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David H. Dunn. *The Politics of Threat: Minuteman Vulnerability in American National Security Policy.* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997. xii + 289 pp. $65.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-312-17611-2.

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For someone who served as a mid-level Foreign Service Officer in the Department of State working on arms control during the seventies, this book has a ring of deja vu about it. After spending months and years trying to understand the complex and arcane world of arms control, it gradually began to dawn on me that the real debate was not about arms control; it was about politics. This was especially clear in the debates between the infamous Team A and Team B. Having known and respected some of the players, it became clear in the course of conversations that what was really at stake was a certain perception of reality (the Hobbesian man vs. the Roussean one). How much trust could we place in our fellow man–in this case the Soviets? While most agreed that Moscow was far from the most congenial of negotiating partners, most of us felt that we could do certain things to improve the overall relationship. But to do so we had to deal with the issue of ICBM vulnerability; an issue that constantly raised its ugly head every time the question of nuclear arms control came up.

This is the main reason why Dunn's book is so useful and why it will be so controversial–especially among those who took the theology of nuclear arms control so seriously. In essence, Dunn argues that it was politics, not arms control that drove the debate about ICBM vulnerability, from its very beginning until the Reagan Administration when it was more or less forgotten (without being solved).

Some readers may take exception to Dunn's argument that part of the concern on the part of Americans was psychological–the idea that we were vulnerable to potential enemies beyond the pond separating us from Europe. For my part, I would argue that this concern goes back to isolationism–a desire to minimize our relations with the outside world, especially if it means making ourselves even partially dependent on another country. Indeed, we see the same theme being replayed today when it comes to an economically and technologically interdependent world–regardless of whether it deals with NAFTA or the EU. Many Americans–especially conservatives–find it very difficult to be dependent on anyone outside the borders of the U.S.

As Dunn notes, the ideological imperative also played an important role in that it exacerbated fears in the minds of those on the right. Not only were we vulnerable, but we were locked in a deadly, no-holds barred contest with the "evil empire." Dunn notes, but in my opinion underestimates the influence of, Generals Danny Graham and George Keegan. Both played a key role in hyping the danger represented by Moscow. Civil defense–a key component in our ability to avoid vulnerability–was an area the Soviets had won. The long and the short of this psychosis was that it became more difficult to come up with a meaningful negotiating position on our side. Besides, one of the more negative impacts of Keegan, in particular, was his decision to bring right wingers into the government–individuals who made rational foreign policy difficult for years to come.

Another major plus of the Dunn book is that it is very readable. Having plowed through a number of sterile volumes on strategic thought, I think this is one of the most readable. The author clearly understands the complexity of nuclear arms control, but he has an excellent ability to make it comprehensible for the average reader.

Dunn's bottom line is that there is no such thing as an apolitical debate in Washington. Almost all of them are wrapped (e.g., disguised) in "factual" terms, but for those of us who have been inside, the first question we ask is who is after what. Objectivity quickly gets lost (if it ever was present). This is the real value of Dunn's book, and it is the primary reason that those who took nuclear arms control seriously and thought they were being totally objective will find it upsetting. Regardless of how bothersome such individuals find the book, however, I doubt that they will be able to avoid dealing with the key issues it raises.

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