



Review: [Untitled]

Reviewed Work(s):

The Wizards of Armageddon by Fred Kaplan
Marc Trachtenberg

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Falk's position remains unattractive to mainstream Marxists because it does not go far enough. A qualitative view of world order is appealing as an ideological device, but the practical implementation of WOMP or models like it remains a mystery. Marxists have an answer revolution; moderates do not have such a mechanism. But this is the problem. Reason has always prevailed over idealism. For Falk, and others in the normative camp of international relations, the reverse should be true. This is the major argument of *The End of World Order*.

JAMES H. FREY

University of Nevada
Las Vegas

KAPLAN, FRED. *The Wizards of Armageddon*. Pp. x, 247. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983. No price.

The Wizards of Armageddon is neither a thoroughgoing history of American nuclear weapons policy nor a comprehensive account of post-1945 strategic thought. Instead, this work is concerned with a particular group of thinkers—Bernard Brodie, Albert Wohlstetter, William Kaufmann, Herman Kahn, and a number of lesser-known figures, almost all of whom worked at the Rand Corporation in the 1950s. Fred Kaplan is interested in how their ideas developed and interacted with policy. Indeed, the heart of Kaplan's argument is that the views of this group essentially shaped American nuclear strategy: the idea that a nuclear war could be something other than an all-out paroxysm of violence, that it might be controlled, limited, and fought rationally, became the accepted basis for operational planning as the "tightly knit coterie" of Rand alumni and their disciples gradually came to dominate strategic policy with the "hidden infrastructure of the government." But to Kaplan this whole effort to impose rational order was rooted in illusion. To him nuclear weapons are simply devices of "sheer mayhem"; the nuclear strategists with all their unrealistic options are merely "dancing in

the dark"; and nuclear strategy is by now nothing but "the stuff of a living dream-world."

Despite the polemic tone, this is a serious and valuable book. Kaplan's insights are often impressive; he knows how to tell a story; and the work is based on a great mass of new, and often fascinating, archival and interview evidence. Kaplan's argument is nevertheless misleading in a number of ways. The Rand strategists are portrayed as propagating a dogma; there is little sense of the serious debate that was going on within the group or of the ideas generated by the Rand people themselves—most notably their concept of strategic stability—that were in basic ways inconsistent with the notion of a counterforce strategy. Nor does Kaplan really show that the strategists were "nonchalant" about nuclear war: a desire for rational contingency planning and a belief in the controllability of nuclear war are simply not the same thing.

Finally, there is, I think, a fundamental contradiction between the two halves of Kaplan's argument. On the one hand he tends to exaggerate the importance of the Rand group. But he also wants to argue that its ideas were, in the final analysis, bankrupt, and the proof here is that these Rand notions were too unrealistic to have a real effect on political leaders. For both sides of the argument his discussion of the 1961 Berlin crisis is crucial. He implies that the strategists at that time were contemplating—almost advocating—a nuclear first strike against Russia, but the document he refers to was simply a capabilities study, untouched by the subtle "no-cities" logic that was the touchstone of the rational, Rand approach to counterforce. On the other hand, the argument about the unrealism of strategic options also rests largely on the contention that in 1961 no one in a position of authority was willing to contemplate the possibility of actually launching a first strike: "Yet approaching the height of the gravest crisis that had faced the West since the onset of the Cold War, everyone said, 'No.'" This conclusion is based on his claim that Paul Nitze, possibly Dean Acheson, Marcus Raskin, and Ted Sorensen all op-

posed the "plan." But even if these assertions are correct, the important points are that three or four people do not constitute an "everyone," that the real decision would probably not be made until a massive American conventional defeat in Europe seemed imminent, that the decision was ultimately in the president's hands, and that Kaplan gives no evidence at all that President Kennedy—who in August had asked for this kind of planning to proceed—had decided in advance not to use nuclear weapons no matter what happened in Europe.

The basic problem then is not that the strategists live in a dreamworld, but rather that the perplexities of the nuclear age are inescapable. As long as there is any possibility, no matter how slight, that nuclear weapons might be used, and as long as there is any chance at all that a nuclear conflict, if it ever does come, can be kept from going out of control, the problems of nuclear strategy will retain political significance and are thus worth thinking about. To imply that a willingness to take such issues seriously can only be rooted in an overintellectualized and nonchalant attitude toward nuclear war is in the final analysis to deny that serious debate on these fundamental questions is possible.

MARC TRACHTENBERG

University of Pennsylvania
Philadelphia

MARCUS, HAROLD G. *Ethiopia, Great Britain, and the United States: The Politics of Empire*. Pp. xi, 205. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983. No price.

The "Empire" of the subtitle of Marcus's book is a multilayered concept. Ethiopia excited imperial ambitions for many centuries, yet only became fully a prey to them in the twentieth. Napier's expedition of 1867 advanced and withdrew. Italy's attempt to expand its empire out of Eritrea was thwarted at Adowa in 1896. Only when the Italian invasion of 1935 became a factor in World War II did the British, supreme in the

Upper Nile and the Gulf of Aden, take a hand. But British weakness was already apparent, and by the late 1940s she had no alternative but to hand over influence in the area to the United States. The combination of British weakness and American vacillation ensured the success of Ethiopia's own imperial designs on Eritrea and the Ogaden. The resulting Eritrean separatist movement, Somali revanchism, and Soviet capacity to capitalize upon American failure are still very much with us. The book therefore charts a key period in the modern history of Ethiopia and of the region.

Marcus's study hinges on the attempted coup of 1960. It was then that the real weakness of Haile Sellassie's rule became apparent. It was then that the Americans were forced to commit themselves, and they threw in their lot with the ancien régime. In the aftermath it was all the more possible to speak of American imperialism, and the clear—but not unique—humbug of the democratic liberal United States propping up the feudal reactionary Ethiopian Empire became itself a source of weakness to both parties. Marcus introduces a curious ambivalence into all of this. He refuses to accept that in the 1950s Ethiopia became an integral unit of American global imperialism. Aid had to be prized out of the U.S. administration. The Americans were, much to the rage of the emperor, at all times reluctant patrons, and American policy was generally made in the American embassy in Addis Ababa. As any student of the British Empire knows, however, imperial reluctance is a poor indicator of imperial reality, and imperial policies are invariably made by more imperialist men on the spot.

The experience of Ethiopia reflects perfectly the American dilemma in the modern world. The handing over of the Western imperial baton from Britain to the United States was a strained and difficult process in which the baton was invariably dropped. It was clear in American policy that the Western European formal empire had to be destroyed in the post-World War II era, but the nature of the informal empire that had to