

Nuclear Threats, Nuclear Fear, and the Cold War of the 1980s

This book brings together cutting-edge scholarship from the United States and Europe to address political as well as cultural responses to both the arms race of the 1980s and the ascent of nuclear energy as a second, controversial dimension of the nuclear age. Diverse in its topics and disciplinary approaches, *Nuclear Threats, Nuclear Fear and the Cold War of the 1980s* makes a fundamental contribution to the emerging historiography of the 1980s as a whole. As of now, the era's nuclear tensions have been addressed by scholars mostly from the standpoint of security studies, focused on the geo-strategic deliberations of political elites and at the level of state policy. Yet nuclear anxieties, as the essays in this volume document, were so pervasive that they profoundly shaped the era's culture, its habits of mind, and its politics, far beyond the domain of policy.

Eckart Conze is Professor of History at the University of Marburg. He is the author of, most recently, *Die Suche nach Sicherheit. Eine Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* and *Das Auswärtige Amt. Vom Kaiserreich bis zur Gegenwart*.

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Edited by Eckart Conze , Martin Klimke , Jeremy Varon

Frontmatter

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Frontmatter

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Frontmatter

[More Information](#)

Nuclear Threats, Nuclear Fear, and the Cold War of the 1980s

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Contents

| | |
|---|----------------|
| <i>List of Contributors</i> | <i>page xi</i> |
| <i>Acknowledgments</i> | xv |
| Introduction: Between Accidental Armageddons and Winnable Wars: Nuclear Threats and Nuclear Fears in the 1980s <i>Eckart Conze, Martin Klimke, and Jeremy Varon</i> | I |
| Part I: Defining Threat: Nuclear Dangers and the Moral Imagination | 25 |
| 1 Nuclear Winter: Prophecies of Doom and Images of Desolation during the Second Cold War <i>Wilfried Mausbach</i> | 27 |
| 2 Atomic Nightmares and Biological Citizens at Three Mile Island <i>Natasha Zaretsky</i> | 55 |
| 3 Missile Bases as Concentration Camps: The Role of National Socialism, the Second World War, and the Holocaust in the West German Discourse on Nuclear Armament <i>Eckart Conze</i> | 79 |
| Part II: Popular Culture | 99 |
| 4 “Will you sing about the missiles?”: British Antinuclear Protest Music of the 1980s <i>William M. Knoblauch</i> | 101 |

| | | |
|---|--|-----|
| 5 | From Artists for Peace to the Green Caterpillar: Cultural Activism and Electoral Politics in 1980s West Germany <i>Martin Klimke and Laura Stapane</i> | 116 |
| 6 | A Tenuous Peace: International Antinuclear Activism in the East German Writers Union during the 1980s <i>Thomas Goldstein</i> | 142 |
| Part III: Local and Transnational Activism | | 165 |
| 7 | The “Example of Wyhl”: How Grassroots Protest in the Rhine Valley Shaped West Germany’s Antinuclear Movement <i>Stephen Milder</i> | 167 |
| 8 | No Nukes and Front Porch Politics: Environmental Protest Culture and Practice on the Second Cold War Home Front <i>Michael Stewart Foley</i> | 186 |
| 9 | Global Micropolitics: Toward a Transnational History of Grassroots Nuclear-Free Zones <i>Susanne Schregel</i> | 206 |
| 10 | European Nuclear Disarmament: Transnational Peace Campaigning in the 1980s <i>Patrick Burke</i> | 227 |
| 11 | A Case of “Hollanditis”: The Interchurch Peace Council in the Netherlands and the Christian Peace Movement in Western Europe <i>Sebastian Kalden</i> | 251 |
| Part IV: The Challenge for High Politics | | 269 |
| 12 | Peace through Strength?: The Impact of the Antinuclear Uprising on the Carter and Reagan Administrations <i>Lawrence S. Wittner</i> | 271 |
| 13 | Did Protest Matter? The Influence of the Peace Movement on the West German Government and the Social Democratic Party, 1977–1983 <i>Tim Geiger and Jan Hansen</i> | 290 |

Contents

ix

| | | |
|----|---|-----|
| 14 | Why Was There No “Accidental Armageddon” Discourse in France? How Defense Intellectuals, Peace Movements, and Public Opinion Rethought the Cold War during the Euromissile Crisis <i>Katrin Rücker</i> | 316 |
| 15 | Building Trust: The G7 Summits and International Leadership in Nuclear Politics <i>Enrico Böhm</i> | 335 |
| | <i>Index</i> | 355 |

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-13628-1 — Nuclear Threats, Nuclear Fear and the Cold War of the 1980s

Edited by Eckart Conze , Martin Klimke , Jeremy Varon

Frontmatter

[More Information](#)

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List of Contributors

xiii

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Frontmatter

[More Information](#)

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Under any circumstances, a book is a collaborative endeavor, made by villages and not individuals. A book such as this – edited by three people from diverse professional cultures, corraling the insight of dozens of accomplished, far-flung scholars – is exponentially more a communal effort.

This book originated in a global conference in 2010, “Accidental Armageddons: The Nuclear Crisis and the Culture of the Second Cold War, 1975–1989.” Hosted by the German Historical Institute (GHI), the gathering was co-sponsored by the National Security Archive, and the New School for Social Research/Eugene Lang College. We are extremely grateful to each of these institutions for having had the willingness, resources, and heart to sponsor our conference, in particular Hartmut Berghoff (GHI Director), William Burr (Senior Analyst/Director of Nuclear History Documentation Project, National Security Archive), and Neil Gordon and Robert Kostrzewa (The New School). Our special thanks go to Bärbel Thomas, Nicole Kruz, Sabine Fix, Betsy Hauck, and Matthias Ball at the GHI, who ran the conference with typical efficiency and aplomb. Yet again, the GHI demonstrated what commitment to ideas can look like and mean, in a world starved for historically informed understandings of the challenges of the present and future.

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This book deals seriously and at length with a period we know well and whose importance we seek to promote. Nothing has been so terrifying as the prospect of species annihilation through nuclear war. Little has been as reassuring as the efforts – across the Atlantic and throughout the political spectrum – to ensure that this cataclysm has not yet come to pass. The world remains choked with nuclear dangers, embodied by new nuclear actors (including, potentially, terrorists) and exacerbated by a potentially resurgent nuclear power industry. The latter brands itself as the “clean” alternative to fossil fuels, obfuscating very real, persisting dangers and decades of advocacy work to highlight that hazard.

We have limited ability to influence the course of the world, with respect to nuclear weapons or energy. We hope, nonetheless, to contribute to a historically informed understanding of current debates and the consequences of various positions. If the effect of our volume is to give some elevated sense to the contested and often contradictory nature of historical and, by extension, contemporary discourses about the concepts of security and safety, it will have succeeded in its grand aim. We hope that readers enjoy and learn from what the talented group of authors behind this volume have to say.

We would like, finally, to acknowledge the crucial role in the conference from which this volume sprung – and the decades of his wisdom on nuclear issues – of the late Jonathan Schell. Mr. Schell was kind enough to give the keynote address of the conference and to help to set the terms of our dialogue. For decades prior, he had been among the world's most thoughtful voices in considering the implications of nuclear weapons for the fate of human kind and the planet. We will sorely miss his insight and humanity.