

# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Jeffrey W. Legro. *Cooperation under Fire: Anglo-German Restraint during World War II*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1995. xii + 255 pp. \$35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8014-2938-5.

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The longest chapter of the European phase of World War II, the Anglo-German war, ended in the unconditional surrender and destruction of Germany. Yet during the war's earlier stages, neither of the two adversaries wished to destroy the other, and each had sought a face-saving settlement. Even so, this kind of diplomatic "cooperation" is not the subject of Jeffrey Legro's investigation. Untroubled by peace feelers, prisoners-of-war, or casualties—the areas where one would normally look for "cooperation" between two enemies—the author steers instead toward three themes of mutual destruction: submarine warfare, strategic bombing, and chemical warfare. The misleading title emphasizes cooperation instead of restraint or abstinence, thus signaling a heavy tilt toward the wishful to the disadvantage of the real.

The principal idea of this unusual book is spelled out in its first sentence: "Why do nations cooperate, even as they try to destroy each other?" Rather than attribute the phenomenon of restraint between two adversaries to the balance-of-power principle or dependence on ideology, Legro, an assistant professor of political science at the University of Minnesota, believes he has found the answer in a principle which he calls "organizational culture"—a set of beliefs and customs in military bureaucracies that limits force in war for the sake of national priorities. "Culture" is in turn subjected to an even more obscure principle that the author calls "preference formation," which is defined as "collective philosophies of war fighting," which in turn influence military bureaucracies. "Culture" is also defined as "how soldiers thought about themselves, perceived the world, formulated plans, advised leaders, and went into action" (p. 2). To support his thesis Legro searches for miniature detail from archival sources. According to these two combined principles, he argues, we can learn "why states did, and did not, cooperate in war even while trying to eliminate each other."

It is in this unsteady mixture of disciplines that one discovers the essential imbalance between strong empha-

sis on theoretical speculation on the one hand and insufficient archival erudition combined with superficial historical judgment on the other. A typical example of this superficiality is the author's comment that "Later in the war when England had superior chemical capabilities, Churchill pushed to initiate chemical warfare, but Britain maintained restraint" (p. 32). Are the three subjects in this sentence synonymous or contesting each other?

The author provides a detailed historical survey for each of the three themes that he discusses. For understanding the scope and limitations of submarine warfare, Legro gives a full account of the interwar naval conferences. This is fine, but he also interlaces superficial conclusions about Hitler's inability to swim and about Admiral Tirpitz's legacy after 1918—the latter is a paragon of professional superficiality (pp. 52-53). Legro may have seen interesting documents on the tactical application of submarines in the broader context of naval strategy, but he has not seen enough higher grade documents where such issues were discussed and decided. There is little evidence that he went systematically through the British Chiefs-of-Staff conferences and assessment papers. How otherwise could he speak of a mere two-front threat in the late 1930s, when the threat was on three fronts: represented not only by Germany and Japan, but also Italy, the last of which Legro seems to have no awareness as a strategic threat (p. 76)?

Legro's limitations are even more visible in his discussion of strategic bombing. Was Britain's escalation after the accidental bombing of London on 25 August 1939 indeed such a clear-cut case for Bomber Command's "culture" to justify Legro's use of the risky word "inevitable" when discussing the respective bombing campaigns (p. 142)? Britain's armament priorities could have shifted to greater production of fighter aircraft or anti-aircraft defense, or toward more warships or merchant vessels rather than to the slow development and costly production of four-engine bombers. In fact the two rivals were fighting two different wars in terms of production—

a point in which Legro is uninterested because it cannot be handled by his “Organizational Preference.” In Germany, armament priorities were reassessed after each “Blitz” campaign—an acute moment for fierce interdepartmental competition and intrigues in which Hitler’s own preferences were decisive. While Britain opted from the start for a war of attrition, Germany opted for lightning wars. A bombing campaign was in fact envisioned by Germany after defeating the British and Soviets in Europe. Looking ahead to a war with the United States, Germany would have added a strategic bombing force to its naval units, which would have operated across the Atlantic. Thus the Germans would have had to have upgraded the *Luftwaffe* to play the same strategic role the RAF assigned to its Bomber Command from 1939/1940 onward.

Finally, the author provides a treatment of “one of the most intriguing questions in the history of warfare” (p. 144), namely, why chemical weapons were not used militarily in World War II, and especially why Nazi Germany—which gassed those thought mentally and

racially unfit to live in Hitler’s Europe—did not resort to chemical warfare. Legro’s description of a “military culture that favored mobile operations” (p. 180) is not very precise, though the tactics of *Blitzkrieg*, which favored fast enveloping operations did make the use of gas prohibitive. The same cause, namely mobility, is discussed elsewhere in a subchapter on the Soviet decision against the use of gas in World War II, despite the Red Army’s intensive training in this area and a conscious Soviet effort to manufacture poison gas. Legro concludes his book with some useful speculations on the theme of restraint in the era dominated by nuclear arms and additional forms of “illegitimate” warfare, namely biological weapons and ecoterrorism. Yet whether restraint lies in applying his model of “organizational culture” to analyses of the new types of warfare is problematic indeed.

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