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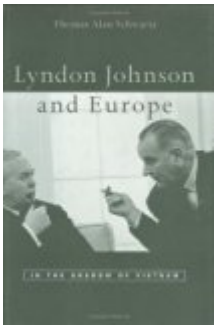
Thomas Alan Schwartz. *Lyndon Johnson and Europe: In the Shadow of Vietnam.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003. 339 S. $29.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-674-01074-1.



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Still In the Shadows

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Former President Lyndon Baines Johnson has for too long a time remained in the shadows of history; his legacy often drenched in the muddy waters of Vietnam or cloaked in the political cynicism associated with the actions of his immediate Republican presidential replacements. It is therefore pleasing to the reader, and student, of the Johnson era to see a historian take on that historical legacy face on and question it. In his book *Lyndon Johnson and Europe: In the Shadow of Vietnam*, Thomas Alan Schwartz indeed goes some way to dispel many of the myths and stereotypes associated with the mighty Texan President.

As the title suggests, the book is primarily concerned with proving that Johnson's foreign policy was not exclusively shaped by his commitments in Vietnam, but encompassed many other levels of which European affairs and alliance politics were also of central importance. During Johnson's six-year tenure, events outside of Southeast Asia, and often independent of events there, took place which seriously threatened both world security and American domestic and foreign interests–France's withdrawal from NATO in 1966, the Six-Day War of 1967, the Soviet invasion of Prague in 1968, and the British monetary crisis. These events all triggered complex and intricate responses from both the administration and the president personally, and were not treated as having less importance than the growing conflict in Vietnam. Indeed, Schwartz presents a convincing case that many of these events, such as the French withdrawal from NATO and its repercussions for the shape of the alliance, were of as great, if not greater, interest to Johnson than the U.S. commitment in Southeast Asia.

Secondly, and more implicitly connected with the above argument, Schwartz wishes to prove that LBJ was not the weak and feeble foreign policy-maker overly reliant on inherited advisors so often described in textbook accounts, but on the contrary a very savvy and skilful operator within the international political framework. Johnson is described as a man who had a clear strategy of seeking d=tente with the Soviet bloc and a wish to end the frosty days of the Cold War. Indeed, according to Schwartz, LBJ's strategy and political vision was one of world-wide peace and security based on an understanding and co-operation between the two leading superpowers, a fact supported by Johnson's commitment to nuclear non-proliferation and nuclear arms reduction.

Although, as such, this basic premise of *Lyndon Johnson and Europe* as a reinterpretation of LBJ's role within foreign policy is sound, the book stumbles in both detail and scope. Though a focus on the relationship between Europe and LBJ within the general historiography is long overdue, it is impossible to separate a detailed analysis of European events without giving an extensive explanation and interpretation of the Vietnam War. Repeatedly, Schwartz addresses the issue briefly and vaguely, figuratively describing the conflict as casting a "long shadow" (p. 186) over Johnson's achievements or simply as a "drama and tragedy" (p. 143). Although it certainly did and was all these things, such

indistinct and slightly bland descriptions of the conflict are not satisfactory. Simply put, and as Schwartz is well aware (Schwartz clearly shows his appreciation of the unfortunate and unfair legacy of the Vietnam conflict in regards to LBJ's historical legacy), because LBJ's legacy is so intimately connected with the Vietnam War it is impossible for a historian addressing any aspect of his foreign policy not to give a detailed exposition of LBJ's views on the war and his role in the decision-making leading up to American intervention. This is especially true with regards to such a groundbreaking reinterpretation as Mr. Schwartz is attempting (if one is to believe his publisher's news sheet). Indeed, it is misplaced and perhaps even historically irresponsible of Schwartz not to give a more comprehensive account of what he understands the debate on the Vietnam War and Lyndon Johnson to be. In order to oblige Schwartz in his request to re-evaluate and re-assess LBJ the reader needs to know more about Vietnam and of what the author thinks about the Johnson administration and the war. Though the final four pages of the book, in which Schwartz deals directly with the conflict, are good, they need to be vastly expanded and that theme more thoroughly incorporated into the general corpus of the book. It seems a bit odd that, although the Southeast-Asian conflict figures in the title, it is not given a more substantial place within the book or even a separate chapter in its own right.

Furthermore, and connected with the lack of written attention given to the Vietnam conflict, is a lack of context, both political and historical. In spite of his presidency arguably being one of the most controversial and eventful of the twentieth century, Johnson has often been reduced to a lesser president wedged in between Kennedy and Nixon, dwarfed by the former's idealism and martyrdom, but tainted by the latter's popularized villainy. This is a problem of historical perception which needs to be adequately addressed and satisfactorily resolved, both generally and specifically by a historian dealing with Johnson, before all or any important aspects of the presidency can be properly understood. Schwartz does mention the issue in relation to the lack of credit given to Johnson for the success of the Kennedy rounds and the dismantling of the Bretton Woods system, and is thus clearly aware of this problem. Yet more needs to be said about this general historiographical problem of approaching Johnson through an overly Nixonian or Kennedyian lens.

Similarly, more attention needs to be given to domestic issues such as civil rights; the growth of the Black Power movement; growing Vietnam protests; the development of strong counter-cultural elements which, at times, resulted in domestic terrorism; and the kind of impact on the decision-making culture influencing the Johnson administration these factors had. Just as the Nixon White House staff often considered themselves and the then president as being under a general siege, both by political opponents and the media, the Johnson administration and concomitant decision-making process must have had a certain prevailing culture which can only be understood if all the factors affecting it are meticulously looked at, not only those of a European origin. Accordingly, if one can understand this decision-making culture and historical context then perhaps Johnson's policies in Europe or Vietnam can be more easily understood. It must be said that Schwartz is generally good on highlighting the complicated links between the domestic political mood (of both America and Europe) and the accompanying flexibility, or lack thereof, within foreign policy, a good example of which is the debate on the removal of American and British troops from West Germany. Not only is the reader introduced to the intricacies of domestic American political pressure surrounding the executive branch, but also those affecting its British and West German political counterparts. Moreover, Schwartz hints at and briefly presents a compelling theory of the dual nature of modern, and especially Cold War, diplomacy as a balancing act between domestic and foreign pressures. Although this theory is not of Schwartz's making it seems that it should have a more elaborated place within any Johnson-era analysis, which is why it is surprising that more is not made of it throughout the book, particularly in regards to the interesting but unfortunately not sufficiently explained idea of how "the international political environment in the West became increasingly similar to the American domestic political system" (p. 228). Exactly how did this come about and in what manner did the political environment of the West become more akin to the domestic political system of the United States? It is an intriguing idea and potentially very compelling, but it needs to be explained in more detail for the uninitiated reader to gain a proper understanding of the concept and its specific application to the Johnson presidency. Although this is only one particular example, I think it illustrates, as described above, the general problem with *Lyndon Johnson and Europe: In the Shadow of Vietnam* as lacking in detail and contextual scope.

It might seem pompous or historically naive to declare that the Johnson years require a more lengthy and complete analysis before specific parts of Johnson's poli-

cies can be effectively addressed both on a micro and a macro level, but the truth is that there needs to be a new historiographical orthodoxy and established interpretation on Lyndon Johnson from which other more specific policy-oriented studies can develop. Though it was probably intentional on the part of Schwartz to emphasise the importance of European issues for LBJ's foreign policy, I feel that he could have risked his European material being buried in a thicker and more definitive book on the whole Johnson presidency (which Schwartz should be more than capable of writing) as this would have satisfied a void not yet filled within the existing historiography, and not merely acted as a tentative first step in the redrawing of the Johnson map.

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