America's Cold War
The politics of insecurity
Campbell Craig and Frederick Logevall
Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Mass. and London, 2009

Robin Ramsay

In this two history professors, one British (Craig, Aberystwyth), the other American (Logevall, Cornell) examine the American end of the Cold War and conclude that it was almost but not quite entirely the result of, and carried out in the interests of, the American military-industrial-complex (m-i-c). They don't quite say this but they're close.

* On the Marshal Plan: 'American officials were confident that Stalin would refuse the aid and force his client states to reject it as well' (p. 90)

* On the Berlin blockade: 'The ensuing crisis – the first real confrontation of the Cold War – was, once again, laid at the feet of the Soviet Union, even though it had been quietly triggered by American actions.' (p. 93)

* On NSC 68: 'NSC-68 provided a comprehensive strategy for dealing with a Soviet Union now in possession of the atomic bomb, and at the same time encouraged the Truman White House to reach for Keynesian solutions to the massive expenditures this strategy would require. It offered a recipe, one scholar has said, for the "permanent militarisation of U.S. policy."' (p. 114)

They quote Eisenhower's famous farewell address in which he warned of the m-i-c on page 7 and they write:

'Composed of the military establishment, the arms industry, and the congressional backers of these two institutions, this "complex" became a power within itself, a vested interest largely outside the perimeter of democratic control, and arguably the single greatest

factor in post-1941 economic life the United States.'

But this rhetoric is not matched by analysis of some of the historical events. The biggest threats to the m-i-c were the attempts by Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy to reduce tension with the Soviet bloc and thus cut military expenditure. With this in mind Eisenhower planned a big pow-wow with Khruschev in Paris in 1960. What happened? The authors write:

> '.....against all odds, the worse scenario occurred: the U2 flight was shot down on the eve of the international summit.'. (p. 188)

'Against all odds?' They tell us that Eisenhower approved the U2 mission. Did he? He certainly took responsibility for it once it had been revealed by the Soviets; but according to Fletcher Prouty, who was then one of the men in charge of the U2 flights, Eisenhower expressly ordered the overflights to be halted in the run-up to the conference.

> 'During the first six months of 1960, I was the focal-point officer assigned by the Chief of Staff of the U.S. Air Force to provide special Air Force support to certain clandestine CIA overflight operations. In April 1960, a member of the Chief's Pentagon office staff was in Thailand overseeing a major series of long-range overflights into Tibet and far northwestern China. Later that spring, orders came down to stop those overflights. The given reason was that the President wanted nothing to interfere with the success of his forthcoming Paris summit conference. Orders were sent from my office to ground the overflights.
>
> These same orders applied to the U-2 program. We all took our orders from the same authorities. The U-2's were supposed to have been grounded along with the

Tibetan overflights.' [6]

Six pages after their timid and/or evasive account of the U2 incident, Professors Craig and Logevall quote a long chunk from Eisenhower's farewell address about the military industrial complex and write:

> 'It was in the interests of this complex to deny, always and forever, that America had done all it could to make itself safe. He [Eisenhower] determined to confront it.' (p. 195)

But they do not make a connection to the Paris peace conference wrecked by the U2 a year before.

The authors' reluctance to look at the m-i-c in action continues through their acount of the invasion of Cuba – they do not tell us that the CIA planned to force Kennedy into supporting the invasion when it foundered [7] – and into JFK's assassination, where they do a version of the standard historians' body swerve round the subject: 'The almost-certain assassin, a troubled former marine named Lee Harvey Oswald...' (p. 227).

Similarly they are carefully sceptical and non-committal about JFK and Vietnam:

> '....over time [JFK] became increasingly sceptical about South Vietnam's prospects and hinted that he would seek an end to the U.S. commitment.....a few authors have gone further and argued that JFK had quietly commenced a withdrawal from Vietnam.....the evidence for this claim is thin.''(p. 228)

I guess it depends on what you mean by 'thin'; though it isn't clear from the authors' citations at this point how much of the

6   L. Fletcher Prouty, 'The sabotaging of the American presidency', *Gallery*, January, 1978 <www.ratical.com/ratville/JFK/SAP.html>
  There is a decent summar of the U2 event at <http://qwstnevrythg.com/2009/11/the-u2-files-mayday-1960/>.
7 This is discussed in James W. Douglass, *JFK and the Unspeakable* (New York: Orbis Books, 2008) pp. 14/15. This book was reviewed in *Lobster* 56 by Michael Carlson.

evidence they are aware of.

Through the book they face a recurring dilemma: they really believe that the Cold War was almost entirely about the m-i-c; but although they can *state* this, they cannot bring themselves to *show* it. To do so would be to step outside the acceptable parameters of their profession and place them in the same camp as people like William Blum who, as an independent researcher, is more able to look historical reality in the face. This they cannot contemplate, so they cop out, repeatedly. This results in a series of evasions of which this comical statement is the pick.

> 'The United States in 1963 had security agreements with almost a hundred countries, on every continent but Antarctica. More than a million U.S. servicemen and women were deployed overseas, on close to two hundred bases. The Soviets' reach was almost as great.' (p. 215)

Ah yes, the global network of Soviet bases in 1963. Let's list them: the satellite states created immediately after 1945 plus........*none*?

ARRB