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# Arms Control during the Pre-Nuclear Era: The United States and Naval Limitation between the Two World Wars

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Indochina, northeast Asia, and Central Africa offer existing laboratories.

In conclusion, this reviewer wishes to ask editors and authors of this subject for relief from the barrage of acronyms and initials that seem to be worse in this field of study than in the purely military fields. In each book some of the articles, or parts thereof, are nearly unintelligible, difficult to read and comprehend because of the excess "alphabet soup."

Neither book is inexpensive. Neither speaks directly to the national security problems of the future, but both are quite informative about the arms control environment in the epoch that is just ending.

The professional who is interested in arms control and verification might want to note the titles and the names of the editors and authors. Some of them may well become involved in meeting the challenge uttered by Joseph G. Burke.

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Kaufman, Robert Gordon. *Arms Control during the Pre-Nuclear Era: The United States and Naval Limitation between the Two World Wars*. New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1990. 269pp. (No price given)

This excellent book gives us what we have needed: a clear analysis of the great effort and ultimate failure to control naval arms in the 1920s and 1930s. Each time, statesmen viewed

ships not as weapons for combat but as instruments of power to be bargained away. Ships were to be sunk at the table. Kaufman, who was a recent Secretary of the Navy Research Fellow at the Naval War College and is presently a professor at the University of Vermont, guides us through the meaning and paradoxes of this process.

The American view was that barring an arms race, no war was likely. That view was translated into various forms of naval arms limitation through policy judgments, strategic doctrines, and budgetary decisions, as well as formal agreements themselves.

The process was interactive. The treaties encouraged antinaval sentiment that placed additional limits on innovations in doctrine and technology and reinforced the reluctance by Congress toward a naval buildup, even to treaty limits. It is a wonder, as Thomas Hone has shown in a number of pioneering articles, that the U.S. Navy integrated as much as it did of aviation and new design. Within limits, which Kaufman shows to be broadly political, the professionals in charge of the "Treaty Navy"—their own efforts under tight constraints—did pretty well in preparedness, although for what they were never told.

The first lesson of making and breaking treaties is their contingent nature and the enduring primacy of politics. Arms control comes from self-restraint, not the other way around. Arms control failed when the will to maintain it disappeared.

Kaufman shows how arms control, either by formal limits or self-imposed reduction in spending, adversely influenced U.S. foreign policy when statesmen let a gap open between ends and means. The commitment in 1922 to the Open Door was vitiated by the naval treaties that made it impossible to enforce the policy.

Success depended on the self-restraint of the key Asian states, on moderates remaining in power in Tokyo, and on China remaining politically stable. When the moderates were replaced and China descended into chaos, the naval settlement collapsed.

High hopes were not enough. Nor were the agreements, which were mere instruments. What was required for arms limitation in the 1920s and 1930s was a supporting international environment, based on domestic approval. That, not words on parchment or even verification procedures, was on what the treaties depended on, and by 1936 it was gone. Ships sunk at the table had to be rebuilt, so an arms race began again.

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in the ill-fated man-of-war. He relies on a selection of well known published sources and authorities. The result is a general history that provides a stimulating narrative of interest primarily to those with little prior knowledge of the subject. Curiously, the author largely ignores interpretations that have come to the fore in recent years, which revise the story considerably. The international context of the war and its diplomacy, recently explored definitively in John Offner's *An Unwanted War: The Diplomacy of the United States & Spain over Cuba, 1895-1898* (1992), received little attention. Nothing of importance is added to the story of the *Maine*. The author considers the Hanson-Price study, which was commissioned by Admiral Hyman Rickover and concluded that an accidental explosion of internal origin sank the vessel, as "conjectural and inconclusive." He seems inclined toward the old view that a mine may have been exploded under the keel, although he does not specify the culprit. He approvingly quotes Theodore Roosevelt's observation that the perpetrators might never be identified.

Popular histories are indispensable, but only if they present their subjects attractively and reflect the best scholarship available. Blow writes well, but he fails to reflect the extensive recent literature, which suggests a much different descriptive and causal analysis than is to be found in *A Ship to Remember*. A better popular account

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Blow, Michael. *A Ship to Remember: The Maine and the Spanish-American War*. New York: William Morrow, 1992. 496pp. \$28

Michael Blow offers a general history of the war with Spain in 1898, emphasizing the history of the battleship *Maine*. His grandfather served