

2021

From Hitler's Germany to Saddam's Iraq: The Enduring False Promise of Preventive War

Kevin McMullen
U.S. Army Reserve (Ret.)

Scott A. Silverstone

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

Recommended Citation

McMullen, Kevin and Silverstone, Scott A. (2021) "From Hitler's Germany to Saddam's Iraq: The Enduring False Promise of Preventive War," *Naval War College Review*. Vol. 74 : No. 3 , Article 9.
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol74/iss3/9>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu.

BOOK REVIEWS

IN THE ARENA

From Hitler's Germany to Saddam's Iraq: The Enduring False Promise of Preventive War, by Scott A. Silverstone. New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019. 323 pages. \$30.

Professor Scott Silverstone is a PhD political scientist and retired American naval officer currently teaching international relations at the U.S. Military Academy. The title of his latest book, *From Hitler's Germany to Saddam's Iraq*, is perhaps a misnomer, yet the book remains an excellent read. It concentrates, first, on the folly of France in invading the Ruhr Valley in 1923 to enforce its claim to 80 percent of the coal mined there to pay the indemnity owed to France pursuant to the Treaty of Versailles, and, second, on Britain's wisdom in refusing to join France then or in a proposed invasion to eject German troops from the Rhineland in 1936.

According to Silverstone, a preventive war is a war that a more powerful state launches against a hostile state that is becoming more powerful, to keep the latter from becoming powerful enough to threaten the former. His thesis is that a preventive war usually does not improve the security of the state that initiates it; in fact, such a war often makes that state less secure. To succeed, the aggressor would need the power to annihilate the victim.

The book explains this by considering Thucydides's security paradox—that is, that one state increasing its military strength to protect itself from a potential enemy can impel the supposed enemy to increase its own military strength, thereby preventing the first state from improving its security, costing each state more resources, and possibly leading to war through fear of the enemy. However, Professor Silverstone's theory is more elaborate than this. He sees the false promise of preventive war arising when the less powerful state has a severe grievance against the more powerful one, but the more powerful state will not cooperate in resolving this grievance and instead launches a war to prevent the weaker state from becoming powerful enough to initiate the military action. However, operational victory on the battlefield does not mean, ipso facto, achievement of strategic political success; in fact, victory can strengthen the loser's determination.

In the 1920s and '30s, Germany had considerable grievances against the Allies, especially France, which bore the blame for the Treaty of

Versailles's imposition of war guilt, a loss of territory, heavy indemnities, and disarmament. When France and Belgium invaded the Ruhr Valley in 1923, they turned enmity into rage. They caused such disorder and suffering that they opened the way for radical movements and ensured that the German public would support enthusiastically Hitler's reoccupation of the Rhineland in 1936. In other words, the French invasion intensified German grievances and helped to produce World War II.

Meanwhile, Britain in 1923 refused to join what Silverstone calls the Ruhr War, and the United States withdrew its token occupation force. In 1936, Britain resisted French pleas to join a proposed invasion, because this, at best, merely would have delayed German rearmament. Instead, the United Kingdom doubled its defense budget in three years. The real failure was in alliances, specifically (1) the alienation of Italy over its invasion of Ethiopia, (2) Belgian neutrality and the country's failure to build its sector of the Maginot Line, and (3) the Soviet Union's breaking of its defense pact with France by concluding the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. Moreover, Silverstone argues persuasively that an invasion was unlikely to have overthrown, weakened, or deterred Hitler.

Finally, *From Hitler's Germany to Saddam's Iraq* is useful for its clarifications of this period for an American audience. One such clarification concerns the severe consequences of the Ruhr War. The Germans tried passive resistance but escalated to sabotage as the French occupation became more draconian. Strikes, unemployment, riots, starvation, and hyperinflation spread throughout Germany. Another clarification is that British politicians who became

celebrities in the United States for their opposition to appeasement (e.g., Winston Churchill) were not, in fact, such proponents of forceful action as they portrayed themselves to be in their memoirs. Silverstone demonstrates this through newspaper accounts, public speeches, and formerly confidential governmental memorandums. *From Hitler's Germany to Saddam's Iraq* is a useful warning against succumbing to the lure of preventive war.

KEVIN MCMULLEN



Last Mission to Tokyo: The Extraordinary Story of the Doolittle Raiders and Their Final Fight for Justice, by Michel Paradis. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2020. 480 pages. \$28.

The April 1942 air raid on Tokyo—led by then-Lieutenant Colonel James H. Doolittle, U.S. Army Air Corps—marked a turning point in World War II. The “Doolittle Raiders” successfully attacked the Japanese homeland for the first time, and thereby shifted strategic calculations in both the United States and Japan. Although their daring mission pushed the technological limits of the day, most of the eighty Doolittle Raiders survived the raid, eventually returning home as heroes; however, eight airmen were captured by the Japanese. *Last Mission to Tokyo* picks up the story with their capture and shows how their legacy remains relevant—even with regard to modern-day military commissions at Guantánamo.

Using a nonfiction but narrative style of writing, Paradis provides a well-researched and easy-to-read account of the captured Doolittle Raiders' grim fate, culminating in the U.S. Army's