

The Alternate Route: Nuclear Weapon-Free Zones. By Thomas Graham Jr.
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BOOK REVIEW

The Alternate Route: Nuclear Weapon-Free Zones

THOMAS GRAHAM JR.

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Thomas Graham Jr. is a former United States diplomat who negotiated arms control and non-proliferation treaties from 1970-1997. Ambassador Graham is a prolific writer within his area of expertise. In an earlier work, *Disarmament Sketches: Three Decades of Arms Control and International Law* (2002), Ambassador Graham presented recollections of his leadership at the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (ACDA) where he served for 27 years. During that time, he participated in negotiating the SALT I and SALT II treaty process (1969-79) between the US and the Soviet Union (USSR), as well as a series of arms reduction treaties between the US and Russia after the end of the Cold War. In the current work, *The Alternate Route: Nuclear Weapon-Free Zones*, Ambassador Graham argues that present US-Russian relations have “blocked, perhaps for a long time” the bilateral approach of nuclear disarmament that has been in place since SALT began almost 50 years ago (1).

The long road toward a treaty-based multilateral approach to nuclear issues ended with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 1968. Although Ireland had been a victim of the Cold War, obtaining membership in the United Nations (UN) in 1955, by 1958 Ireland’s foreign minister initiated talks on a non-proliferation plan. Three years later, after Ireland held the presidency of the UN General Assembly, the resolution passed. Despite President John F. Kennedy’s support for the initiative and his moving “nuclear speech” at the UNGA in 1961, the NPT negotiations faltered in the years that followed. Many important global challenges threatened armed conflict between the superpowers: the Berlin Wall Crisis in 1961, the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, and the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Soviets in 1968. Ambassador Graham weaves the history adeptly, arguing that the NPT ultimately became a disarmament treaty. The text explores SALT and the treaties that followed. Five signatories of the NPT possess nuclear weapons today: the US, United Kingdom, France, China, and Russia. A future treaty regime discussed in *The Alternate Route* is analogous in structure to the NPT. The main idea is that long-term negotiations and multilateral treaties ultimately produce a global norm. The difference is that regions without hegemonic leadership are presented as cornerstones to 21st century global disarmament policy. Ambassador Graham argues that friction in US-Russian relations should not derail any regional process already underway.

Published in December 2017, *The Alternate Route* argues that the nuclear weapon-free zone movement (NWFZ) may continue as a regional solution even though the former bilateral process is stalled by unfriendly US-Russian relations. The reasoning focuses on integrating the nuclear-free zones while excluding the non-NWFZ areas of “China, Russia, and the states of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)” which one day “might

then become nuclear weapon-free themselves” (2). The interior chapters of the text outline each of the six regional treaties, including a level of diplomatic and legal detail that historians appreciate. The evolution of the NPT and the regional “treaty chapters” consume almost 100 pages of text. Ambassador Graham makes a significant effort in documenting his sources within these chapters yet secondary sources outweigh primary ones. Given his fluency with the ACDA, the text would be richer with documentation from the US National Archives (NARA) to support many of the ideas in the secondary sources. Overall, the author does not disappoint in delivering the narrative, providing credible statistics and a wide-sweeping history of nuclear proliferation and arms limitation since 1945.

In Thomas Wilson’s *The Great Weapons Heresy* (1970), Wilson documents nuclear scientist J. Robert Oppenheimer’s struggle to understand the “nuclear revolution” he helped create. Wilson’s text became a classic and focuses on 1953, when Oppenheimer openly criticized US nuclear policy. Oppenheimer argued that he foresaw little cooperation among countries in nuclear regulation, leading to long periods of tension and a nuclear arms race. 1953 was a pivotal year in Cold War history. Stalin died in March. In June that year, East Germany erupted with labor riots. The Korean conflict ended and the armistice began. Oppenheimer’s predictions, though pre-scient, resulted in the suspension of his security clearance. In reflecting on Oppenheimer’s outcome, Wilson questioned whether a world government is the solution to arms control. In the 21st century, Ambassador Graham argues regionalization is the optimal approach. Simultaneously, Ambassador Graham aims for a solution to save the NPT process from the vagaries of poor relations between the US and Russia. In part, he blames the US for not ratifying the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) while nuclear programs continue to develop in the Middle East, northeast Asia, and South Asia. He concludes by using an image from President Kennedy’s 1961 speech: “The end of the NPT regime would also mean the end of all chances for removing the sword of destruction that has been hanging over the head of humankind for more than seventy years” (241).

The *Alternate Route* is useful on several levels. For mid-career professionals in intelligence, security, and diplomacy, it’s a reminder that careers end but international issues do not. For students of international relations and nuclear proliferation, the treaty chapters mentioned earlier – along with the emerging regions chapters (9-11)—are essential reading on the topic. The highlight of the book is Chapter 8, “Where we are, and where and how we must go” as it aims to bring the six treaties from the regions into a global plan. Maps are missing from the text and would be a welcome addition at the beginning of this important chapter. Also in this chapter, Ambassador Graham provides more history of the ACDA, describing in

detail how the agency merged into the State Department in 1999. Ambassador Graham concludes that the future viability of the nuclear weapon-free zone movement depends on an independent agency like the ACDA. After 1999, the functions of the ACDA fell to the Undersecretary of State for Arms Control and International Security Affairs whose most notable alumnus is Ambassador John Bolton (2001-05). As of this writing, the Trump Administration has yet to staff that position.