

from the Communists and stabilize Italian democracy. American liberals accepted that a center-left government might be a slightly less reliable ally in foreign and security matters, but they were willing to accept this as part of the bargain. By 1962 or 1963, according to Nuti, Schlesinger's line had prevailed within the administration. Supporters of the *centro-sinistra*, including Amintore Fanfani and Aldo Moro, were welcomed effusively in Washington, whereas conservative opponents, including Antonio Segni and Giulio Andreotti, were given the cold shoulder. A very public meeting between Kennedy and Socialist Party Secretary Pietro Nenni, at a reception held in the U.S. president's honor at the Quirinale Palace in Rome in July 1963, was tantamount to a vote of confidence. Meanwhile, prominent American supporters of the *centro-sinistra*, notably Walter and Victor Reuther, rewarded Nenni by channeling money his way. Funds from the United Auto Workers and the affiliated International Metalworkers Federation certainly reached the Italian Socialists; whether U.S. government funds did as well, as Schlesinger expressly advocated, Nuti could not determine.

The United States, Nuti concludes, did not dominate Italy's domestic politics during this period, but the attitude of U.S. officials tipped the balance at crucial junctures. During the Kennedy years the U.S. government tipped the scales in favor of the center left and against Italy's conservatives.



Lawrence Freedman, *Kennedy's Wars: Berlin, Cuba, Laos, and Vietnam*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000. 528 pp. \$35.00.

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Lawrence Freedman, Professor of War Studies at King's College London, is the author of many important works dealing mostly with military affairs. But his new book, *Kennedy's Wars*, is not primarily a work of military history. It is a study of American foreign policy during the presidency of John F. Kennedy that covers both the military and the political sides of the story—or at least a major part of the story. Rather than trying to give an account of U.S. policy in every part of the globe, Freedman emphasizes what he sees as the most important topics. He does not ignore general issues, but the focus of the book is on U.S. policy in three distinct areas: the Berlin crisis, U.S.-Cuban relations (including the missile crisis), and the growing U.S. involvement in southeast Asia.

The argument of the book revolves around certain fundamental questions. Freedman notes that there were sharp crises during the Kennedy period, yet “catastrophe was avoided.” Was this, he asks (on p. x), “through good luck or good management?” He notes that the situation in Vietnam was worse at the end of the Kennedy period than it had been at the beginning. Did this mean that American policy under Kennedy, if he had lived, would have taken the same course that it actually did under Lyndon Johnson? Freedman's answer to the second question is that no one can know for sure what Kennedy would have done, but that it “is fair to say” that he, unlike

Johnson, “would have looked hard” for a way to avoid a full-scale military commitment (pp. xii, 413).

On the broader issue Freedman gives Kennedy a good deal of credit. Although Kennedy might not have been the “far-seeing statesman of unusual insight and courageous decision” that some of his admirers made him out to be, he was a serious and thoughtful statesman (p. xi). He had no plan for “winning the cold war,” but sought instead to find a way “of consolidating peaceful coexistence” (p. 419). In this, Freedman argues, Kennedy was quite successful: “For all his mistakes and misadventures, Kennedy’s achievement was that he could be remembered for crises rather than hot wars, and that he left the cold war in a far less dangerous state than he found it” (p. 419).

These judgments are based on a sober and intelligent analysis of a broad range of published sources, especially the volumes in the *Foreign Relations of the United States* (FRUS) series covering the Kennedy period. Freedman has also made good use of the many books and articles on this subject that have come out in recent years. His basic views about Kennedy are, I think, correct. At any rate, they are in line with my own understanding of American policy during that period. Kennedy clearly *did* want to stabilize the status quo in Europe, and, as David Kaiser’s important new book on the origins of the Vietnam War demonstrates, Kennedy also very much wanted to avoid a full-scale military involvement in southeast Asia.

Freedman is a cautious scholar. He tends not to stray too far from the conventional wisdom, even when (at least as I see it) changes in our understanding of the period are warranted by evidence that has only recently become available. For example, on the question of a possible U.S., or joint U.S.-Soviet, attack on Chinese nuclear weapons facilities, he says that “it has been argued that Kennedy was pushing hard in this direction, but the evidence for this is flimsy” (272). My own judgment, however, is that the evidence on this subject, presented by Gordon Chang and others, is quite substantial. Kennedy, as one senior official recalled in 1964, was eager to have the Soviet Union join the United States in taking action, if necessary physical action, against China. Within the government Kennedy openly discussed the sorts of unconventional actions that might be taken: “You know, it wouldn’t be too hard if we could somehow get kind of an anonymous airplane to go over there, take out the Chinese facilities—they’ve only got a couple—and maybe we could do it, or maybe the Soviet Union could do it, rather than face the threat of a China with nuclear weapons.” (“Oral History Interview with William C. Foster,” 5 August 1964, p. 37, declassified: 1994, available from the Declassified Documents Reference Service-United States, ID: 1995070101874, Fiche No.: 1995–169.) This aspect of American foreign policy, and the way it changed during the 1960s, is a crucial part of the story of great power politics in that decade, and it needs to be recognized for what it was.

Similarly, Freedman accepts the conventional view of the Kennedy administration’s military policy. The new administration, he writes, believed that “something had to be done” about NATO’s reliance on nuclear threats and that a build-up of nonnuclear forces was of fundamental importance. This “was not even a matter of interagency debate” (p. 48), according to Freedman. The State Department, he says, was

convinced that policy had to be shifted in that direction, and the Pentagon and the White House shared that view.

This general picture is of course quite familiar. Since the early 1960s observers have tended to take at face value the flexible response rhetoric of the Kennedy administration. But one of the big surprises in the volume on national security affairs for the Kennedy period published in the *FRUS* series a few years ago is that the Defense Department headed by Robert McNamara was *not* particularly interested in beefing up America's ability to fight a nonnuclear war. The department's unwillingness to move energetically in that direction was a source of concern to officials elsewhere in the government who were more committed to flexible response. In July 1961, for example, the State Department criticized the Pentagon view that "no major increase in the present scale of U.S. conventional forces is required" ("Memorandum from Dean Rusk to McNamara," 9 July 1961, in *FRUS*, 1961–1963, Vol. 8, p. 114). And in October of that year State Department officials were dismayed that the budget proposed by the Pentagon "actually projects a cutback in force levels, principally in the Army, below those currently approved" ("Attachment from Rusk to Maxwell Taylor and McGeorge Bundy and David Bell," 29 October 1961, in *FRUS*, 1961–1963, Vol. 8, p. 191). But the impact of the memorandum in which that view was expressed was, as one official noted, somewhat "diminished" by the fact that Secretary of State Dean Rusk told McNamara in a personal conversation "that he did not feel strongly about these remarks" ("Memorandum from William Y. Smith," 6 November 1961, in *FRUS*, 1961–1963, Vol. 8, p. 194n.)

As for the president himself, he was more comfortable with nuclear deterrence and less convinced of the need for a buildup of conventional military power than Freedman's discussion might lead the reader to think. In Kennedy's view, had it not been for the problem of Berlin, nuclear forces alone could have stabilized Europe. The Soviet Union, he argued, understood that a conventional attack would "lead promptly to nuclear warfare," and for that reason, "the nuclear deterrent would be effective" ("Kennedy meeting with Rusk, Bundy, and McNamara," 10 December 1962, *FRUS*, 1961–1963, Vols. 13–15, microfiche supplement, doc. 27).

Although one can take issue with Freedman's views in this area, and indeed in other areas as well, such differences of opinion are par for the course in academic life. The fact that they exist should not be allowed to obscure the main point to be made about this book: that it is a perceptive and well-written account, judicious in its assessments, and convincing in most of what it has to say.

