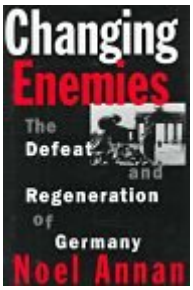
H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences



Noel Annan. *Changing Enemies: The Defeat and Regeneration of Germany.* New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1996. xii + 265 pp. $27.50, cloth, ISBN 978-0-393-03988-7.

Reviewed by Günter Bischof

Published on H-German (February, 1999)

This book is part fascinating memoir and part engaging scholarly analysis of the transformation of British policy towards Germany between 1941 and 1946. The first six chapters deal with Britain's effort during World War II to divine German strength and grand strategy, and Noel Annan's changing roles in this effort. The final four chapters concentrate on early British postwar occupation policies in Germany, and Annan's job as a political adviser during the occupation. In all, Annan traces the transformation of Britain's perception of Germany from that of an enemy to that of a potential western ally, and, correspondingly, the changing picture of the Soviet Union from ally to foe.

Annan demonstrates how the gargantuan Allied effort to defeat Hitler's Germany brought out the best from his generation, by placing intelligent young people into positions with high responsibility and access to the highest decision making. Youngsters in their mid-20s today can only dream of such opportunities. In 1941 the War Department assigned Annan, a young officer with a Cambridge history degree, to the German department in the Military Intelligence Division of the War Office (MI14) to assess German strategy and intentions for the Imperial General Staff. Annan's qualifications were that he could read German and that he was supposedly and expert on railways. In fact, as he told the recruiting officer tongue-in-cheek, his only contact with railroads derived from his father's association with the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad before the Great War.

In 1942, his sterling analyses got him an advancement to the Joint Intelligence Staff, one of the famed British wartime committees that ran Whitehall's orderly war effort. It was the JIC's job to iron out interservice rivalries in their intelligence assessments of German intentions and to present the Imperial General Staff and Prime Minister Winston Churchill with joint intelligence reviews. Finally, in 1944 Kenneth Strong, Dwight D. Eisenhower's intelligence chief, asked Annan to serve on a newly established Joint Intelligence Staff in the SHAEF Headquarters in Paris. Annan did not consider this work very "exacting" since the JIS was "a factory designed to cement the Anglo-American alliance" (p. 115)--a part of the SHAEF mega-bureaucracy. Young Annan, with his scholarly bent, relaxed by reading French poetry

in his icy bedroom as death and destruction loomed nearby.

These chapters on the Allied wartime intelligence effort open a fascinating window to the challenge of gathering intelligence from Nazi-occupied Europe--by way of spies, counter-intelligence, and Ultra decrypts, as well as piecing together intelligent surmises from very incomplete information about Germany. Annan gives lasting tributes to the code-breakers at Bletchley Park who produced the absolutely vital Ultra decrypts that helped the Allies win more than one battle in North Africa and elsewhere. He is persuasive with his assertion that the most scholarly and patient approaches toward piecing together intelligence data netted the best results. An example is the tracing of the wild shifting of German divisions between the Eastern and Western fronts in order to determine the German order of battle. Annan is admiring yet candid about the "old rogue elephant" Churchill (p. 41) who "bred military schemes like rabbits" (p. 47) and the difficulties and exasperation of the IGS and General Alan Brooke when it came to reigning in the resourceful Prime Minister. He leaves no doubt that the Allied intelligence contribution against the German submarines in the see-saw supply battles in the Atlantic, the interception of German supply lines to North Africa by sinking the convoys, and the big D-Day intelligence deception plan all played vital parts in winning the war. This is an important corrective to Richard Overy's otherwise outstanding analysis *Why the Allies Won the War* (1995), which gives short shrift to the contributions of the intelligence community in the victory of the Allies.

Yet this is no hagiography of British intelligence in the war; Annan is frequently critical of their efforts. He is downright searing in his portrayal of the incompetent and lazy Russian section MI3(c), which consisted of two emigre brewers, one from Russia, the other from Estonia. These "white" reactionaries welcomed every Red Army defeat by the Nazis with gleeful chortles of "another army lost" (p. 32). Refusing to look at Abwehr decrypts, they never managed to arrive at a sound Russian order of battle. He bemoans the fact that the Allies failed to get "inside Hitler's mind and think like him" (p. 131). He is critical of "Bomber" Harris and his assumption that area bombing could distress German morale (p. 83). He does not shy away from probing the controversial decision to bomb Dresden, finding that Churchill was looking for "attractive targets" with refugees in the East and that Harris was "only too willing to satisfy a thirst for revenge" (p. 99). Annan is absolutely on target, however, about how the air war created a "third front" for Albert Speer--as far as resources were concerned--which helped to defeat the Germans. In fact, it is often ignored in "second front" debates that here was an early substitute for the very "second front" for which Stalin had been clamoring so loud and so long. Annan portrays the failure to predict Hitler's final offensive in the Ardennes (or rather, the failure to convince SHAEF that it was coming) as one of the greatest intelligence fiascos of the war. SHAEF intelligence had become over-confident and "hedged their bets." Ultra decrypts were misread and crucial information from interrogations of prisoners of war ignored. Thus Annan's soul-searching conclusions--Hitler indeed took an "absurd gamble" and suffered 80,000 casualties; but "the measure of our failure" was 70,000 Americans either killed, wounded or missing, and 8,000 more taken prisoner (p. 123).

This is not the monochramatic picture of the "victory of democracy over totalitarianism" that some American military historians have recently painted in their jingoistic narratives of the American victory in Europe 1944/45. Annan has done his homework and pored over archival sources and the recent scholarly literature (including many German books) and thus makes this much more than a memoir. In defense of Brooke's policies not to invade Norway and the failed invasion attempt at Dieppe, Annan does not shy away from

picking historiographical battles with Gerhard L. Weinberg's recent work (pp. 47, 50). He is more oblique in dismissing John Charmley's revisionists assaults on Churchill (p. 133). He is representative of his generation in being awe-struck with the "superiority" of the German Army (pp. 55, 68) vis-a-vis Allied armies, and in refusing to incorporate in his analysis recent work such as Omer Bartov's *Hitler's Army* (1992), which shows how primitive the German Army had become towards the end of the war.

Annan's chapters of his experience as a "satrap" (p. 139) in "Britain's new colony" (pp. 137ff) is some of the most lucid analysis written by any mid-level Allied occupation official on the German occupation. He vividly describes the agonies inherent in the four-power effort to maintain preconceived notions regarding "wicked" Germans amidst the destruction of Germany and amidst swiftly changing enemy images in the emerging Cold War. Annan shows how different models of reconstructing Germany clashed in the British occupation regime--with "hesitations" in British policy springing from the change in enemies (p. 222). The British Army in its practice of military government came with a colonial model to Germany "as if [the Germans] were a specially intelligent tribe of Bedouins" (p. 157). As a 29-year-young lieutenant colonel, Annan became an advisor to William Strang and then Christoper Steel, the heads of the political division of the British Control Commission. As their point man in the reconstruction of German political parties, Annan found himself in the thick of early Cold War battles with the Soviets in Germany. When the Soviets reconstituted German parties in their zone very rapidly after the war and then pushed the fusion of the Communists and the Socialists to a left-wing unity party (the eventual SED), they put enormous pressure on the Western powers to permit more rapid revival of political life in Germany as well to counter Soviet moves and contain the spread of fusion into the Western zones. In fact, Annan reconstructs from a personal perspective the Byzantine revival of German political life and complements very well Daniel E. Rogers more detailed scholarly work *Politics after Hitler: The Western Allies and the German Party System* (1995). Annan shows how the political officers clashed with the doctrinaire British military occupiers in their views on Germany's reconstruction.

Annan met the emerging postwar German political leaders regularly. His personal cameo sketches of the wily Christian conservative Konrad Adenauer and his bitter Socialist rival Kurt Schumacher are among the best of his numerous personal portraits of the people he met during and after the war. Adenauer with his "flat, impassive, curiously Tartar face with those minute, watchful eyes that one had seen in portraits by Cranach and Duerer" (p. 171) comes across as the consummate political intriguer who outwitted Schumacher and his "excessive idealism" at every turn. Schumacher's every gesture revealed "his demonic energy and sardonic, impatient disposition" (p. 223). While Schumacher fought hard to maintain Germany's unity, "Adenauer proclaimed his dedication to the ideal of a united Germany ... [but with] every action he did his best to make it politically impossible" (p. 224). This observation corresponds well with recent research such as Herman-Josef Rupieper's *Der besetzte Verbuendete: Die amerikanische Deutschlandpolitik 1949-1955* (1991). Seldom has a portrait been more sharply drawn than the one of East German Communist party boss Walter Ulbricht by a Spanish comrade: "His eyes, the right sharply observant, and the left half-closed [gave him] the look of a lapsed priest who visits shady houses" (p. 176). These character sketches make this book a treasure trove and are a must-read for every enthusiast of postwar German political history.

In 1945, the British were bitter with the Germans; they felt they had done more than anyone in meeting Germany's legitimate aspirations before the war, and horrified by the Holocaust, they found non-fraternization easy. By early 1946 they

were frustrated with the German occupation, which had become increasingly costly. In the process, built-up alienation also led to the straining of the Anglo-American alliance, since the British found themselves isolated among the German occupiers (pp. 146f). This is an interesting conclusion about changing relationships among the occupation powers in Germany. The traditional perspective is that the French--with the chip on their shoulder regarding the Anglo-American "special relationship"--maneuvered themselves into isolation.

The Americans found "non-fraternization policy impossible to follow--they were too generous and outgoing" (p. 147). As a consequence, "from the start the Americans were the most humane of all the four powers towards Germany" (p. 145). This is exactly the American mindset we find richly portrayed in Leon Standifer's ***Binding Up the Wounds: An American Soldier in Occupied Germany 1945-1946*** (1997), maybe the most intimate memoir of an American occupation soldier's experience in Bavaria to date. Standifer makes it clear that the average GI fighting the Germans had respect for their military toughness and did not hate them. Such findings stand in sharp contrast to conspiracists such as James Bacque, who argues that the vengeful Americans came to Germany to starve millions of German POWs and refugees to death (***Crimes and Mercies: The Fate of German Civilians under Allied Occupation, 1944-1950*** [1997]). When it comes to the French, Annan still holds the view that they were as uncooperative as the Russians in their occupation policies--a perspective no longer supported by recent scholarship (Heike Bungert, "A New Perspective on French-American Relations during the Occupation of Germany, 1945-1948: Behind-the-Scenes Diplomatic Bargaining and the Zonal Merger," ***Diplomatic History***, Vol. 18, No. 3 [Summer 1994], 333-52).

Yet the heart of Annan's analysis shows how the British imperceptibly started to consider the Russians their principal enemy. Annan heard many intimations of this switch in high places during and soon after the war. Already in 1943, after Stalingrad, the chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee William Cavendish-Bentinck noted, "Now that the tide had turned, it was in our interest to let Germany and Russia bleed each other wide" (pp. 61f)--which was also Senator Harry S. Truman's perspective as early as 1941. In March 1945, Annan was shocked to hear Kenneth Strong repeat the gossip among SHAEF generals that "... when the Germans are finished, we shall push the Russians back to their pre-war frontiers" (p. 124). And in July 1945 the British Chiefs of Staff recommended that "if Russia turned hostile Britain would have to incorporate as large a part of Germany within the Western sphere" (p. 145). In other words, the open break with the "greedy" Soviets over their reparations policy in Germany and their forcing of one-party dominance with the fusion of the SPD and KPD in their zone seemed to have been preordained. The partly hidden "war to the knife between East and West in Berlin" (p. 195) by February 1946 made the open outbreak of the Cold War seemingly inevitable. Conversely, Michaela Honicke's deeply researched chapter in ***Enemy Images in American History*** (ed. By Ragnild Fiebig-von Hase and Ursula Lehmkuhl [1997]), clearly demonstrates how hard it had been for President Roosevelt's propaganda warriors during the war to hate the Germans. Washington realized before the war's end that non-fraternization and the Morgenthau Plan would not work.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at https://networks.h-net.org/h-german

Citation: Günter Bischof. Review of Annan, Noel. *Changing Enemies: The Defeat and Regeneration of Germany.* H-German, H-Net Reviews. February, 1999.

URL: https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=2794