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## Roots of War

by [Richard J. Barnet](#)

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## Member reviews

Barnet, Richard J. *Roots of War* (Kingsport, Tennessee: Kingsport Press, Inc., 1970), 192 pp.  
Feis, Herbert. *From Trust to Terror* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1970), 412 pp.

After reading Herbert Feis's *From Trust to Terror* and Richard J. Barnet's *Roots of War*, I am left with the impression that these two books are representative not only of two different historical schools, that of traditionalism and revisionism respectively, but even of two separate generations. Although both were written during the final stages of the Vietnam War, both Feis and Barnet would claim to be American patriots, the brand of patriotism of the two is decidedly different. Feis, the hardened economist and bureaucrat who served in the Department of State and the Department of War between the years 1930 and 1950, is an American apologist. Barnet, a critic of the war in Vietnam, wrote two books on Vietnam or served in the Department of State under JFK and founded the Institute for Foreign Policy Studies. He is the "thorn in the flesh" that keeps democracy on its toes.

Feis, as a traditionalist, does not question the accepted wisdom common to the statesmen, elected officials and generals who saw the beginnings of the Cold War. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. said after Feis's death in 1973 that, "though Herbert Feis did not question the historical and intellectual framework within which the American policy developed, he means a writer of old-tie history, intent on proving the infallibility of official judgment" (Schlesinger, 519). That official intellectual framework, and not the fallibility of official judgment, was for Barnet the very root cause of the ignominious failure of US policy in Vietnam. Barnet, who reveals himself to be somewhat of a left-leaning revisionist, questions the conventional wisdom with a vengeance perhaps only surpassed by Pravda.

The theses of these two books are indeed antithetical, but taken together they provide a student of the Cold War a balanced view which neither of these two taken alone could provide. With the goal of unearthing the roots of the Vietnam War, Barnet outlines defects of the US's bureaucratic national security system, its capitalistic economic system and apathetic public. Barnet argues the US policy of permanent mobilization is based upon an ideological norm in domestic policy. That norm is what Barnet labels "business creed". A Calvinistic stress upon order and efficiency, hard work and with a Hobbesian reverence for the Leviathan-like central "national security bureaucracy" characterizes this creed. Barnet urges a basic change in this traditional American norm. Feis confines his analysis to the twisting diplomatic moves and counter-intuitive foreign policy developments during the onset of the Cold War between 1945 and 1950. He argues implicitly throughout his account that the responsibility for the concomitant guilt associated with the move of US-USSR relations from the Truman Alliance to mutual terror in a world plagued by nuclear proliferation is to be placed on the US.

with the Soviet Union.

It will be the goal of this review to highlight those aspects of these mostly cont. which shed the greatest light upon the still raging conflict within the USA as to or to deescalate the Cold War. The contrast is first seen in terms of overall imp stated that Barnett's account is quite a bit more readable. His inclusion of p historical analytical techniques and philosophical considerations of political id an incisive analysis of neo-Leninist theory, serves to keep the reader's atten longer periods than does Feis' strict historical accounting of post-WWII di take.

Though similarly one-sided, these two books demonstrate differences in litera degree as their authors' plainly visible antithetical prejudices. Feis chooses by the hand through five years of crucial policy negotiations and lays bare with splits within the camp of the Western Allies as well as the East-West split which Cold War. At times, Feis is as critical of the obstructions provided by the recal is of the Soviets. This provides somewhat of a respite from his condemnation (

Barnet divides his complaints into three categories: the national security burea autonomous and guilt-free perpetuation of the US preparedness for all-out n imperialistic nature of the US' capitalistic business creed which, along with Christian" morality, pervades both the exclusive "national security bureaucra community of the "American business elite" cementing them together in a co perpetuating the mutually beneficial military-industrial complex; and finally tl manipulable American public, which takes little or no interest in foreign policy Where Feis may be faulted for the inclusion of too much cumbersome detail, the dangers of excessive abstraction. For instance, Barnett's "national secu use "rat psychology" and systematically commit "bureaucratic homicide" dur War, although occasionally tied down to names such as McGeorge Bundy or F remain nameless abstractions. With Barnett, the United States is the sole benef One tires of this eventually.

In the presentation of Cold War history offered by the two authors one sees th exclusion of those topics which might seriously threaten the validity of their in Barnett is particularly guilty of this. His commentary totally ignores the malicio machine, which like the US war machine must undoubtedly bear some of the US' permanent mobilization for war. In like manner, by his silence on the r US government officials from any guilt of deceit or willful deception of the An Western Allies or the Soviets. If Feis is to be trusted completely, the US is simp type of action. If Barnett is to be wholly trusted, the fact that the Soviet Union l untold numbers of human rights violations and shown imperialistic tendencies will be entirely ignored.

One can see the selective treatment of the Marshall Plan by the two as an exan seemingly innocent tendency. Feis portrays the US proposal of the Marshall Pl self-less act of the American Government and ignores the fact that the US bus was eventually to benefit immensely from the rebuilding of the European indu criticizing the US business interests for their role in developing the Marshall Pl the fact that the US Government was largely motivated by the desire to take th Europe "off the welfare rolls", so to speak. In developing the Marshall Plan, ph part of the US Government was indeed balanced by a healthy dose of self-seel concern on the part of US business concerns. Feis consistently ignores the rol business community in forming US foreign policy consensus. To see this clear certainly have to read Barnett's account.

This selective coverage given to events of the Cold War period is best seen in that it covers the Soviet involvement in Eastern Europe. It was, turning to the Feis text, the installation of the Lublin Poles to power in Poland which, as an example of Soviet good intentions, served as the catalyst for US distrust of Soviet intentions. Contrary to the involvement in Poland, as of the rest of Soviet involvement in Eastern Europe, "accords which the American Government had thought to be clear and valid were distorted." (Feis, 173). The account which Feis gives of the initial souring of US relations include war reparations exacted from Germany by Russia, the US termination of US disengagement from the Chinese nationalists and the development of the US containment policy (which is entirely absent in the Barnett account).

Certainly, after the subjugation of the Poles, the US had best beware of Soviet attempts at autonomous democracies for Eastern Europe. Feis argues that Soviet intentions for some type of strategic buffer zone in the region were probably sincere, but by the time they sought to justify Soviet aggression in Eastern Europe. Reading Barnett, one would never get the impression that the Soviet Union expanded its sphere of influence greatly during the period of 1945-1950, that, as Barnett ceaselessly ferrets out US policy inconsistencies, he selects his information carefully as does Feis. He refers numerous times to the US support of a representative government in Brazil during the 1960s but ignores the manner in which the Soviet Union expanded into Eastern Europe during the late 1940s and 1950s. Although perhaps this omission is glaring to the careful observer.

It should be noted, to Feis's further credit, that his article is more extensive and a more careful consideration of primary sources and their origins (such as the Truman Doctrine and Kennan's Long Telegram). This produces a few interesting insights which Barnett's account lacks and evokes sympathy for the perception of US policy as seen through the eyes of French diplomats, even if their fears appear to be greatly exaggerated.

It is these apprehensions, these "paranoias", which dominated the thinking of the US during this immediate Cold War period following WWII that Feis relates best. In Feis's account, quite obviously, absolutely no mention of the affects of the interaction between the US Government and the US public in the forming of the Cold War consensus. Contrary to the US Government seems to be acting in a veritable vacuum and arriving at decision-making without public autonomy. This executive privilege of the national security elite, only implied by Barnett, is a substantial portion of Barnett's argument. As Barnett observes, the "national security managers" submit to the limitations which public opinion places upon foreign policy over time as they mold that public opinion. He argues that, "though the world of national security is an elite preserve, it is evident that those who make foreign policy always have one thing in common: a reaction." (Barnett, 266).

Furthermore, Barnett assails the myth of "monolithic" Communism aimed at world domination. This myth, according to Barnett was created by the US Government by playing upon the people's Calvinistic fears of the Communist political system about which they knew nothing. Barnett holds that, during the period of the Cold War, "anticommunism was a kind of glue to hold a rapidly fragmenting society together." (Barnett, 255).

It should be carefully noted that in his analysis, Barnett probes the motivations behind US foreign policy much more deeply than Feis would ever consider doing. For example, the influence of the Catholic Church, organized labor and the media in enlisting public support for US foreign policies. Significantly, Barnett is just as unsympathetic with the Catholic hierarchy and its anti-Russian sentiment in the US as he is with the "national security managers" and their visceral anticommunism into foreign policy. The roots of anticommunism, so often synonymous for Barnett with the roots of war, include not only the "paranoid" reaction of government officials but also the vicious reaction of Catholic clergy, union bosses and the media. Here, Barnett's otherwise generalized and sweeping analysis is more careful and more

Sympathy with Feis or Barnet, like sympathy with the Cold War diplomats (US or Soviet) is greatly dependent upon the reader's own political orientation. The commentator for *The New York Times*, noted that "those who feel the American since the end of WWII, especially as it relates to Vietnam, is a signal success with Richard Barnet's critical investigation of who makes the policy and how it is done." The *Roots of War* vary from the condescendingly critical review by Warren F. Kimball in the conservative Catholic magazine *America* to that of the conspicuously positive critic in the more liberal *The Nation*. *The Nation* raves, "one has come to expect the important books of Richard Barnet. This time he has surpassed himself." Kimball finds that, in *Roots of War*, "often facts which diminish his [Barnet's] argument and the book is "more of a plea than a history" (Kimball, 537).

The less committed reviews of *Roots of War* remain fairly objective and professional from Barnet's work. These, however, consistently take Barnet to task for his criticism of those who exercise power and weak on solutions which would promote the use of power. According to E. Berkley Thomas, in the *Saturday Review*, "unfortunately [Barnet's] apocalyptic formulas for the future do not possess the cogency of his critiques of the past." The general tone of the aged and at that time ailing Feis provided for less sordid reviews. The general tone of *From Trust to Terror* is summed up in *The New York Times* by Richard R. Lingeman, who states that "Mr. Feis does little more than the admittedly considerable job of moving from trust to terror".

The common criticism issued against Barnet, that of lacking a positive approach to the end of the Cold War, is also a problem to be found in *From Trust to Terror*. Feis is bewildered as to the future of the Cold War and leaves those problems which his generation had seen growing to the next generation to solve. He closes by adding that the US and the USSR that together "we must turn over the tale to the philosopher since-born." (Feis, 412). He asks rhetorically, "will they resign themselves? Or will they rebel against the past and reform?" (Feis, 412). Barnet, in his conclusion, urges solutions as a reduction of the national security bureaucracy, a lessening of the growth in US business circles and a greater participation of the public in the foreign policy. Barnet concludes that "we can have a chance for a generation of peace if the American people demand it and are prepared to build a society rooted in the past" (Barnet, 341).

How this is to be accomplished he does not say, but perhaps that is the topic for another book. That neither Feis nor Barnet can offer a concise plan for deescalating the Cold War. Even thirty years after the end of WWII and the onset of the Cold War, the debate in the US over whether or not the de-escalation of the Cold War should even be a government policy. After listening to President Ronald Reagan's address to the American people in 1981, one is reminded of President Truman's calling for aid for the embattled Greeks in 1947. Though the specifics are different, the scenario is quite similar. The message to the American public is the same - "monolithic" Communism is assaulting the "free world." The Cold War rages today and we are no closer to peaceful coexistence with the Soviet Union than we were thirty years ago.

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