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Gretchen Heefner. *The Missile Next Door: The Minuteman in the American Heartland.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012. 320 pp. $35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-674-05911-5.

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Missile Fields on the Great Plains

One does not typically think of the American Great Plains as a frontline of the Cold War. The Fulda Gap in Germany (the "frontline of freedom" to a good friend of mine who was commissioned as an army officer in 1989 and stationed there), Alaska and the Arctic Circle, Japan, South Korea, and perhaps even the Middle East come to mind. Yet, according to historian Gretchen Heefner, the Great Plains became an almost invisible frontline of the Cold War. The fact that the American people largely saw it as invisible, if they ever saw it at all, leads to one of her primary arguments: policymakers, the U.S. Air Force, its supporting think tanks, and its associated corporate suppliers and support groups were successful in "selling" this invisible security to the American public. Heefner also, however, does not leave out public agency or the USSR as factors in the sales job. To be sold something, the American public had to be in the market and willing to buy. According to Heefner, Sputnik put them there and Defense Department financial largesse kept them there.

Heefner is clearly after big things. Her main argument is that the United States, and even historians, have not yet dealt with the role that Cold War defense spending and all of its implications have played in modern American history. The Minuteman missiles are, to her, a metaphor or at least an example of that lack of ability or unwillingness to come to grips with a long, expensive conflict that did so much to change American political culture, dislocate much of the American economy, and transform U.S. societal values. In fact, she argues that continued high defense budgets that have not always been necessary have persisted in causing similar problems for American society. In addition, she asserts that post-Cold War historical veneration of the missiles themselves illustrates how this new type of American militarism focuses on military technology, rather than military personnel, as the real "heroes" of the Cold War.

Heefner is not shy about asserting her opposition to the size, if not the basic existence, of the missile programs. Central to her thesis is to illustrate the damage that the expense of these programs, in particular, and the Cold War, in general, have done to the United States. While her opposition to the very thing she is studying might strike some as biased, she is also open about where her work stands. In this context, she is not at all reluctant to point out where she thinks scholars and policymakers have previously downplayed the impact of the arms race, gotten things wrong, or even been part of the military-industrial complex itself and employed their scholarship to justify the national security state.

Heefner is also interested in how the "missile fields" and the "nuclear geography" of a "sameness" region came to epitomize an area of the country that was specifically chosen for this role because of its remoteness to other areas of the United States. The remoteness of the Great Plains, in turn, allowed the rest of the country to enjoy the security of Mutual Assured Destruction and the nuclear war fighting strategies developed between the 1950s and the 1980s without directly paying the price of being the host. In this context, she is also interested in the thoughts of the people in this region as they became tied more and more to a national security state that they did not always trust but that increasingly came to represent an economic prosperity they had not known before. In this respect, her work is as much a history of the recent American West as it is an understudied aspect of Cold War U.S. national defense strategy. In addition, her book is one of a few monographs so far that explores how the Cold War affected everyday Americans as opposed to policymakers, planners, and strategic thinkers.

Heefner's sources are wide ranging and seriously explored. She has mined declassified government planning and intelligence documents, as well as official histories. Beyond that, however, she interviewed participants both in and out of government; researched books,

magazines, and journals; looked at advertisements from various sources; employed what little secondary literature exists on this subject; and even researched period textbooks for cultural constructs about the Cold War and American military history.

The book is not entirely devoid of flaws. For instance, Heefner claims early in the book that until the Defense Department was established after World War Two, the United States only had a temporary wartime War Department, in spite of the fact that the War Department existed permanently back in the 1790s. In addition, she does not make clear why she chose to focus so heavily on South Dakota as opposed to the other states that had substantial missile fields, such as North Dakota.

More generally, Heefner devotes an entire chapter to the antinuclear movement of the 1970s and 1980s, with a particular focus on a very small number of political and social activists in South Dakota. Yet, as she notes several times in her book, the majority of people who lived in the missile fields believed in the nation's deterrent strategy, largely accepted the federal government's explanations, and thought of protest practically as treason. Nevertheless, she allocates no more than a few pages to analyzing this majority, usually finding their motives simply in patriotism and profit, while devoting an entire chapter to an albeit interesting yet exceedingly small group of activists. While Heefner is to be commended for analyzing all aspects of this history and demonstrating the nuanced nature of conservative-based social activism in the missile fields, that kind of imbalance in the book could have been dealt with differently.

I also find myself in disagreement with her assessment of the George H. W. Bush administration's arms control diplomacy and foreign policy at the end of the Cold War. Yes, on the one hand, arms control measures perhaps should have gone faster and developments been more significant, especially the drawing down of the defense budget in general. On the other hand, if there had not been as astute a diplomat in the White House at that time, along with the national security team he had assembled, events could have gone very badly. It is difficult to fight a forty-five-year Cold War, but it is perhaps even more difficult to back off from one, and hasty moves by either side could have caused even more problems. Heefner, perhaps, should have at least explored that alternative while enunciating her criticisms.

In conclusion, I think that Heefner has produced a highly important monograph on an understudied topic. Some reorganization, however, and some further analysis of aspects of this history, which perhaps do not agree with her own politics, is in order. Still, the book is an important addition to a very small historiography and it is hoped that she will continue her research and that other historians will follow her lead.

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