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Andrew Butfoy, *Disarming Proposals: Controlling Nuclear, Biological and Chemical Weapons*, Sydney, UNSW Press, 2005, reviewed by Richard Gehrman, University of Southern Queensland.

When the Berlin Wall came down and thousands of bewildered East Berliners wandered down the streets of their newly reunited capital, it appeared that a new world order might be dawning. After a decade of Reagan, Star Wars and the threat of nuclear annihilation, we in the developed world could all sleep peacefully in our beds at night. As a young university student in the 1980s, my awareness of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) had been conditioned by dramatic films such as *The Day After* (1983) which seemed to offer nothing but despair. A series of issues such as the Australian government's three uranium mines policy, the bombing of the Rainbow Warrior, the Lange government decision to prohibit the entry of nuclear weapons into New Zealand and the ever present Greenham Common protesters all conspired to make nuclear weaponry the focus of any discussion of WMD, and therefore to make the end of the Cold War appear the solution to the problem. After Gorbachev's demise, all that remained was for the various successor governments of the former Soviet state to manage the disposal of their now superfluous arsenals (the Cooperative Threat Reduction Program) and we could all move on. Subsequent horrors of ethnic cleansing in Bosnia and the Rwandan genocide seemed to be tragic but explainable in terms of ethnicity and anyway, were not concerns that would threaten those fortunate enough to

live in the comfortable and wealthy countries of the world. The boom in the Asian economies only added to a perception that issues of weapons, security and war would be supplanted in the public interest by a focus on industry, trade and commercial imperatives.

This book comes at an excellent time. WMD and Disarmament are topics that should be at the heart of public debate in Australia. Apart from the centrality of terrorism and the 2003 Iraq War (not to mention the question of North Korea), disarmament is of great interest to the wider community as well as practitioners of strategic studies and international relations. This book covers the basic who - how - what - why - when - where questions of disarmament and provides a range of stimulating answers in a concise account that is both comprehensive and free of academic jargon. Butfoy provides a well written survey of the three types of weapons, nuclear, biological and chemical, enumerating the basic differences between them. The easy availability of biological compounds such as anthrax is balanced against the difficulty in successfully disseminating them as weapons, and the author makes his concerns with misinformation on this issue evident. Indeed, the vagaries of United States policy towards WMD are covered in their own chapter in which the conditions of American exceptionalism are outlined. His assessment gives the United States a mixed score card, with much criticism but some clear praise.

Disarming Proposals does an excellent job of explaining the reality of WMD, and the author is committed to the proposition that if the current non

proliferation protocols collapse, the number of WMD states could expand to perhaps 40 states, a truly horrific prospect. The significant differences between treaty arrangements that control biological and chemical weapons and those that control nuclear weapons are clearly identified. We frequently accept the many myths about the international system and the apparent failures that plague it, yet arms control is actually very successful, and like international law is usually honoured and respected. When there are problems, these gain our attention because in comparative terms disarmament is so often problem free. As Butfoy points out, most of the states of the world actually do see acquisition of WMD as being against the norm.

Although this all seems optimistic, it is not all good news. One of the more interesting chapters deals with the problem areas of WMD control. The nature of modern scientific research means that scientific developments move faster than legal restraints and that the potential to develop latent WMD is considerable. Verification is also a major problem as was seen after both Soviet biological weapons production and Iraqi nuclear developments of the 1980s were revealed. There is clearly the tremendous potential for extensive evasion by individual states. While Butfoy rejects the argument presented by the United States to justify the 2003 invasion of Iraq, he fully supports the right of the United Nations to authorise force if the necessary legal procedures have been followed. Yet United States unilateralism is not as unique as some critics would suggest. Among others, France, India, Pakistan, Iran, Iraq and North Korea have all come in for justifiable criticism in this book. But for

collective security to be effective on a continuing basis, principled leadership by the world's superpower is essential, as is American recognition that collective security is usually a very effective mechanism in weapons control.

Moving beyond WMD issues, it is a fact that most humans killed in war die from the effects of conventional weapons, and that the most grotesque violations of elemental human security takes place in the Congo and West African conflicts, rather than in the developed world. Televised accounts of these atrocities inflicted with common assault rifles and machetes, often by child soldiers, do not usually reach us in the comfort of our suburban living rooms. Unlike WMD, these security issues are neither newsworthy nor are they a good basis for a blockbuster film script. It would be wonderful if such security issues did engage the attention of the interventionist neoconservatives in the United States administration, but this seems unlikely as perceived national interest is usually more influential in shaping policy, as is clearly the case in the newsworthy and highly visible realm of WMD control. In the 1930s, the collective security regime of the League collapsed and states realised that it was not in their interests to abide by arms limitations agreements such as the Washington Naval Agreement. It would be a tragedy if the lessons from the past were not remembered, and carefully considered. *Disarming Proposals* constitutes an informative antidote to more sensationalist accounts of WMD, and should be widely read.

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