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Rolf Steininger, *Der vergessene Krieg: Korea 1950–1953*. Munich: Olzog Verlag, 2006. 247 pp. €24.90.

*Reviewed by Bernd Bonwetsch, Deutsches Historisches Institut Moskau*

The war in Korea—is it really forgotten? Of course it is not, as Rolf Steininger, a professor of contemporary history at the University of Innsbruck, explains in his conclusion. But public memory, much like individual memory, is subject to many unintended influences and variations that depend on changes in the perception of the outside world. Memory also depends on public commemoration. In South Korea, for example, where the army is kept on almost permanent alert and officers even today are constantly ready to defend against a surprise attack, the “War” has never left people’s minds. The war and its commemoration are omnipresent in daily life. But in the United States, as Steininger plausibly argues, the Korean War at least for a time left public memory, “forgotten” between the memory of the “good” World War II and the “bad” war in Vietnam.

Historical memory is not the subject of Steininger’s book on the Korean War, but in a way the aim of *Der vergessene Krieg* is to bring the Korean War back to the public memory in German-speaking countries. The book is addressed to a general, modern reader who wants a concise account drawing on the latest scholarly research available—not the least from Internet and electronic sources. The book is relatively compact (140 pages of text, including document facsimiles), reads easily, and puts notes, glossary, biographical comments, and observations on sources at the end allowing readers to maintain the illusion of reading a thriller.

But this is no work of fiction, unlike many other books (and films and television series) on the Korean War. Instead, the reader has much to gain from Steininger’s deep knowledge of the matter and from his ability to differentiate between important and unimportant details, a welcome skill in such a compact book. Steininger is particularly familiar with the latest research on Western, especially U.S. and West German, policies. His discussion of U.S. policies is especially lively, often reading like a thriller. On many crucial questions—proposals to limit the war to the Korean peninsula or extend it beyond the Yalu to China and thus, possibly, turn it into a third world war; the possible use of tactical and strategic nuclear weapons; the conflict between Truman and MacArthur; Korea and its consequences for West German rearmament; Korea and the development of the bipolar international system—Steininger is well informed and conveys the material well.

The other “side of the moon” does not remain “dark,” but it is considerably less illuminated. Josif Stalin’s plans and ambitions in East Asia, Western Europe, and the United States are mentioned only fragmentarily and without the same level of knowledge and information. Stalin’s strange decision to order the Soviet ambassador to the United Nations (UN), Yakov Malik, to boycott the UN Security Council session on 27 June 1950, against the strong advice of the Soviet Foreign Ministry, goes unmentioned here. Stalin’s decision in January 1951 to order the East European states to embark on crash buildups of their armed forces—an action that was first disclosed in the

late 1970s in the book *30 ans de secrets du Bloc Soviétique* by the Czech historian Karel Kaplan, based on documents he had seen in the Czechoslovak Communist Party archives in 1968—might have been “something like the counterpart to Washington’s NSC 68” (p. 183), as Steininger suggests. But at this point no one really knows. The same applies to Stalin’s apparent role in preventing the armistice talks from making any headway after July 1951. Steininger’s assumption that Stalin wanted to keep China dependent on the Soviet Union is similar to his assumption that Stalin wanted to keep the United States engaged in what General Omar Bradley famously described as the “wrong war” at the wrong place and the wrong time with the wrong enemy (pp. 182–183). But whether it was really Stalin and only Stalin who was responsible for the prolongation of the war, Steininger cannot tell us. The inaccessibility of key documents means that these and many other crucial aspects of Soviet policies, not to mention Chinese and North Korean plans and actions, are as yet unknowable.

When discussing the Communist side of the war, Steininger writes mainly on the basis of what has been published since the break-up of the Soviet Union and the transfer of declassified Soviet documents to the South Korean government in the 1990s. The content of these documents is still not widely known and is therefore useful to include here, though it is sometimes contradictory and rarely verified. Compared with the enormous amount of information about Western policies, what we know (or think we know) about the Communist states is minimal. The book tells us nothing about possible differences among the Soviet Union, China, and North Korea or about possible disagreements within the leading political bodies of these states. The unavailability of requisite sources largely accounts for these gaps, though perhaps Steininger could have done more with what is currently accessible.

This reviewer detected only one factual mistake in the book: Terentii Shtykov, the Soviet ambassador in Pyongyang before and during the first months of the war, was never a “supreme commander.” Although he held the formal rank of a general, he was not a professional military officer. Instead, he made his career in the Communist Party and had served as a political officer in the Soviet armed forces (p. 32).

One can only express admiration for Steininger’s ability to present the Korean War in its historical context as informatively and attractively as he does. *Der vergessene Krieg* is recommended reading for everyone interested but not specialized in the history of the Korean War.



Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945–1961*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003. 317 pp.

*Reviewed by Gordon H. Chang, Stanford University*

This is a smart and ambitious book that explores more terrain than the title suggests. It also delivers less than it promises. Traditional diplomatic historians of the Cold War will find portions useful and insightful, especially about the domestic popular culture