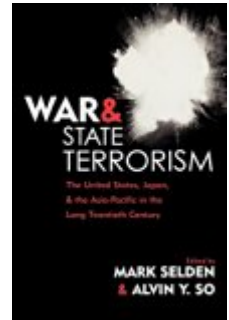


**Mark Selden, Alvin Y. So, eds..** *War and State Terrorism: The United States, Japan, and the Asia-Pacific in the Long Twentieth Century*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004. vi + 293 pp. \$36.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-7425-2391-3.



**Reviewed by** Bill Sewell

**Published on** H-US-Japan (February, 2005)

This timely volume will interest all who seek to apply the "lessons of history," as they are often called, to contemporary events. Growing out of a June 2001 conference entitled "Asia and the United States at War: The Twentieth Century Experience," held at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, some of the contributions to the collection were also obviously prodded by recent events in the United States, Afghanistan, and Iraq. Taken together, this book will contribute much to the debate over what many have called the "root causes" of September 11, at the same time reminding readers that American policy in the Far East is as problematic as it has been in the Middle East.

That said, not all of the papers here address American policy, for some consider actions taken on behalf of Asian regimes, particularly Japan. The result, however, is a volume focused on a tactic (terrorism), that usefully compares and contrasts the definitions, implementations, and implications of that tactic over the last century with regard to one region of the world. And even if individual articles will appeal to specialist niches, the

volume as a whole focuses coherently on a central theme, making it perhaps a useful adjunct for seminar courses, at least for those who think that "root causes" matter.

American policy is focused upon by Mark Selden, "The United States and Japan in Twentieth-Century Asian Wars," Richard Falk, "State Terror versus Humanitarian Law," Bruce Cumings, "American Airpower and Nuclear Strategy in Northeast Asia since 1945," and Peter Dale Scott, "Drugs and Oil: The Deep Politics of U.S. Asian Wars." Selden's chapter is first, noting that while acts of Japanese state terrorism ceased with the Second World War, the incidence of American acts has increased. Defining "state terrorism as *systematic state violence against civilians in violation of international norms, state edicts, and precedents established by international courts designed to protect the rights of civilians*" (emphasis original, p. 21), Selden finds evidence for this growth most obviously in the changing role of airpower. For Selden, relatively bloodless bombing campaigns—from Americans' perspectives—qualify as instances of state terror because they target

civilians en masse. Worse, this practice expanded in Korea and Vietnam, and threatened to do so again on the eve of the second Gulf War, when the essay was written. This expansion occurred because, while there was a rough parity of forces apparent in Europe during the Cold War to restrict American options, there was no such restraining balance in Asia. And now, in the wake of the Soviet collapse, Selden warns that there is little to contain the United States, unless international organizations can somehow come together.

In some ways, Falk's essay attempts to explain American justifications for the practices Selden describes, but in essence he describes mainly the quandary in which Americans find themselves. That is to say, despite technological superiority and a self-imposed global police role, the United States has also assumed a moral leadership role that leads many to question the means of achieving victory. That questioning, however, is never brought to a conclusion because the United States has never had to acknowledge comprehensively the sum total of American actions--the privilege of hegemonic status. Falk's prescription, then, related to Selden's call for greater organization, is for greater education in "the dark side of state terrorism" (p. 57). A good example of this education is provided by Cumings, whose essay on evolving American bombing strategies highlights the brutal nature of American conventional and nuclear tactics. Indeed, given the continuing security issues on the Korean peninsula that interest Cumings most, this perspective is perhaps one that needs bringing to popular attention most rapidly, for Cumings provides a more realistic rationale for current North Korean actions than simply labeling their leadership as mad.[1]

The three essays above focus upon destructive tactics, in effect assuming American actions as a given. Scott's essay seeks to explain why American administrations perceive the need to take these actions in the first place. Perhaps somewhat controversially, he concludes that oil and

drugs constitute a "deep politics" that remain "factors in policy formation that are usually repressed rather than acknowledged" (p. 172). Although many will agree that the drive for foreign sources of oil has been central to postwar American decision-making, Scott's charge of American complicity in preserving and expanding the global drug trade is more likely to be met with raised eyebrows. Granted, Scott, a former Canadian diplomat, is "not suggesting that anyone in the highest levels of U.S. government made a conscious decision to restore or expand the global [drug trade]" (p. 189), yet his allegations are, nevertheless, deep-involving even the banking industry. In a less provocative manner, it might be more prudent to recognize the correlations Scott notes and conclude simply that American policy makers have tended to be more willing to resort to shady or brutal methods to support whatever goals they have, rather than upset the American public by making extravagant military demands. Thus, the resulting "blowback" is one of the costs of waging war on the cheap. Moreover, as Scott admits that "the mechanics of the U.S. relationship to the drug trade remain mysterious" (p. 190), perhaps this perspective needs further study--not that it should be dismissed out of hand.

Supplementing Scott in this volume is Brian Daizen Victoria, "When God(s) and Buddhas Go to War." Exploring the roles of religious leaders in justifying acts of state aggression in a global context, Victoria's essay addresses the views of twentieth-century Americans. In keeping with his earlier work, Victoria finds ample evidence of support for aggressive actions, concluding by calling Christianity "the handmaiden of the state in providing moral and spiritual support and an ethical rationalization for U.S. wars" (p. 114).[2]

In contrast to these essays, two chapters focus upon protesting American policies: Marilyn Young, "Resisting State Terror: The Anti-Vietnam War Movement," and Lawrence S. Wittner, "Resisting Nuclear Terror: Japanese and American

Antinuclear Movements since 1945." Together, they seek to demonstrate the impact protests had upon policy. This is difficult to gauge, but they are on the right track. While Young asserts that "in the face of the absolute military superiority of the United States, the international antiwar movement added a moral force untainted by state power or ideology" (p. 243), Wittner suggests that if one considers the strategy of MAD (Mutually Assured Destruction) to be a kind of state terror, "then two of the largest and most effective antiterrorist organizations of the postwar era have been the Japanese and American antinuclear movements" (p. 251). These movements proved successful because, by stigmatizing an unpopular war and nuclear weapons, these two movements succeeded in making the moral points that Falk suggests some governmental agencies consider, only more successfully. The result of these endeavors has been that even if administrations now seek to insure broad popular support for their policies, there remains room for a popular check upon the executive, a theme that perhaps underlies all of the essays discussed so far. Notably, Victoria's essay ends on this kind of a note: "one of the chief challenges of the twenty-first century is for religious and non-religious alike to compete not so much in saving souls as putting in place systems, creeds, and practices that will no longer serve to foster 'the same old death-game'" (p. 115).

Balancing the discussion of the American context somewhat, Japanese experiences are addressed in the aforementioned article by Selden and in Utsumi Aiko, "Japanese Racism, War, and the POW Experience." While Selden provides an overview of some of the more pertinent atrocities of the Sino-Japanese War, Utsumi's essay explores the differential treatment of POWs in Japan during the Second World War. Unsurprisingly, Allied POWs were accorded some status due to international agreements, though other POWs were not. This did not mean, however, that Allied POWs were treated well. Compelled to work for often doubtful pay, their conditions deteriorated to-

wards the end of the war as shortages and other problems plagued Japanese society at large. As a result, overwork and food shortages incapacitated many. That said, Utsumi notes well the propaganda role these POWs played in Japan, initially dispelling any lingering views that foreigners might in any way be superior to Japanese and later providing scapegoats for rising Japanese frustrations.

Utsumi's discussion of Asian POWs will perhaps be enlightening to many readers. Theoretically "liberated" by the Imperial Japanese Army, South and Southeast Asian POWs were compelled to labor for the Imperial state, often under adverse conditions. Chinese POWs, though, had it worse. While many were worked to death or killed before ever reaching internment camps in Japan, once there they were subjected to brutal conditions. A similar fate befell many Koreans, she notes, even if they were not technically POWs. Although the Asian POW portion of her article is not as well developed, it indicates generally what were likely the most common issues for these men.

Highlighting the racial profiling inherent in the Japanese expansion of the 1930s, Utsumi's analysis indicates one example of the stereotyping apparent in the prosecution of state-sponsored terror. This perspective is underlined in Ben Kiernan, "War, Genocide, and Resistance in East Timor, 1975-99: Comparative Reflections on Cambodia." Kiernan illustrates well how simplistic assessments in Washington helped enable Indonesian and Khmer soldiers to terrorize East Timor and Cambodia. That said, the two campaigns differed in that while the Khmer Rouge was revolutionary, Indonesians were bent on conquest. This resulted in different tactics, though both cases involved terrorism.

Another case study is provided in Diana Lary, "The Waters Covered the Earth: China's War-Induced Natural Disasters." However, unlike the chapters mentioned previously, this essay is about a desperate, self-inflicted form of terror. Retreat-

ing in the face of an unstoppable 1938 Japanese advance, the Nationalist Chinese forces resorted to opening the dikes on the Yellow River to slow the enemy. The strategy succeeded somewhat, but at the cost of more than 800,000 dead and six million made refugees. These resulted not only from flood and famine; as Lary notes, fear of the Japanese advance prevented many from seeking shelter in that direction.[3]

Moving from a discussion of the May 1938 flood to a discussion of floods, famines, and other war-related disasters in general, Lary stresses the useful point that contemporary plans to meet disasters today (disasterology--"surely a contender for economics as the original dismal science" [p. 166]) rarely take into consideration disasters occurring as part of war. This is perhaps most obvious today in discussions of Iraq, for the suffering of the Iraqi people in the wake of the first Gulf War appears to have provided a useful recruiting tool for those who would challenge American hegemony, and the situation today appears such that the suffering apparent in the wake of the second could well do the same. As Lary notes, "it is difficult to convey the long-term damage that accompanies such disasters, because the ramifications come in so many forms and affect so many aspects of life" (p. 165). The victims of state-implemented terrors--whether intentionally made victim or not--simply must be cared for, for at the least we risk contributing to the detriment of us all.

This book is one in the War and Peace Library series edited by Selden for Rowman and Littlefield. Obviously reflecting Selden's lifelong interest in the relevance of history for contemporary politics, it can be assumed that more projects are on the way.[4] Despite, or because of, the current intellectual climate, it is still cool to be a scholar engagee.[5]

#### Notes

[1]. This, of course, is not a new perspective for Cumings. There are many works of his that al-

lude to this, but he has done so perhaps most popularly in *Korea's Place in the Sun: A Modern History* (New York: Norton, 1997).

[2]. Though Victoria's earlier works focused on Japan, his successes there recommend that he turn his attention elsewhere. See his *Zen at War* (New York: Weatherhill, 1997); and *Zen War Stories* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003).

[3]. Lary has written on this disaster elsewhere in "Drowned Earth: The Strategic Breaching of the Yellow River Dyke, 1938," *War in History* 8, no. 2 (2001): pp. 191-207; and briefly in her "A Ravaged Place: The Devastation of the Xuzhou Region, 1938," in *Scars of War: The Impact of Warfare on Modern China*, ed. Diana Lary and Stephen MacKinnon (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2001), pp. 98-116. The latter includes much on Japanese atrocities.

[4]. Selden perhaps first demonstrated this inclination in Mark Selden and Edward Friedman, eds., *America's Asia: Dissenting Essays on Asian-American Relations* (New York: Pantheon, 1971) and in the various articles published in the *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, now *Critical Asian Studies*.

[5]. Indeed, many of the contributors to this volume have written and spoken publicly much in this vein, perhaps most notably Bruce Cumings, Richard Falk, Lawrence Wittner, and Marilyn Young.

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

**Citation:** Bill Sewell. Review of Selden, Mark; So, Alvin Y., eds. *War and State Terrorism: The United States, Japan, and the Asia-Pacific in the Long Twentieth Century*. H-US-Japan, H-Net Reviews. February, 2005.

**URL:** <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=10222>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.