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## American Defense Policy from Eisenhower to Kennedy

Vincent Davis

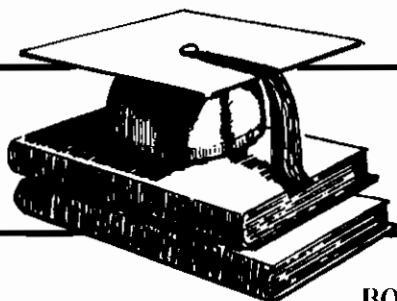
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# PROFESSIONAL READING

## BOOK REVIEWS

Aliano, Richard A. *American Defense Policy from Eisenhower to Kennedy: The Politics of Changing Military Requirements, 1957-1961*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 1975. 309pp.

The 1957-1961 period marked a "dramatic shift in American defense establishment policy which occurred during the transition years from the second Eisenhower [administration] to the Kennedy administration." This is the central theme of this book by Dr. Richard A. Aliano, an Assistant Professor of Political Science at the same institution—the City University of New York—where he earlier received his own undergraduate education and graduate training.

The substance of the "dramatic shift," writes Aliano, was a rejection of the Eisenhower emphasis on "sufficient" nuclear retaliation capabilities in favor of the Kennedy orientation toward "flexible response" with a greatly enhanced range of conventional forces backed up by "strategic superiority." The catalyst—but only the catalyst, not the cause—for this shift, he says, was the impact of Sputnik I on the thinking of many influential Americans. Accurately recognizing that foreign and defense policy emerge at the interface between domestic and international political factors, Aliano argues that a variety of internal domestic circumstances were far more significant than the external stimuli from the U.S.S.R. in explaining the shift in U.S. defense policy. Once the shift had taken place, he says, it set the stage for the

interventionist behavior of the United States in the 1960's, particularly in Vietnam, in contrast to the far more cautious involvements of the 1950's. Aliano, explicitly trying to avoid a determinist label, says that the buildup of U.S. conventional capabilities did not compel Kennedy to use the newly available forces. But, he adds, the simple fact of the new forces was—at the very least—a basic precondition for the expanding U.S. involvements in the 1960's, and might well have contributed to a cast of mind that was predisposed in that direction in any case.

Stretching for explanations, Aliano comments on differences in the backgrounds and personalities of Eisenhower and his key staff people in contrast to the backgrounds and personalities of Kennedy and his circle of aides. The author puts his main emphasis, however, on "innovators"—that is, new kinds of senior officers emerging in key roles in and out of the Pentagon in the late 1950's. In this he largely follows the earlier reasoning of Janowitz and Huntington in describing the new management-oriented military men and their civilian friends in various influential institutions. He also attaches importance to interservice rivalries as a major contextual element in the unfolding story. Thus, once the pressure began to emerge from these professional military quarters for expanded capabilities particularly in conventional forces, Aliano says that prominent journalists and academic strategists played the role of "popularizers" in publicizing and

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supporting the new military thinking. Granting considerable success to these popularizers, Aliano says they were followed by the "capitalizers"—primarily ambitious political leaders in Congress and in presidential circles who rode the wave of the new thinking for their own political purposes. Chief among these capitalizers, according to the author, were the Kennedy people.

In the end, Aliano gives much higher marks to Eisenhower than to Kennedy, suggesting that further research would reinforce Ike's presidential reputation. But he was not reluctant to assign some important shortcomings to Eisenhower—for example, an alleged failure to give an adequate hearing to his senior military officers, which in turn, says Aliano, drove many of these officers (such as Gavin and Taylor) into political activities (mainly with the Kennedy crowd) to seek desired redress.

This short summary of Aliano's main arguments does not do justice to the nuances and subtleties of his provocative exposition. His balanced scholarship carefully takes into account a wide array of congressional documents, executive reports, books, articles, and many respected secondary sources. The resulting book is evenly paced and well-written. Most people with a professional interest in recent U.S. military and political history would benefit from and enjoy reading Aliano, if for no other reason than as a stimulus in their own alternative analyses.

Nevertheless, notwithstanding this book's substantial virtues, it falls into the category of interpretative contemporary history, and as such it is not entirely persuasive at all points. Although Aliano states in his introductory chapter that his book would examine three major "propositions," this reviewer was left with the impression that the author's mind was pretty much made up before he looked at all of the evidence—and part of the problem, therefore, is that he did not actually

look at all of the evidence. In too many sentences we are given precise numbers but the indicated footnotes do not provide supporting data or explanations. For example, on page 3 we are told that President Johnson in 1965 could call on "the nearly 100 percent increase in conventional war strength which had taken place" since 1961, but the footnote gives no suggestion as to just how the author calculated this asserted increase. Somewhat similarly, over on page 56, there is an assertion that the Army had the "primary" mission for "limited war" and the Air Force the "primary" mission for "general war," thus meaning that the Navy in its policy goals in the late 1950's was "infringing" on Army and Air Force responsibilities. But the footnote at that point does not support this claim. This reviewer doubts that an official document supporting this claim ever existed.

Finally, another major weakness in the book is that Aliano seems to have confined most of his research to the specific 1957-61 period under examination, with inadequate attention to major events both before and after the period that significantly relate to his overall themes. Geometrists may be able to define straight lines from any two points, but historians need more than two points because history seldom moves in a straight line. For example, if Aliano had consulted House Document No. 285, 89th Congress, 1st Session, entitled *United States Defense Policies in 1964*, he could have learned from Table 13 on page 101 and from other evidence to this publication and in the series of which this congressional document was an annual edition, that as of FY '64 the Kennedy administration was already planning reductions in the Army. In other words, President Kennedy required only about 2 years to discover the major long-run constraints in the American political system that work against the consistent maintenance of substantial conventional war forces.

This reviewer would therefore suggest that the "dramatic shift" which Aliano tried to picture was in actuality only a short-lived experiment, with the trends in the final months of the ill-fated Kennedy administration moving back toward something resembling the U.S. Defense posture in the Eisenhower years. The subsequent "buildup" in conventional forces was President Johnson's reversal of Kennedy's ultimate reversal, accomplished by LBJ mainly by drawing down capabilities in inventory in various places which were then redeployed to Vietnam, supported by massive reliance on conscription for manpower needs.

In conclusion and on balance, the strengths of this book easily outweigh its weaknesses. We greatly need a new generation of research scholars with a dedicated interest in studying the evolution of U.S. military policy, carefully utilizing documentary sources within the traditional perspectives of political science. In this respect Dr. Richard A. Aliano is a most welcome and talented newcomer from whom we can hopefully expect more and better efforts in the future.

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Cecil, Robert. *Hitler's Decision to Invade Russia, 1941*. London: Davis Poynter Ltd., 1975. 192pp.

In his study of Hitler's decision to invade Russia, Robert Cecil provides a neat, concise description of one of World War II's most crucial events. Although his book contains nothing that is startlingly new, Cecil has put together a well-written, well-organized summary of the best and most recent research.

Hitler's motives are clearly documented and the author notes that Hitler always intended to attack and destroy the Soviet Union. The leader of

Germany was, of course, flexible as to matters of timing and detail, but he never lost sight of his basic objective. Hitler even rejected opportunities to expand German power in other areas in order to husband resources for his great eastern venture.

Hitler's willingness to open a second front was, according to Mr. Cecil, based upon a number of miscalculations. Nazi racial ideology led Hitler to underestimate the abilities of the Russian soldier and the strength of the Soviet regime. The determination to enslave the Russian people made it impossible for the Germans to appeal to anti-Stalinist elements within the Soviet Union and guaranteed that the war would be fought with the utmost savagery. Poor military intelligence led to poor estimates of the Russian order of battle, and past German victories convinced Hitler that victory was in any case inevitable.

In 1941 Russia posed no direct threat to Germany's vital interests. Stalin did not want to fight and went to great lengths to appease Germany. Many German officers and civilians were reluctant to fight the Soviets, but Hitler ruled Germany and his obsession ruled him. Thus, Hitler not only decided to have a war, but also decided that the war would be one of ideological extermination. Mr. Cecil has presented a fine summary of the origins of the conflict that ultimately brought Soviet power into the heart of Europe.

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Couhat, Jean Labayle, ed. *Combat Fleets of the World 1976/77: Their Ships, Aircraft, and Armament*. Translated by Comdr. James J. McDonald, U.S. Navy (Ret.). Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1976. 575pp.

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