

The Nuclear Question: The United States and Nuclear Weapons, 1946-1976

by Michael Mandelbaum
(Cambridge University Press; x + 277 pp.; \$14.95)

James T. Johnson

The author describes this book as "a history of American nuclear weapons policy," focused upon the largely unaddressed problems of what has happened in international relations since the dawn of the nuclear age, and the reasons behind these events. A secondary purpose of the book, Mandelbaum tells us, is to "trace the similarities and differences between international politics before and after the coming of nuclear weapons." Both aims are worthy, for the author is correct in noting a deficit in efforts to trace historically and analytically the development of nuclear weapons, along with their associated metamorphoses in strategy and diplomacy.

In the pursuit of its announced goals the book succeeds only moderately well. *The Nuclear Question* is a readable, useful, but limited and highly selective introductory text on the problems of the nuclear era. Serious students of the problems Mandelbaum treats will have to continue to resort to the original sources and piecemeal analyses available elsewhere. The book's strength as an introduction comes precisely from the selectivity and simplification that makes it inappropriate for knowledgeable readers and useless for serious scholars. In short, its strengths are its weaknesses.

As a history, *The Nuclear Question* ostensibly deals with the thirty years beginning with the first attempts to reflect on the meaning of the possession of nuclear weapons and ending with the termination of the presidential term finished out by Gerald Ford. Its main focus is on the years 1946-63, 1963 being the end of the Kennedy presidency. Seven of the book's eight chapters are devoted to this seventeen-year span, and much of the remaining chapter is also given over to a retrospective on the

legacy of John Kennedy and Robert McNamara for nuclear weaponry, strategy, and diplomacy. The Johnson and Nixon-Ford administrations are given short shrift. Indeed, as Mandelbaum interprets the history of the nuclear era, the Kennedy years represent a sort of climax: "The abbreviated three-year life of the Kennedy administration was a momentous period in the history of the nuclear age...Although his three successors differed from John Kennedy in both personal and political terms, all three followed the broad outlines of policies, for nuclear weapons, that he and Robert McNamara had established. The next thirteen years were, in this sense, a series of footnotes to the Kennedy administration."

Something can be said for the utility of such a simplified view, though there is a great deal of evidence against it. Specifically, this perspective allows Mandelbaum to give McNamara credit for raising the issue of counterforce targeting and to analyze the major deficiencies of such a strategic posture without straying from the main theme of the coalescence of nuclear strategy around the idea of deterrence. What is lost in such a restricted approach is any memory of the hot and extensive strategic debate that raged both in secret and in public during the Eisenhower era. That debate, continued in the Kennedy years, focused on the terms of nuclear strategy (whether for deterrence or for use) and the moral, social, and military implications of counterforce versus counterpopulation targeting. Nor does Mandelbaum mention James Schlesinger's later public flirtation with counterforce strategy and the brief but heated resurgence of the earlier debate following that flirtation.

Such selectivity at the expense of a

complete picture can be further detailed. For example, while Mandelbaum cites Bernard Brodie, Albert Wohlstetter, and Henry Kissinger, he does not even mention such an influential theorist as Herman Kahn or take note of the respected ethical analysis of nuclear strategy performed by Paul Ramsey, among others. Similarly, on the development of limited war theory, there is no mention of men like Robert Osgood and Robert W. Tucker, though the former could justifiably be termed the architect of the limited war idea. Or again, while the Eisenhower era fares better under Mandelbaum's pen than that of Nixon and Ford, to treat it without saying a great deal more about the contribution of John Foster Dulles seems curious. In describing American attitudes toward nuclear weapons, to slight Dulles is to miss one of the most important and flavorful elements in a rather drab historical period.

So far I have mentioned the limits of this book as history. But there is similar selectivity in Mandelbaum's treatment of nuclear-era diplomacy. His conviction about the importance of the Kennedy presidency allows him to dwell on the background to Soviet-American nuclear diplomacy without undertaking a careful analysis of, for instance, SALT I, negotiated under Nixon. Thus he also scrutinizes at length the diplomatic and strategic developments surrounding the Cuban missile crisis without paying attention to those associated with later crises. The foremost diplomatic achievement of the Kennedy years, argues Mandelbaum, was the rejection of the liberal model of diplomacy in favor of a return to the traditional one; thus the United States left off trying to achieve a total ban of nuclear weapons in the context of world government (the United Nations or a similar agency) and reverted to the earlier pattern of negotiations for limited ends between sovereign states—in this case, the United States and the Soviet Union—over a point of common concern. Though this return certainly began in the Kennedy period, it might well be argued that only with the conduct of foreign policy by Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger did the traditional model become both a conscious norm and the operative reality of American diplomacy.

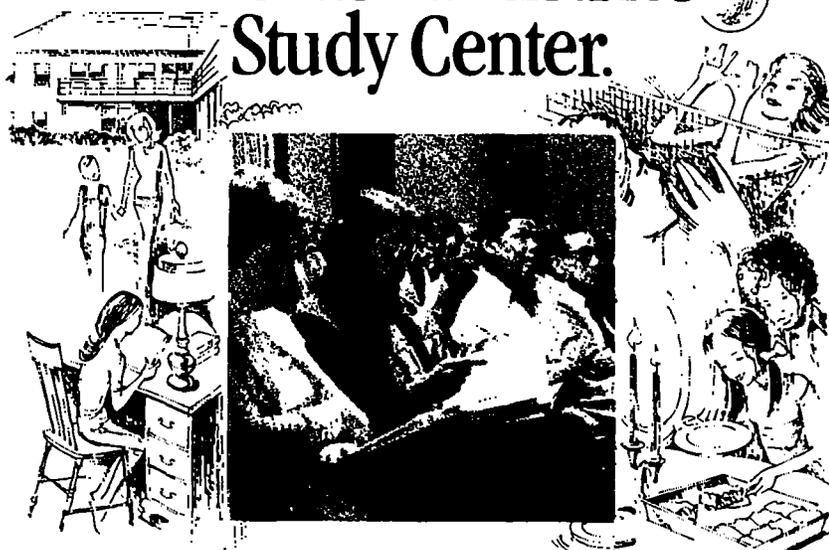
Having said all this, there is no other book in print that sets out to do what Mandelbaum does, however well. Its

tracing of events associated with nuclear weapons from 1946 to 1963, where its real emphasis lies, is a straightforward and competent account of what is treated, and indeed the individuals and developments treated are among the most prominent features of that period. Mandelbaum's approach is not wrong, only incomplete. *The Nuclear Question* would be an excellent undergraduate textbook in a course where lectures and

other readings could be counted on to fill in the gaps. The chapters entitled "The Failure of Liberal Diplomacy" and "The Foundations of Stable Deterrence" are especially clear and well argued. They manifest the virtues rather than the faults of Mandelbaum's penchant for simplification. In these chapters the impact of his expository style, which depends heavily on categorizations like "the three questions of strate-

gy" and "the two schools of diplomacy," is measured and provides a useful tool for imposing order on a mass of complex historical data. (It is only when Mandelbaum elevates these categories, particularly the first set, drawn from Clausewitz, to the level of first principles by which to judge all subsequent developments that their usefulness evaporates.) In an introductory treatment such categories help to reduce to sharp blacks and whites the many grays encountered in the history of the nuclear era. They also help Mandelbaum pursue his argument for the superiority of the traditional pattern of diplomacy over the liberal model pursued by the United States in the early nuclear years. Chapter two is recommended reading for anyone concerned with nuclear arms limitations. In showing clearly, and in an understandable style, the weaknesses of an idealistic, all-or-nothing approach to restricting nuclear weapons, this chapter paves the way for serious discussion of the achievements of the limited, one-to-one model typified by such treaties as the Limited Test Ban, SALT I, and SALT II. Mandelbaum's argument for the advantages of traditional diplomacy is forceful and convincing, and it constitutes a significant contribution of this book. [VVV]

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by Robin Reilly

(G.P. Putnam; ix + 502 pp.; \$19.95)

Bruce Cole

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"It is not possible in a single volume to describe in detail the events of Pitt's lifetime or the intricacies of his policies....I have therefore given little more than an outline of the events, selecting for special attention those episodes which seem to shed light on Pitt's character and personality, and giving some weight to three important influences in his life: his health, his alcoholism and his sexuality. This is not a work of deep historical research. It is an attempt to

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