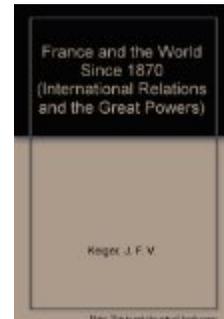


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

J. F. V. Keiger. *France and the World Since 1870*. London and New York: Hodder Headline Group, 2001. viii + 261 pp. \$35.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-340-59507-7; \$72.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-340-76012-3.

Reviewed by Brian McKenzie (Colby-Sawyer College)
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The back cover advertises this book as “the first study in English to chart France’s relations with the rest of the world over the whole of the twentieth century.” Broad in terms of synthesis and scope, and aided by clear prose, Keiger’s book is a useful contribution. The book is organized thematically. Chapters cover the determinants of France’s relations with other states, policy formation, strategy and defense, intelligence, Empire, and the post-cold war era. In addition Keiger devotes individual chapters to Germany, “the Anglo-Saxons,” and Russia.

The first chapter, following the lead of Pierre Renouvin, identifies the key determinants affecting France’s relations with other states as geography, demography, and economic issues. The state is also a determinant for Keiger, and by this he means the tradition of state intervention as well as the formation of political and administrative elites through the grandes ecoles. Like Renouvin, who also includes collective mentalities as a determinant, Keiger specifically sees national identity and perceptions of France by others as determinants. These determinants, and it must be pointed out that Keiger views national identity formation as a contested process, provide the framework to understand the continuities in French history.

The chapter on policy formation is a succinct review of the major policy-making apparatus through three Republics and Vichy. Keiger charts the waxing and waning of various bodies and offices. The power of ambassadors generally declined in this period, while that of the Foreign Ministry—staffed by graduates of the Ecole nationale d’administration—has remained strong and even increased insofar as ease of communication has promoted specialization and centralization. Keiger also de-

votes attention to the role of individuals, particularly presidents, in crafting foreign policy. Before De Gaulle and the strengthened presidency of the Fifth Republic, Keiger reminds us, there were active presidents such as Raymond Poincare in the Third Republic and Vincent Auriol in the Fourth.

Indeed, this book is more than a survey. Keiger argues throughout that the relationship with Germany is the most important issue in French foreign policy during the entire period. The chapter “Germany” is the longest in the book—over three times the length of the chapter on Empire. For Keiger, France’s relationship with Germany oscillates between war and insecurity (p. 156). Relations with “Anglo-Saxons” and Russia are discussed separately, but in both cases Keiger emphasizes French ambivalence and instrumentalism. The chapters on French intelligence as well as strategy and defense are impressive overviews. Keiger provides excellent examples and stresses both strength (inter-war signals intelligence) and weakness (a legacy of distrust inherited from the Dreyfus Affair which inhibited the development of intelligence agencies).

In his discussion of post-war foreign relations Keiger provides a good discussion of French concerns about and engagement with globalization. Keiger’s facility to incorporate concepts heretofore neglected by international relations scholars is one of the book’s greatest strengths.

In sum, Keiger’s book is an engaging read. The book also contains excellent notes, bibliography and index, and one hopes that the editors of the series to which the book belongs (International Relations and the Great Powers) ensure the presence of such scholarly apparatus in other volumes.

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