

A.W. Purdue. *The Second World War*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999. Pp. xix, 203. Cloth, \$55.00; ISBN 0-312-22213-0. Paper, \$19.95; ISBN 0-312-22214-9.

Written by the Senior Lecturer in History at Great Britain's Open University, this is an excellent short interpretative history covering the period from the Paris Peace Conference to the end of the Second World War. Rightly called a "teacher's book" by the author, it provides an introduction to some of the major debates among historians of the war as well as a succinct and insightful account of the significant events.

Purdue's basic thesis is that it is a mistake to view the conflict as a war between ideologies (the noble and democratic Allies v. the evil and fascistic Axis); it was rather, coupled with World War I, a second Thirty Years War "comprehensible within a history of traditional power politics and international rivalries." In a similar manner, the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the USSR, rather than being "the end of history," as Francis Fukuyama has claimed, was really the end of a Europe artificially divided by ideology, and the reversion of the continent to political boundaries which resembled those of 1919 more than those of 1945. In short, nationalism, far more than the ideologies of fascism, communism, or democracy, has driven political change in the great wars of this century and now, free of Russian Super Power restraints, is reasserting itself across Eurasia.

While persuasively arguing his general thesis, Purdue makes provocative assertions on the conduct of the war and raises questions that have often been ignored or glossed over in earlier histories of the conflict: Was Hitler aiming for world domination in 1939 or simply traditional German foreign policy aims? Should Britain have accepted Hitler's peace offer in the summer of 1940 rather than continue an exhausting war that reduced her to a junior partner and led to the end of her position as a great power? In regard to this question, Purdue claims that Neville Chamberlain might well have understood Britain's limitations far better than Winston Churchill. Was the liquidation of the Jews a part of Hitler's plans dating back to *Mein Kampf* or a "solution" to the Jewish problem developed as late as 1942 when deportation and resettlement were no longer possible?

Purdue's observations on strategic decisions, events behind the lines, and wartime diplomacy are equally stimulating: The Yalta Conference became "Churchill's Munich" when he and Roosevelt repudiated the Polish government in exile for which Britain had gone to war in favor of the communist-controlled Lublin Committee. "The decisive decision of World War II was the Japanese decision to attack the USA and the British Empire instead of the USSR." Had Japan attacked Russia (a course she had seriously considered) rather than the U.S. at the same time as Hitler launched Barbarossa, the Soviet Union probably would not have survived, and American entry into the war would not have been guaranteed. Hitler's "New Order" in western Europe in 1940-41 was far more popular than post-1945 accounts have acknowledged, and the

Resistance is generally overrated, having little effect on the war's outcome. German mechanization of elite Panzer units, so evident in the early *Blitzkrieg* period, did not spread to other parts of the army nor keep pace with the vastly increased mobility of the Allied armies in the latter stages of the war, leaving the Germans with an inferior "horse-drawn body behind a motorized head." The French, who receive a number of Purdue's barbs, were not unhappy with the early Vichy government, probably had more collaborators than members of the Resistance, were more willing to fight the allies than the Germans during the North African invasion, and for the most part did not welcome the Normandy landings. Finally, Purdue believes that the Soviet Union was an enemy of the Western Allies as dangerous and villainous as Nazi Germany, noting Russian interest in a second Nazi-Soviet Pact as late as the summer of 1943, and Stalin's brutality in the Katyn Forest massacre and in permitting the destruction of Warsaw and the death of 250,000 Poles.

Despite a slight British bias, evidenced in preferring Montgomery's strategy over Eisenhower's and in blaming Roosevelt chiefly for Russia's wartime gains, this fine little book will provoke lively discussions among students of the war, ranging from those who have at least a good "Western Civilization" understanding of the conflict to those who teach it. Necessarily short on biographical and anecdotal detail, it deserves close consideration for adoption as collateral reading in undergraduate courses or as a primary text at the graduate level. The footnotes are sparse but adequate, and a predominantly British bibliography is balanced between traditional and revisionist accounts of the great issues.

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**Peter Lowe, ed. *The Vietnam War*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998. Pp. xii, 253. Cloth, \$59.95; ISBN 0-312-21693-9.**

This volume of essays by European, Asian, and American scholars, relying mostly on secondary sources, is an uneven introduction to the level that different nations were involved in the Vietnam War. The consensus that emerges from this global perspective is that the Vietnamese fought the war to preserve their nationalist revolution, while other participants viewed it in light of their larger cold war strategies. These essays all champion Vietnamese nationalism, but criticize foreign and particularly American intervention. Readers looking for a conservative point of view on the war will be disappointed.

The book contains an editor's introduction and nine essays. The first one, on the war's early years, suggests that the United States followed the French into Vietnam through a combination of diplomatic blunders, missed opportunities, and military optimism. Excellent essays on the Vietnamese come next. Nguyen Vu Tung argues