

Thomas Mahnken, Joseph Maiolo, David Stevenson (eds.): Arms Races in International Politics. From the Nineteenth to the Twentieth Century, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2016, 322 p.

Review by
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Ever since the Trump administration issued its nuclear policy in February 2018, envisioning to rebuild the United States' nuclear arsenal to counter Russian efforts in this regard, the danger of a new nuclear arms race between the former superpowers of the Cold War is back in the spotlight.¹ As this recent episode underscores, arms races are of enduring relevancy in international politics and, at the same time, have a long history. Against this background, the volume edited by Thomas Mahnken, Joseph Maiolo and David Stevenson is a timely and welcome contribution. Closing a gap in the literature, it aims to be no less than "the first connected historical survey of the modern arms race phenomenon in its totality" (pp. 8-9).²

Besides an overarching introduction (Maiolo) and conclusion (Stevenson), the volume consists of twelve articles by individual scholars, organized in four sections that each start with a short introductory overview by one of the editors. Part I focuses on the European naval (Seligmann) and land (Stevenson) arms races beginning in the 19th century and leading up to the First World War. Part II deals with the

period preceding the Second World War, with contributions on land (Mawdsley), naval (Maiolo) and air armaments (Overy). Part III is dedicated to the Cold War, focusing on the United States (Hoyt) and Soviet Union (Radchenko), with a third chapter on other actors than the superpowers (Mastny). Finally, Part IV, even more wide-ranging than the sections before, deals on the one hand with arms races outside Europe, looking at the Arab-Israeli conflict during the Cold War period (Kober) and the arms rivalry between India and Pakistan from 1953 to 1965 (Chaudhuri). The other two articles concentrate on arms races after the end of the Cold War, specifically in Asia (Cheung) and between the United States and its global competitors (Mahnken).

To bring some analytical order to this wide spectrum of research topics, which are tied to quite different historical contexts, the authors had been encouraged by the editors to address two main questions: Which factors fuel arms races and what relationship exists between arms races and the beginning of war? (p. 6) In addition, in his introduction editor Joseph Maiolo offers three explanatory models – technological change, domestic political factors and the dynamics of an action-reaction cycle – to be put to the test in the volume's empirical case studies (pp. 6-8). Although the authors differ in how strongly they make use of these analytical propositions in their articles, the volume's contributions taken together represent an impressive accomplishment that anyone dealing with the history of arms races and arms control will have to take into consideration for further research.

What historians usually suspect but cannot further substantiate beyond their narrower field of research, this volume is able to attest empirically, namely that the explanatory power of theoretical models and assumptions in regard to arms races are only of relative usefulness and validity (pp. 287-289). Moreover, the individual articles are knowledgeable across-the-board and provide helpful, oftentimes almost encyclopedic overviews of the given topics. The complexity of the arms race phenomenon is skillfully carved out in general (pp. 1-6) and its relevance and heuristic potential as an “intersection of (...) political, diplomatic, technological, economic, and ideological, as well as military” (p. 6) spheres, even as “framework for an alternative map of the past” (p. 287), is emphasized convincingly.

Yet, in subtle ways, the very broad chronological and geographical range the contributions encompass undermines the attempt to make the volume’s research object more manageable. Put differently, not reading these articles selectively but in their consecutive order makes one wonder if the chosen concentration on arms is not more artificial than it seems at first glance. For the overall narrative that emerges is often barely distinguishable from a general and well-known perspective focused on military history and war (planning). The most striking example is the interwar period resulting in the Second World War. Its outbreak, as the authors are all too aware (e.g. pp. 67, 91, 114), can still be best explained by considering ideological and political factors rather than the impact of arms competitions. In fact, here these armaments manifest as subordinate fac-

tors, influencing “the timing of hostilities” (p. 292) at best.

This leads to the essential question of the relationship and hierarchy between politics and arms races in general. Put pointedly: Were arms races merely a dependent variable of political tensions? Or a driving factor of its own, thereby influencing politics? This is an aspect the volume touches upon over and over again, yet without addressing its methodological and analytical challenge as thoroughly as would have been desirable. During the Cold War, for example, this was a pressing issue political actors had to answer for their strategy and decision-making.³ Finally, the most significant blind spot of many contributions – with the noteworthy exception of Sergey Radchenko’s excellent article on the Soviet Union (pp. 158-175) – lies in the neglect of cultural, perceptual and symbolical dimensions of armaments and arms races. This is particularly regrettable if one considers that, for instance, the epoch-defining nuclear arms race during the Cold War was arguably as much, perhaps even more, about prestige, status and perceptions than about actual war fighting capabilities.⁴ In the end, however, these complaints neither diminish the volume’s qualities as state-of-the-art reference book on the topic, nor the thought-provoking intellectual impact it will undoubtedly have in the field, making it required reading for every historian of arms races and arms control in modern times.

Notes:

- 1 See D. E. Sanger, W. J. Broad: To Counter Russia. U.S. Signals Nuclear Arms Are Back in a Big Way, in: The New York Times, February 4, 2018, URL: <https://www.nytimes.com>

- com/2018/02/04/us/politics/trump-nuclear-russia.html (11.02.2018).
- 2 For older efforts in this regard, see G. T. Hammond, *Plowshares into Swords. Arms Races in International Politics, 1840-1991*, Columbia 1993; and with a similar timeframe yet from the supplementary perspective of arms control, the compilation by J. Goldblat, *Arms Control. A Guide to Negotiations and Agreements*, London 1994.
 - 3 For a relevant example, see the contemporary reflections US security advisor Henry Kissinger conveyed to President Richard Nixon in February 1969 on the meaning of arms races and arms control for American foreign policy and international politics, see: A. Schors, *Doppelter Boden. Die SALT-Verhandlungen 1963–1979*, Göttingen 2016, p. 82; Memorandum from the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon, Washington, February 18, 1969, in: E. C. Keefer (ed.), *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS), 1969-1976, Vol. XII. Soviet Union, January 1969-October 1970*, Washington, D.C. 2006, p. 49-52, p. 51.
 - 4 See, for example, J. Suri, *Logiken der atomaren Abschreckung oder Politik mit der Bombe*, in: B. Greiner, Ch. Th. Müller, D. Walter (eds.), *Krisen im Kalten Krieg*, Hamburg 2008, p. 24-47, p. 34.

Dierk Hoffmann, Andreas Malycha (Hrsg.): Erdöl, Mais und Devisen. Die ostdeutsch-sowjetischen Wirtschaftsbeziehungen 1951–1967. Eine Dokumentation (= Schriftenreihe der Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte, Bd. 113), Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg 2016, 250 S.

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Ziel der Publikation ist es, den Wandel der Wirtschaftsbeziehungen zwischen der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik (DDR) und der Union der Sozialistischen Sowjetrepubliken (UdSSR) in den 1950er und 1960er Jahren darzustellen. Die ausgewählten Dokumente sollen zeigen, dass sich in diesem Zeitraum die ökonomischen Beziehungen der DDR zur UdSSR weg von Reparationslieferungen hin zu einer privilegierten Abhängigkeit wandelten. Obwohl von einer echten Partnerschaft auf Augenhöhe nicht die Rede sein könne, betonen die Herausgeber, dass sich „das ostdeutsche Verhältnis zur Hegemonialmacht UdSSR nicht pauschal auf den Begriff Fremdbestimmung [...] reduzieren lässt“ (S. 3). Vielmehr wusste die Führung der DDR ihre strategische Rolle in der wirtschaftspolitischen Systemkonkurrenz zwischen (sozialer) Marktwirtschaft und Planwirtschaft zu nutzen, um ihren Handlungsspielraum schrittweise zu erweitern. Diese grundlegende Erkenntnis verdeutlicht einerseits die zentrale Relevanz der deutsch-deutschen Systemauseinanderset-