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Realpolitik: A History

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the American deficit, national debt, and entitlements, and the occasional departures into partisan rhetoric do not really serve the overall thrust of the book. Some of the arguments it contains are inconsistent or undeveloped. An example is the suggestion to build smaller, single-mission hulls, which is followed later by a diametrically opposite recommendation to build multimission frigates with anti-air, anti-submarine, and anti-surface warfare capabilities. Additionally, his proposal to relegate much of the Army to National Guard or Reserve status is probably politically infeasible because of the dire effects this would have on the communities around major Army bases. All that aside, it is difficult to disagree with the fundamental tenets of *Mayday*—that a sufficiently sized and equipped Navy is crucial for our continued national security and the maintenance of international order—and on these bases his arguments for a naval expansion are sound.

Mayday provides an excellent case for reversing the piecemeal downsizing of the Navy, a return to pragmatic platform design, and consistent funding of a shipbuilding program to deliver and maintain a fleet sized to secure our interests and achieve our international objectives. Although the quote is not mentioned specifically, this book recalls President George Washington's observation in his letter of 15 November 1781 to the Marquis de Lafayette: "[W]ithout a decisive naval force we can do nothing definitive, and with it, everything honorable and glorious." Mr. Cropsey's recommendations are pragmatic and worth consideration by senior Navy leadership and policy makers alike.

JOSH HEIVLY



Realpolitik: A History, by John Bew. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2015. 408 pages. \$27.95.

John Bew, a historian at King's College London, provides the first comprehensive intellectual history of the often-misunderstood term *Realpolitik*. Drawing on the experience gained from his acclaimed biography of Lord Castlereagh, the Napoleonic-era British foreign secretary, Bew traces *Realpolitik* from its obscure, nineteenth-century origins in revolutionary Germany to the term's use and misuse in contemporary Anglo-American foreign policy debates. Scholars and practitioners seeking to gain a more nuanced understanding of the evolution of Western foreign policy thinking over the last century, particularly before 1945, would be well advised to consider Bew's compelling narrative.

In the often-glib foreign policy discussions that characterize public understanding of the discipline's key terms and points of contention, *realism* is often supposed to be interchangeable with *Realpolitik*. Bew's greatest contribution is his voluminous research into the term's early history, beginning with the 1853 book *Foundations of Realpolitik* by the little-known German philosopher Ludwig von Rochau. This original formulation, distinct from later uses in both Germany and the Anglosphere, was a creature of its time and place: a disunited Germany torn between the liberal impulses of the 1848 revolutions and the conservatism of its traditional ruling class, as personified by Otto von Bismarck. Rochau's *Realpolitik* was not an ideology at all; it was a lens for viewing the political circumstances of Germany's

bourgeois liberals at a time of conservative reaction. Rather than continue to build “castles in the sky,” as Rochau believed the failed revolutionaries of 1848 had done, he argued for a specific focus on the essential truth that ideas have little currency without some acquaintance with power. To have any hope of success, Germany’s liberals had to understand the underlying social, economic, and political context of how power was wielded and the limitations that existed on their freedom of action. A fervent believer in German unification for liberal ends, Rochau supported much of Bismarck’s foreign policy under the guise of *Realpolitik*. A sober appraisal of the domestic political situation meant that German unification, even under the leadership of a reactionary conservative such as Bismarck, provided the best long-term prospects for German liberalism.

It was Rochau’s unsentimental acceptance of the facts of the situation, as he interpreted them, that defined the original *Realpolitik*. Bew’s essential mission is to chart the course from Rochau’s relatively benign concept to the fraught foreign policy debates of today, with intermediate stops in Wilhelmine and interwar Germany. In his zeal to demonstrate the laudable breadth of his research on the term’s multientury evolution, Bew occasionally overwhelms the reader with quotes and anecdotes from relatively obscure academics whose opinions of *Realpolitik* and its various permutations have only tangential relevance. His point, seemingly inarguable given the clarity of Rochau’s writing, is that the term quickly lost its essential benignity and was co-opted by German intellectuals advocating something

very different from Rochau’s cold-eyed analysis of the facts on the ground.

Realpolitik’s introduction to British and American audiences at the beginning of the twentieth century was in a far different form. Namely, after Germany’s nationalist academics transformed the term into an amoral ideology of “might makes right,” Anglo-American opinion came to regard it as a synonym for German militarism and ultranationalism. Bew is particularly elegant in his parsing of Rochau’s original work and the contrast with much of the ultranationalist proselytizing that came to define Anglo-American understanding of *Realpolitik* before the First World War.

Bew’s narrative shines particularly brightly during his analysis of the interwar period, notably the use of “*Realpolitik*” by British prime minister Neville Chamberlain to justify his appeasement of Nazi Germany. The counterreaction to the perceived failures of Woodrow Wilson’s liberal internationalism precipitated a reappraisal of the term in London during the 1920s and 1930s, with it coming to be seen more positively as a steady adjustment to facts, as opposed to Wilson’s starry-eyed idealism. Bew, seeing the appeasement debate as a critical node in the term’s evolution to its ultimate place in the twentieth-century realist paradigm, is convincingly dismissive of Chamberlain’s co-option of the term. Quoting at length from contemporary sources, Bew notes that Chamberlain’s *Realpolitik* lacked many of the essential elements of commonly accepted foreign policy realism and instead relied on a world-weary pessimism that left Britain unprepared for the Nazi challenge. Winston Churchill’s blend of tactical realism, in the form

of advocacy for a British rearmament policy, and ideological opposition to Nazism serves as a powerful contrast to Chamberlain's flawed use of *Realpolitik*.

Bew breaks less original ground in the post-1945 period, as *Realpolitik* in the postwar United States is decidedly intertwined with the much-discussed "realist" school of foreign policy exemplified by academics such as Hans Morgenthau and Kenneth Waltz. The term's Germanic origins and use by discredited proponents of the Second and Third Reichs undoubtedly contributed to a period of limited use, even by self-proclaimed realists. Bew's narrative, post-1945, begins to merge into the broader discussion of the different schools of American foreign policy that emerged during the Cold War—an area of much previous research without room for the compelling scholarship offered in this book's early chapters. Like all who study "realism," Bew is drawn to an extended meditation on Henry Kissinger and his influence on U.S. foreign policy. Refreshingly, Bew is cognizant of the subtlety and nuance of Kissinger's worldview and refuses to paint that enigmatic figure with an overly broad brush.

Realpolitik: A History is an important contribution to international relations scholarship, not least for resurrecting Ludwig von Rochau and the origins of *Realpolitik*. Bew is to be credited with tracing the term's evolution in multiple countries with different political cultures with relative ease and skill, showing time and again the slow metamorphosis of the term into something far different from what its creator intended. Particularly in the interwar appeasement debate, *Realpolitik* found itself misused toward ends that were anything but realist. More

broadly, the term has been twisted to mean any policy that is believed to lack a moral foundation or, from the contrary viewpoint, is seen as grounded in realistic levelheadedness. As Bew's narrative ends and the term is gradually subsumed into the broader tradition of American realism, the reader is reminded of the inherent flimsiness of the structure of so many of the terms endemic to the debate over American foreign policy. Professor Bew's new book is a helpful antidote to such rhetorical laziness.

ALEXANDER B. GRAY



Grand Strategy in Theory and Practice, by William C. Martel. New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2015. 548 pages. \$115.

"The main goal of this book," Martel writes, "is to provide contemporary policy makers and scholars with a rigorous historic and analytic framework for evaluating and conducting grand strategy" (p. ix). Acknowledging that the term itself is "relatively new," although its concepts certainly can be found throughout history, Martel credits academics during World War II (particularly "the founder of modern grand strategy, Edward Mead Earle") with being the first to focus on a nation's "highest political ends," employing all elements of national power—"diplomatic, informational, military, economic"—to achieve global, long-term security goals (pp. 23, 25, 30). He thus elevates grand strategy above "strategy," "operations," "tactics," and "technology" while acknowledging that for most of history "strategy"—how to achieve overall military victory—was