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H-Diplo Review Essay on George Shultz. *Issues on My Mind: Strategies for the Future.*
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URL: <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/essays/PDF/Nichols-Schultz.pdf>

Reviewed for H-Diplo by Tom Nichols, Naval War College

Few people have earned the right to give a book a title as simple as *Issues on My Mind*, but George Shultz, America's 60th Secretary of State, is one of them. (He also headed the departments of Treasury and Labor, and the Office of Management and Budget, among other posts.) As the title implies, the book is an exploration of Shultz's thoughts in six areas: governance, economic policy, energy, drug policy, diplomacy, and nuclear weapons.

The book is not structured around a conventional narrative. Rather, Shultz has some introductory materials in each section, and then he adds various speeches and articles, as a kind of intellectual scrapbooking of his views and those of others whom he respects. As Shultz modestly says at the outset, he has collected his thoughts on issues "of critical importance that [have] been on my mind for many years," and he hopes that his "observations...based on the insights I have gained through personal experiences" may be "useful." (7)

The former Secretary of State is a formidable and experienced diplomat and academic, and his views are always worth considering. Unfortunately, this is less an exploration of important topics than it is a kind of cobbling together of Shultz's words of wisdom. Readers will not find much that is novel or controversial, although Shultz's direct and concise observations on issues like leadership should earn the book a place on every executive's desk. (What is obvious to a man of long experience is not always apparent to people caught up in the quotidian burdens of daily management.)

The book is mostly useful as a primer in basic issues for the general reader, but specialists will find little ground for further policy analysis here. Does anyone disagree, for example, that the 'war on drugs' as conceptualized in the 1970s and 1980s has failed? No, and neither does Secretary Shultz, who has long argued that the problem is demand, not supply, and who now implores us to lift the "taboo" on real debate. (61) Of course, that taboo was

lifted decades ago and drastic changes have already taken place (as any resident of Colorado knows). The idea that we need new leadership in a debate on drugs is inherently sensible, but it is a dated observation; a lot has happened since the anecdote Shultz relates about attending a United Nations conference in 1988 with First Lady Nancy Reagan.

In the areas of most interest to scholars of international relations, including diplomacy and nuclear weapons, Secretary Shultz mostly presents arguments and anecdotes he has already offered elsewhere. He repeats a terrific story he has told for years, for example, of being “handbagged” by Margaret Thatcher – yes, the British Prime Minister really did whack the U.S. Secretary of State with a purse – for letting President Ronald Reagan even *think* of discussing full nuclear disarmament with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev in 1986. (91) Shultz recapitulates the remarkable efforts he and other former senior leaders (including former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, former Secretary of Defense William Perry, and retired Senator Sam Nunn) have made to press for nuclear reductions, but readers will not find anything here that has not been said since the original “Gang of Four” declaration by Shultz and his colleagues in 2008.

The end of the chapter on nuclear arms illustrates the overall problem with the book’s structure. Shultz reminds us that where nuclear weapons are concerned, “difficult work and real dangers lie ahead.” (99) Well, yes, they do, but unfortunately the book is laden with these kinds of after-dinner closers that sap the discussion of urgency. On energy, Shultz writes that “the energy industry is entering a period of radical change and great opportunity. We need to think strategically about these potential changes...” (52) Of course we do; no one favors thinking un-strategically about energy or anything else. On governance we are told that “freedom of speech is central today as we witness protests against arbitrary authority,” and so on. (25) These things are true, but they are not much to go on once the chapters have ended.

In part, this is because the book itself is deceptively short. The actual chapters only occupy 106 pages out of 376; the rest are collected speeches, pictures, op-eds, and articles. In a way, this actually increases the value of the volume, since it makes it a kind of short introduction to the life and views of George Shultz for the general reader. Novice students of diplomacy and public affairs, in particular, should not proceed a step further if they are not familiar with Shultz’s works, which arguably are more relevant to the challenges of the twenty-first century than those of his more widely-read colleagues like Kissinger. Still, although the book is written in an accessible way that is clearly intended to reach the policy-conscious general reader, I’m not sure that a wider readership will relate to Shultz’s golf analogies, or to his memories of coaching football at Princeton as a guide to better government.

None of this is to deny the value of revisiting important issues with one of America’s most consequential Secretaries of State. But *Issues on My Mind* should be viewed as a kind of coda or reference addition to Shultz’s memoirs, rather than a stand-alone volume. Scholars of public policy will not find much they have not heard before, but the book nonetheless is useful as a quick compendium of Shultz’s views on a variety of topics – indeed, perhaps too

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many for one book – as well as the overdue collection in one volume of some of Secretary Shultz’s best anecdotes.

Tom Nichols is a Professor in the National Security Affairs Department at the U.S. Naval War College, a senior associate of the Carnegie Council on Ethics and International Affairs, and an adjunct at Harvard Extension School. He was personal staff for defense and security affairs in the United States Senate to the late Senator John Heinz of Pennsylvania. He holds a Ph.D. from Georgetown University, and the Certificate of the Harriman Institute for Advanced Study of the Soviet Union at Columbia University. His most recent book is *No Use: Nuclear Weapons and U.S. National Security* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014).

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