the British, contrary to the assertions of those who, for example, have argued that Hitler’s long-standing respect for the British is why Germany did not go for the jugular at Dunkirk in May 1940, or subsequently invade Great Britain.

Weinberg believes that had Hitler led Germany to victory in World War II, the world would have been changed overwhelmingly and tragically. He does not make that case for either Benito Mussolini, or Tojo Hideki, whose victories would have had minimal influence on the hundreds of millions of people remote from their spheres.

Benito Mussolini

Il Duce, Benito Mussolini, emerges as a tragicomic character due to his personal posturing, extensive territorial ambitions and “unbelievably poor job of preparing the country for war against major enemies” (p. 44). Weinberg parts ways with prominent historians of Italy such as Bosworth [4] who argue that Mussolini had limited and sometimes confused war aims. Bosworth asserts that “...neither in 1940, nor even in 1935 when Italy attacked Ethiopia, had he set out war aims” [4, p. 19], and devotes scores of pages to the elucidation of this point. One is hard put to accept Weinberg’s position here because he does not provide significant evidence in support of his thesis, though in a volume such as this it is impossible to plumb fully issues such as these.

Mussolini, like several others of the leaders, was an opportunist who seized upon what he interpreted as possibilities for territorial aggrandizement. Thus, when he progressively attached himself to Hitler’s war wagon in June 1940, June 1941, and again in December 1941, these actions had more to do with perceived opportunities for booty, and less to do with ideology. Indeed, Mussolini’s own movement from a confirmed, ideologically vocal socialist to the fascist prime minister of Italy within an eight year span speaks to Mussolini’s malleability. What he wanted to do was to sit at the peace conference table and divide the spoils.

Had the Axis emerged triumphant in World War II, Hitler would have sprinkled rewards on his friend Mussolini, whom he had long admired. All of North and East Africa would have fallen under Italian rule and Italy would have assumed a strong position of influence in the Middle East. Malta, Corsica, Cyprus, Greece, and portions of the French Riviera and southeast Switzerland also would have become part of this modern Roman Empire. Yet, without turning one’s eyes away from the atrocities Italy committed in East Africa and Libya in the 1920s and 1930s, this would have been a relatively benign regime compared to what the Germans had in mind for Eastern Europe and the USSR.

Tojo Hideki

The problem in assessing Tojo Hideki’s post-war vision is that there is very little written on the subject, either by him or other individuals. Weinberg comments, “On his role in the direction of the Japanese war effort, its aims, and his views about the future, there is essentially no scholarly work in any language and only indirect evidence of any kind” (p.

60). Hence, one must focus on how Tojo and the Japanese actually behaved as opposed to what they said.

By May 1942, Weinberg asserts that the Japanese already occupied the majority of the territory that they had their eyes on when they went to war with the western powers in December 1941. In support of this thesis, Weinberg cites a December 1941 Japanese Ministry of War document that outlined the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. While Japan did not control Midway, Hawaii, New Zealand, Australia, Malaya and the approaches to India in Summer 1942, it did control more than one-quarter of the area of the globe.

Japanese victory in World War II would have resulted in a harsh regime imposed on Asia. Despite some Japanese rhetoric to the contrary, Japan typically treated those it conquered with brutality. Executions, starvation, poison gas and enforced prostitution were commonplace. Perhaps five to ten million Chinese died at the hands of the Japanese. Weinberg notes that “There is no evidence that anyone was ever brought before a court martial or even severely reprimanded” (p. 74) by the Japanese for these crimes.

Oddly, even though Japan had contemplated and simulated war with the United States for almost two decades, in the actual event, it was unprepared for its own success. Its manufacturing base was in no way sufficient to project world power; it did not possess a merchant fleet or a set of naval escorts equal to the momentous tasks in front of it; and, by 1942, it had already sustained a half million casualties in its bleeding military sore in China. Even had the West thrown in the towel in Summer 1942, Japan’s dominance in Asia was likely to dissipate sooner rather than later.

Chiang Kai-shek

As Weinberg observes, Chiang Kai-shek has never been treated very well by historians. He usually has been stylized as the leader of a corrupt, ineffectual state. Weinberg is much kinder and paints a picture of a Chiang who had no territorial ambitions other than evicting Japan from China. He also wanted an end to the one-sided treaties that granted western nations special concessions and military posts in China and an end to the colonization of the remainder of Asia, including India, Malaya, Korea, the Philippines and Indo-China. Weinberg’s Chiang was willing to accept a defeated Japan as a legitimate, peaceful member of the community of nations and held out high hopes for the United Nations, provided China was a permanent member of the Security Council.

The most intriguing observation Weinberg makes about China is that the failure of the Nationalists to resist Japan’s *Ichigo* military offensive in southern China in 1944 destroyed most of Chiang’s military power and “thereby paved the way for the Communist takeover of China” (p. 68). He contrasts this to a scenario in which the Nationalists stymied the Japanese and then occupied southeast China, including Hong Kong. This, he implies, would have dramatically changed the post-war world.

Josef Stalin

Stalin's utmost desire in 1941 was to see the capitalist states fight each other to exhaustion in order that the USSR could step in and take advantage of their fatigue. Thus, argues Weinberg, Stalin thought it appropriate to grant concessions to the Germans and to encourage them to attack Britain and France. He also sees Stalin as gambling that the blood letting between the capitalists would last sufficiently long that the USSR would be much better prepared for war. He was surprised and alarmed that Hitler subjugated Western Europe so quickly.

Weinberg types Stalin as "the one leader on the Allied side who at times had doubts and fears about the possibility of defeat or at least such exhaustion as to weaken his country in the trials that he was certain lay ahead" (p. 3). Thus, even through the Summer of 1944 he was not immune to thoughts of a peace settlement with the Germans.

To Stalin, the key to post-war security for the USSR involved the creation of a ring of buffer states around the country. He largely succeeded in establishing such a cushion, especially in Europe, despite the almost catastrophic misjudgments he made in 1941 and 1942. In many cases, this buffer zone represented a reestablishment of the external boundaries that had been forged over many years by the Romanovs. Stalin was prepared to incur great political and diplomatic costs in order to put this security cushion in place and thus he soon was at odds with his erstwhile allies. Stalin's view of the post-war world was predicated on pre-war notions of security and this led him to establish geographic buffer states for the USSR. The buffer defensive strategy became less viable with the development of American intercontinental missiles carrying atomic warheads. Further, the buffer states soon became restive and required continual attention and a significant degree of repression.

Retrospectively, some of Stalin's demands were on face preposterous, for example, his demand that Libya be made a Soviet protectorate after the war [5, p. 494] and his almost fatuous offer to hold national elections in Poland in 1988 (p. 118).

The USSR incurred stupendously high costs in emerging victorious in World War II. It lost 25 to 30 million of its citizens and its most productive economic regions became scorched earth. This hardly sounds like a nation that was a dominant player on the winning team. Yet, viewed through the prism of Stalin's preferences, we must note that the USSR did in fact defeat the Germans; it did induce the capitalists to fight amongst themselves; it did acquire coveted buffer states; it did assume a dominating role in Central and Eastern Europe; and, Stalin did become the most powerful absolute dictator in the history of the world. These are no small potatoes, though all of these developments contained within them the seeds of Soviet problems and decline. Thus, like Great Britain, the USSR was a World War II winner that actually may have been a loser if reasonable accounting were utilized.

Winston Churchill

Churchill famously observed in November 1942 that he had not become Prime Minister in order to preside over the dissolution of the British Empire. However, had the Conservatives not been defeated in the national election held in July 1945, he would nonetheless have been Prime Minister when the Empire sundered. India and Pakistan achieved independence in 1947 and it seems unlikely Churchill could have stopped this. No doubt Indian independence was a particularly bitter pill for Churchill, as he had broken with his party in 1935 when the Government of India Act was passed. But, other parts of the Empire took lessons from the war as well. Australia, New Zealand and Canada now understood that it was the United States and not Great Britain that was the key to their defense against stronger attackers. Thus, Weinberg comments that Great Britain's supreme effort to win the war "may well have been its last defining contribution to modern history" (p. 226).

This is not what Churchill had in mind. Neither did he have in mind a post-war world in which Britain would be a major debtor nation teetering on the brink of bankruptcy, nor one in which the United States' economy would be larger than all the rest of the world combined. If Britain's world economic leadership did not end after World War I, it certainly ended with emphasis after World War II.

Churchill hoped and perhaps expected that the post-war era would witness a reinvigorated, victorious Britain and British Empire. In this regard, he had no intention of relinquishing British colonies and battled multiple times with Franklin D. Roosevelt on this issue. Churchill somehow did not believe the language of the Atlantic Charter applied to Britain's colonial possessions or, for that matter, to those of France. Thus, Weinberg comments acerbically that Churchill's thinking was "anchored firmly in the world of the previous turn of century" (p. 143).

Britain was a winner in World War II because it thwarted invasion and maintained its own parliamentary democracy; and, with the help of others, it subdued and reordered Germany in such a way that eventually all of Germany would evolve into a democracy. Nevertheless, like the USSR, it paid a huge price for these achievements and did not realize many of its goals. Britain and France went to war in September 1939 ostensibly over the territorial integrity and independence of Poland. Yet, Poland quickly fell to the Germans, ended up in Soviet orbit and did not escape that repressive condition for almost a half century. Central and Eastern Europe likewise never benefited from the free elections that Churchill envisaged, though he was realistic enough to reach an agreement with Stalin about spheres of influence in various countries that effectively delineated which of the major powers would call the tune. Like the USSR, then, Britain might be placed in the category of "they won, but they lost."

Charles de Gaulle

Histories and biographies that include Charles de Gaulle invariably comment upon his difficult personality and his personal sense of destiny intertwined with that of France. Weinberg does likewise, but carefully points out that de Gaulle also achieved many of the goals he set out for himself and France. In July 1940, after the armistice at Compiègne,

what were the odds that de Gaulle would emerge as the leader of a restored France that would be the master of a zone of occupation in a defeated Germany? That French troops would lead the liberation of Paris? That France would regain all of its former colonies, despite the Atlantic Charter? That France would be a permanent member of the Security Council of the United Nations? Not very good, one must venture, but this is what transpired.

Though Weinberg comments that de Gaulle's vision of the post-war world was, like Churchill's, "that of prior era" (p. 167), de Gaulle did remarkably well in light of the objective economic, military and political weaknesses of the French position. Even though de Gaulle was almost totally dependent upon Britain and especially the United States for support during the war, he did not act that way. Somehow, like the very unhappy child whose piercing cries cause his parents to capitulate, he got his way.

None of this was sufficient to restore France's power to pre-war levels, and in the fashion of the USSR, the post-war years brought many disappointments to France, important among them successful independence movements in Indo-China and Algeria.

Franklin D. Roosevelt

If there is a hero among Weinberg's eight leaders, it is Franklin D. Roosevelt, who in Weinberg's view held the purest and more admirable motives. Further, Weinberg argues convincingly that the world of 2005 more closely resembles what Roosevelt had in mind than any of the competing visions held by the other seven leaders. This is substantially true because the United States emerged from World War II as the unambiguous winner. In September 1945, it boasted the most powerful navy and air force in the world, but even more importantly, held a monopoly on the atomic bomb. As noted, the American economy dwarfed any other. Whereas the USSR had suffered the loss of 25 to 30 million people, the United States lost only about 400,000 (plus another approximate 600,000 injured). With unimportant exceptions, the mainland United States was never touched physically by the war.

Further, Roosevelt's dream of a United Nations came to fruition, along with a set of valuable cooperating organizations such as the International Labor Organization, the Food and Agricultural Organization and the International Monetary Fund. Both Germany and Japan had been forced to surrender unconditionally (a Roosevelt stipulation that Churchill also supported), were subsequently occupied, and then restructured politically and culturally. Roosevelt desired war crimes trials, creation of a Jewish state in Palestine and recognition of China as a major power (though Churchill thought this foolish). All of these things occurred.

Still, Roosevelt did not attain all of his goals, especially within Europe. The Iron Curtain was soon to be identified by Churchill and the Cold War was already in its infancy. Roosevelt was not able to convince the Soviets to establish occupation zones that met in Berlin and massive numbers of people (especially Germans) were forced to move within Europe. And, as noted, the implications of the Atlantic Charter for colonialism and self-

determination were substantially ignored. Yet, with the advantage of hindsight, one must agree with Weinberg that Roosevelt and the United States both attained and retained a greater part of their post-war agendas than any of the other leaders or countries.

There are two interpretations that Weinberg places on his Roosevelt material that invite challenge. Weinberg suggests that Roosevelt did his best to avoid war in 1940 and 1941. Concerning Germany, Weinberg writes, "It had been Roosevelt's hope that the United States could keep out of another war with Germany by assisting the Allies to defeat the Axis powers" (p. 178). And, regarding Japan, "He hoped that by lengthy negotiations, to which he devoted an enormous amount of his own time, the Japanese could be delayed from entering the wider war on Germany's side long enough to allow the authorities in Tokyo to see the Germany was likely to lose..." (p. 178).

Both of these statements contain elements of truth, but sugar coat Roosevelt's intentions and his actions. There is more evidence in favor of the thesis that by 1941 Roosevelt was looking for appropriate incidents that would allow the United States to enter the war against Germany and Japan. On 11 March 1941, the Congress passed the Lend-Lease Act, which realistically poisoned the United States' neutrality. On 18 April 1941, Admiral Ernest J. King issued Operation Plan 3-41, which declared that the entrance into the Western Hemisphere by the planes or ships of belligerents would be regarded as an unfriendly act and subject to military action. In July 1941, Roosevelt wrote to Admiral Harold Stark that "the words 'threat of attack' may extend reasonably long distances away from a convoyed ship or ships" [6, p. 27]. He further noted that "the presence of any German submarine or raider should be dealt with by action looking to the elimination of such 'threat of attack' on the lines of communication..." [6, p. 27]. Admiral King shortly codified this with his Operation Plan 7-41, which *inter alia* warned the Germans not to approach within 50 miles of Iceland, or to within 100 miles of the convoys now being escorted by American ships across the Atlantic. Numerous skirmishes with German submarines occurred during this undeclared war prior to Pearl Harbor. These were not the fruits of the leadership of someone who sought to avoid war, but rather the actions of a leader who was sticking his chin out and anticipating incidents sufficient to justify a declaration of war he thought inevitable.

Meanwhile, in the Pacific Roosevelt imposed a series of increasingly punitive trade restrictions on Japan. After the Japanese moved into French Indo-China on 21 July 1941, Roosevelt announced a critical embargo on 25 July that with Dutch cooperation would cut off Japanese oil. He also froze all Japanese assets inside the United States, dramatically reducing that country's ability to conduct any international trade. At this point, Japan either had to back up in humiliation or go to war, since its dwindling oil supply would soon grind its economy and military to a halt. The Japanese chose a two-track approach (simultaneously negotiate and prepare for war), but this came to naught for a variety of reasons and Pearl Harbor followed.

None of this should be interpreted to suggest that either Germany or Japan were wearing white hats during this time period or that they did not necessarily merit the actions Roosevelt took against them. There is, of course, an extensive literature that treats these

issues. It should suggest, however, that Weinberg's interpretations of Roosevelt's intentions and actions are a stretch and especially appear at variance with reality in 1941. Roosevelt himself made statements to his cabinet that he was looking for the appropriate combinations of incidents that would mobilize American opinion about the war. As Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson wrote in his own diary in November 1941, Roosevelt was seeking a way to maneuver the Germans or the Japanese into firing the critical first major shots. As Weinberg indicates, Roosevelt also may have sought to delay the Japanese sufficiently that they would see war as an unattractive option and that "this tactic came within two weeks of working" (p. 178), but failed when they attacked Pearl Harbor prior to seeing the Germans founder in the snows in front of Moscow. If so, then Roosevelt's other actions made this delaying strategy less likely to work.

Those caveats aside, Weinberg has masterfully represented the thoughts and desires of the eight leaders. While not a "must read" volume, this book contains much that will be of value to even seasoned historians of World War II.

Notes

[1] Hitler, Adolf. *Mein Kampf*. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999). Originally published in 1925.

[2] Hitler, Adolf. *Hitler's Second Book: The Unpublished Sequel to Mein Kampf*. Translated by Krista Smith, edited by Gerhard L. Weinberg. (New York: Enigma Books, 2003).

[3] Bartov, Omer. "He Meant What He Said." <https://ssl.tnr.com>. (29 January 2004).

[4] Bosworth, R.J.B. *Mussolini*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

[5] Service, Robert. *Stalin: A Biography*. (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2005).

[6] O'Connor, Jerome M. "FDR's Undeclared War." *Naval History*, 18 (February 2004), 24-29.