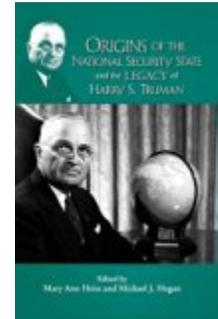


# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Mary Ann Heiss, Michael J. Hogan, eds. *Origins of the National Security State and the Legacy of Harry S. Truman*. Truman Legacy Series. Kirksville: Truman State University Press, 2015. Illustrations. 256 pp. \$34.95 (paper), ISBN 978-1-61248-124-1.

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In his farewell address, President Dwight Eisenhower famously warned Americans about the influence of the military-industrial complex. In *Origins of the National Security State and the Legacy of Harry S. Truman* edited by Mary Ann Heiss and Michael J. Hogan, the contributors to the Eleventh Harry Truman Legacy Symposium held in 2013 present a variety of assessments of the role that President Truman personally, and his administration more broadly, played in the creation of the post-World War II national security state of which the military-industrial complex is a key part.

The eight substantive essays in the volume are organized into three groups bound by an introductory essay by Hogan in which he introduces the essays and highlights key shared themes. The most prominent themes are the militarization of US national security policy, the role of politics in making national security decisions, and the question of intentionality in making decisions. The concluding essay, by Mark Jacobson, identifies several more specific themes found in the essays which hold relevance for understanding today's national security discourse. Jacobson points to the following themes: Congress has a critical role to play in the development of US foreign policy, bureaucratic change requires the agreement of the bureaucracy, and emerging threats require private-public partnerships.

The first group of essays includes interpretative accounts of the establishment of the national security state (Douglas Stuart), Truman's relationship with the military (Dale Herspring), military spending during the Truman years (Benjamin Fordham), and the Central Intelligence Agency (Richard Immerman and Timothy Sayle).

This last essay was not presented at the conference but commissioned afterward. A second essay section contains the chapter "Harry Truman and the National Security State: A Graphic Essay" authored by Randy Sowell, which combines commentary with photos and government documents. The third grouping examines the implications of the national security state. These essays focus on questions relating to the construction of a military-academic-industrial complex (Audra Wolfe), the politics and political legacy of Truman's policies (David Unger), and America's global military presence (Aaron O'Connell).

Among the key virtues of the volume is that it provides readers both a variety of normative perspectives on national security policy in the Truman administration and a variety of empirical approaches to examining important national security policy decisions and outcomes. No effort was made to impose a uniform framework for investigating and evaluating Truman's national security policy legacy nor do the essays constitute an orchestrated celebration of Truman's legacy. If anything, critiques are far more common. For example, Stuart examines the question of what national security institutions were not created under Truman. In evaluating Truman's legacy in dealing with the military, Herspring finds it positive in the area of civil-military relations but largely negative elsewhere. And Wolfe characterizes Truman's national science policy as one promoting science research primarily through defense-related organizations while deemphasizing the role that scientific research could play for the broader public good.

Taken as a whole, the essays in *Origins of the National*

*Security State and the Legacy of Harry S. Truman* raise several important issues for those interested in examining the relationship between present and past national security policy decisions. First and foremost is the question of what do we mean by “legacy.” Dictionary definitions tend to treat the concept of “legacy” simply as being an inheritance from the past or something that happened in the past with a person or an event as the source of the inheritance. The essays here adopt both approaches focusing on Truman the person and events occurring during his administration.

Yet, when we talk of legacy in a political context, as in the legacy of the Civil Rights Act, the legacy of the Vietnam War, and the legacy of 9/11, we are digging deeper than just viewing the past as a source of inheritance for the future. We are also looking for evidence of causation and responsibility. This takes us beyond identifying the Truman administration and/or Harry Truman as the point of inheritance for the national security state and to looking at additional questions. One is the matter of path dependency. From this vantage point, to link Truman’s national security actions in a casual fashion to the decisions of other Cold War and post-Cold War presidents from Dwight Eisenhower to Barack Obama, as many essays do, requires establishing a policy line linking them. It also requires us to establish that this base effectively eliminated future choices. Thus, while in one sense the roots of the Vietnam War may be found in Truman’s national security policy, that does not necessarily mean that meaningful options were not available to future presidents.

A second question is the matter of “political time.” As conceptualized by Stephen Skowronek (*Presidential Leadership in Political Time: Reprise and Reappraisal* [2008]), political time refers to the political context within which presidential leadership is exercised. Skowronek breaks

American political history down into a series of regime segments and then further characterizes problems of presidential leadership and performance according to the state in a regime’s development. Doing so provides us a vantage point for assessing whether it is Truman’s personality and policy preferences, bureaucratic and partisan politics, or some other factor that his legacy might best be attributed to. It also draws our attention to questions regarding which future presidential administration’s political time was most similar to Truman’s to determine where its legacy might be especially great and how Truman’s actions were influenced by the political time of the Franklin Roosevelt administration which he followed.

Third, the question of causation leads to questions about how other Great Powers organized and conducted their foreign policies. As virtually all contributors note, under Truman US foreign policy became militarized. How is that unlike the foreign policies of other Great Powers throughout history? How many of them created or relied on a militarized foreign policy? How many demilitarized after winning a war? In the militarization of US national security policy, do we see Truman’s legacy or the legacy of World War II?

Raising these points is not meant to suggest that the contributors to *Origins of the National Security State and the Legacy of Harry S. Truman* were blind to the issues mentioned above. Discussions of intentionality on Truman’s part to his legacy, his policy inheritance from Roosevelt, the changing nature of public opinion over time on military-related spending, and Truman’s varied levels of success in different policy areas can be found in its pages. Rather, it is to suggest ways of moving the discussion of Truman’s national security policy legacy (or that of any other president) forward in a more structured fashion.

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