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Book Reviews

Gerard J. DeGroot, *The Bomb: A Life*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004. 397 pp. \$18.95.

Reviewed by Robert S. Norris, Natural Resources Defense Council

Anyone reading Gerard DeGroot's *The Bomb: A Life* would have to conclude that some pretty strange things happened here on planet earth when it came to trying to live with the Bomb during the second half of the twentieth century. DeGroot, a history professor at the University of St. Andrews, writes with a skeptical eye and a wry sense of humor, though his occasional attempts at a joke may cause a grimace. The book is an ambitious attempt to cover the nuclear era in a single volume, but it focuses more on the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s than on later decades. *The Bomb* is a welcome addition to the literature and might serve as a text for a course about the arms race and the Cold War.

As we move further in time from and begin reflecting on what transpired during this period, the logic, official pronouncements and explanations, and mind-set that surrounded the Bomb look more and more outlandish. Civil defense programs and the original MX intercontinental ballistic missile basing scheme are two examples among many. A new nomenclature was invented to try to make nuclear wars seem logical, palatable, and winnable. For DeGroot this reached an apotheosis in the figure of Herman Kahn, whose book *On Thermonuclear War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1960) "is a massive window into a warped mind."

DeGroot's approach is close to that in Paul Boyer's *By the Bomb's Early Light* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994) and Spencer Weart's *Nuclear Fear* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989) in recounting the cultural, social, and psychological manifestations of the Bomb. The book contains little examination of domestic policy, geopolitics, or international crises. The short chapter on the Cuban missile crisis is particularly thin, as is DeGroot's description and understanding of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). DeGroot draws on the standard works in the secondary literature and eschews any archival research into primary sources. He offers no new document discoveries or novel interpretations, but he tells a good tale in a lively and accessible manner and is an able guide in revisiting this harrowing journey. We wonder how we made it through without blowing ourselves up.

The book is descriptive rather than analytical, providing no overarching arguments that bind the work together or any attempt to explain the big issues. One theme that recurs is the bomb's effect on science and the scientists. Throughout the nuclear era, especially during the Manhattan Project and the quest for the hydrogen

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bomb that followed, scientists were attracted to the Bomb because of the sheer intellectual excitement it engendered. Ethics often took a backseat. Repeatedly, as De Groot notes, “[s]cientific possibility . . . smothered moral doubt.” A few scientists may have written agonized letters about the morality of the bomb, but thousands of others worked diligently to create weapons of ever greater lethality and quantity. This was true of scientists in the United States as well as those in the Soviet Union and elsewhere.

One of the “abiding truths of American Cold war policy” traced by DeGroot was the belief that possessing nuclear weapons provided security and that the larger the number and the better the quality of the bombs you had, the safer you would be. The two superpowers chased this chimera for decades, tempting Armageddon in the process. DeGroot does not delve deeply into what animated the arms race, and the book would have been stronger if he had explored this in more detail. One contributing cause was the interlocking interservice rivalries in the United States and the Soviet Union. The military services in each country scrambled after the newest weapons and used the threat of their opposite number as the rationale. Congress contributed its own fuel. Key members of the congressional committees on armed services and appropriations funneled enormous amounts of money to their congressional districts, and local governments and corporations were happy to receive it.

DeGroot is better at describing how the U.S. government sought to instill fear in the public. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles laid out the approach: “In order to make the country bear the burden we have to create an emotional atmosphere akin to wartime psychology. We must create the idea of a threat from without.” DeGroot could have pointed out that this technique is still being used today, although the enemy has changed. But the problem now, as then, is that being scared 24 hours a day is too burdensome, and apathy, distraction, and disbelief inevitably set in. Only the periods of real fear brought people into the streets and forced governments to respond.

Occasionally DeGroot’s book contains an alarming sentence with no footnotes to indicate where the information came from. He claims that General Leslie Groves told Harry Truman that the bomb would nullify the need for an invasion of Japan and save one-and-a-half million lives and that Josif Stalin saw the sketch of Fat Man (the bomb produced by the Manhattan Project) before Franklin Roosevelt’s death. Neither of these things actually happened. In describing how many people might have been in Hiroshima on the morning of 6 August 1945, he claims: “There were also nearly 5,000 Americans, mainly children sent to Japan after their parents—US citizens of Japanese origin—had been interned.” DeGroot offers no source for this stunning remark and blithely continues on. Had he done a little more research, he could have avoided this blunder. It is true that nationalities other than Japanese were living in Hiroshima. John Dower estimates that possibly as many as 3,200 second-generation Japanese Americans may have been in the city. They had been temporarily visiting Japan and got stranded there after Pearl Harbor. According to Dower, by extrapolating the casualty rates it is possible that as many as 1,000 American citizens—men, women, and children—were killed by the Hiroshima bomb. This is quite different from DeGroot’s assertion that many thousands of children were sent to Japan after their

parents were incarcerated during the second half of 1942 and that they were later killed by the nuclear bomb.

DeGroot moves quickly through more recent decades and concludes with a chapter detailing our present plight, which includes a disastrous health and environmental legacy in both the United States and Russia as a result of building tens of thousands of nuclear weapons and the prospect of several new countries possessing nuclear weapons. With all of this and more ahead of us, the life of The Bomb will have many more chapters.



J. V. Boone, *A Brief History of Cryptology*. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2005. 193 pp.

Reviewed by Jacques Stern, Ecole Normale Supérieure, Paris

Among the many books devoted to cryptology and its history, *A Brief History of Cryptology* has several distinctive features. First, the author, J. V. Boone, a former U.S. Air Force officer who has worked at the National Security Agency (NSA) for many years, has chosen to view cryptology as an element in a triad that also includes the closely associated fields of communications and computers, and to show how new developments in each field have had dramatic consequences for the others' progress, finally resulting in a tight integration of all three technologies. Even to those familiar with the history of cryptology, the book appears novel in revealing or at least reminding us of many facts pertaining to such things as the introduction of radio and the advent of solid-state electronics and satellites. Also, the approach adopted by Boone restores the complexity of cryptography, which is not only a matter of mathematics but a subtle combination of mathematics, technology, and brain power. A particularly inspiring example of this complexity is provided by the history of voice encryption (cryptophony), which is discussed at several places in the book.

Boone's main goal of presenting facts is a strength that allows him to give a concise overview of cryptology through the centuries, covering major achievements and activities across the field. Concise does not mean dull. On the contrary, all milestone accomplishments in the three fields are described together with an introduction to the talented people who spearheaded developments and applications. The book also includes many illustrations of the equipment and systems as well as the people involved, something that is often missing in other works on this topic, especially for the last hundred years, which the book emphasizes. These features allow Boone to tell an exciting story, despite the book's surface appearance as little more than a diary. His background assists him in this respect. In addition to his Air Force and intelligence work, he served as deputy director for research and engineering at the U.S. Department of Defense. Besides his perfect knowledge of the technical developments of the field, he has had access to the excellent iconography at the National Cryptologic Museum and of course, to many secrets. However, a warning to the reader is in order: The book it-