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Andreas Wenger. *Living With Peril: Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Nuclear Weapons.* Lanham, Md. and Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1997. xvi + 461 pp. $34.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8476-8515-8; $104.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8476-8514-1.

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The author poses a clear objective of analyzing how U.S. political elites comprehended and dealt with the shift in the nuclear balance from U.S. superiority to Soviet-American nuclear parity. He properly contends that this shift occurred within the administrations of Dwight Eisenhower and John Kennedy. He chose this period for analysis because it raises many important questions historically as well as for the present. It was not a foregone conclusion that the loss of American nuclear superiority would occur smoothly and without destabilizing the super-power relationship. In the end, the author concludes that we should be grateful that Eisenhower and Kennedy were both capable of learning during this pivotal time.

STYLISTIC COMMENTS

The author grounds his analysis firmly in the words of high-ranking officials including the Presidents, in the two administrations. Many of the narrative accounts are densely written and pursue extremely subtle nuances in strategic military thought. It is easy to get turned around and to lose sight of the fundamental points of the debate. However, the author limits this problem by carefully and consistently providing wonderful summaries at the end of each chapter. Non-experts could benefit from the book by reading the opening sections and summaries of each chapter. Nuclear strategy afficiandos will find great pleasure in the meaty sections within each of the substantiative chapters. At times, material was repeated too much and I was bothered by the redundancy, but at other times I was grateful for the recapitulation and reminders.

In contrast to the exhaustive research of archival material the author seemed to be rather narrow in his reliance upon the analytical work of other scholars. Some authors, notably Marc Trachtenberg, John Lewis Gaddis, and McGeorge Bundy appeared in the footnotes and text with alarming regularity. The works of these authors are certainly commendable, and frequently brilliant, but the book's analysis could have benefited on occasion from casting a wider net. Particular examples of works which were not consulted include the classic work of Glenn Snyder and Paul Diesing, *Conflict Among Nations*, which would have contributed insights into the role played by perceptions of resolve in crises, and the recent work by Richard Ned Lebow and Janice Gross Stein, *We All Lost the Cold War*, which would have provided additional evidence and compelling interpretations of the Cuban Missile Crisis. However, this criticism should not be overdrawn, and it is in a sense unfair to criticize someone for not reading everything that I have read, especially in a work which is, on the whole, meticulously documented and researched.

SUBSTANTIVE COMMENTS

While this book adds to an already substantial literature on the evolution of nuclear policies, *Living With Peril* makes a number of important contributions. First, it isolates a pivotal period, one which is usually considered alongside other periods and developments. Second, it draws upon a combination of solid classical analyses of various episodes within the time frame and government sources. The author clearly synthesizes the existing literature and draws extensively upon a multitude of recently declassified government documents and memoranda to shed new light on the issues and events. Sometimes this simply clarifies earlier suppositions, but it sometimes leads the author to dispute the conclusions drawn by others. Along the way, the author provides persuasive explanations for some nuclear-age puzzles, such as why a fiscally conservative President like Eisenhower was unable to limit the U.S. nuclear arsenal to the size that he thought was appropriate. Third, by drawing so extensively upon insider information, the author is able to explode the black box of the state and permit us to see how institutional and personality factors were influenced by the changing nuclear balance and how they shaped the U.S. response to those changes. However, this book does not adopt a bureaucratic explanation. Rather, the insti-

tutional debates add depth and complexity to our understanding of the nuclear issues of the times. Fourth, the detailed accounts of governmental debates contributes much valuable material to the analytical literature devoted to the question of nuclear learning.

The book pays close attention to three major international crises in which nuclear weapons and the nuclear balance played important, but perhaps not fully understood, roles. These crises are the Korean War, the Berlin Crises of 1958-1963, and the Cuban Missile Crisis. An unexplained omission is the Taiwan Straits Crises. In a footnote, the author acknowledges the absence and agrees that they would be very useful for the type of analysis he was undertaking but provided no justification for the exclusion. In each case analyzed the author scrutinizes the thinking of policy-makers during the decision-making period, as well as their interpretations of the events afterward. The major claim which the author makes is that as the nuclear balance changed, American leaders realized the declining political importance of nuclear superiority during crisis periods, with perceptions of resolve replacing them in importance. Along with this, leaders came to realize that the greatest threat was not Soviet weapons per se, but rather the total number of nuclear weapons and the associated destructive capacity. This sense becomes firmly established with the Cuban Missile Crisis, which revealed to leaders of both super-powers that they had a common interest in avoiding nuclear war. Thus, the sum total of nuclear power rather than the specifics of the nuclear balance predominated in the minds of the decision-makers.

Of particular importance to the analysis in the book and to evaluations of nuclear history in general is the question of the political importance of nuclear weapons, and especially of nuclear superiority. Robert McNamara has long contended that under conditions of Mutual Assured Destruction, the only purpose of nuclear weapons was to deter other nuclear weapons. They have no other military or political purpose. While serving in the Nixon administration, Henry Kissinger reportedly asked in desperation what the purpose of nuclear superiority was, implying that he saw none. Even if one accepts these views, the question of the political significance of nuclear weapons before Mutual Assured Destruction is still open for debate. And this is one of the virtues of this book's focus on the time frame leading up to MAD. The author presents an extremely forceful case that the most important political purpose of American nuclear superiority was to reassure the European allies. Time and again, the author uncovers the often overlooked dimension of alliance politics to explain U.S. policies and rhetoric. At one level, the question of allies, in the form of extended deterrence, is nothing new to nuclear analyses. It has been widely recognized that the problem of extending a nuclear umbrella in large measure defined the central dilemma of the nuclear age as far as American decision-makers and strategists were concerned. This book contributes to our understanding of these matters by turning our focus away from the problem of deterring Soviet attack on U.S. allies, (though he does discuss this as well) to how the need to reassure our allies of our credibility shaped U.S. decisions. This insight helps explain certain otherwise peculiar patterns of behavior. For instance, President Eisenhower put aside his fiscal conservatism and supported larger defense budgets than he thought were militarily justified, in order to reassure the Europeans that the United States was not about to retreat into a Fortress America. This perspective supplements the traditional bureaucratic explanation advanced by Eisenhower himself in his farewell address. The author convincingly argues that it was European uneasiness with the rise of Soviet nuclear parity, and the impact this would have on American resolve to defend Europe which constantly demanded attention. He argues that the Kennedy administration accelerated U.S. defense spending increases even though it recognized the strategic nuclear balance strongly favored the United States, because any other action would signal to the Europeans as well as the Soviets that American resolve was wavering. The author reminds us that the Kennedy administration's budget decisions were shaped in the context of the ongoing Berlin Crisis which it had inherited. He advances the provocative claim that the Kennedy administration strategic nuclear and conventional build-up was primarily not intended to bolster the ability to actually defend Berlin, but rather to signal U.S. resolve. This interpretation expands earlier interpretations which had emphasized how the growth in the Soviet nuclear arsenal had transformed the rivalry so that crises had replaced war as the means by which strength was tested. This book extends this by claiming that in the Berlin crisis at least, military acquisition decisions, rather than increased levels of military alert, etc., helped settle the crisis. Less convincing are the book's arguments about the extent of nuclear learning which occurred in the two administrations. The author convincingly claims that Eisenhower, unlike many advisers and strategists, foresaw the stability that would emerge from mutual vulnerability. However, he also claims that although Eisenhower and Dulles believed in the positive role of nuclear threats in resolving the Korean War, they somehow also learned the political and military limitations of nuclear

weapons. Certainly, both learned about the limited ability of translating nuclear advantage into political advantage. However, the author's own analysis of the Korean War does not seem to support this conclusion. In this case, it seems the author was shaping his conclusion to fit the larger argument advanced in the book regarding the degree of nuclear learning.

The book's conclusion regarding the combination of nuclear learning at the presidential level and the stabilizing effect of absolute growth in nuclear arsenals and emerging nuclear parity, also raises questions. It may be impossible to untangle the two, but the cases the author uses, particularly the Berlin and Cuban Missile crises, seem to argue that on the one hand, the nuclear balance was not very stable since it did not prevent the crises, and on the other hand, the crises were finally resolved by what went on in the heads of the leaders. Eisenhower may have been right about the stability of nuclear parity, but it was not yet clear that that was the case in 1963. Thus, stability ultimately finds its source in the minds of men rather than in military balances or stockpiles.

CONCLUSION

This is a meticulously researched and well-written analysis of a very important historical period, and of a very important set of issues involving nuclear history. It makes new contributions in many areas, and addresses several perennial questions and sheds much new light on them. Some of the analytical conclusions are in line with pervious interpretations, but usually the book provides either greater depth by drawing on new materials, or by focusing on a new angle. This book is probably too focused on nuclear issues to be useful in any college course devoted to broader foreign policy topics. Much of the narrative is extremely subtle and probably out of the range of most undergraduates. However, it should be highly recommended to historians of the nuclear age, and to students pursuing research topics in this area or time period. It provides all researchers a wealth of new information and quotes.

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