

Callahan, David. *Dangerous Capabilities: Paul Nitze and the Cold War*. New York: Harper Collins, 1990.

Over the course of five decades, Paul Nitze served seven presidents in various capacities. Yet, for the most part, Nitze remains something of an enigma. Unlike many of his contemporaries who entered government service during the Second World War, and who were to become household names in the Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy and Johnson administrations, Nitze toiled longer and in relative anonymity. The past few years have produced three separate accounts of his life. In addition to David Callahan's recent effort, we have Nitze's own memoirs, *From Hiroshima to Glasnost: At the Centre of Decision*, and Strobe Talbott's biography, *Master of the Game: Paul Nitze and the Nuclear Peace*. Hopefully the future will bring further accounts of the life and times of this remarkable and dedicated man, for Nitze's career is indeed a window on the Cold War and American foreign and defense policy from the Second World War to the end of the Cold War.

A brief list of Nitze's career accomplishments would be a list of many of the important events of American contemporary history. Beginning with the United States Strategic Bombing Survey in Germany and Japan, through the development of the Marshall Plan, primary authorship of NSC-68, active participation in the showdowns over Berlin and the Cuban Missile Crisis, participation in the earliest efforts at controlling strategic weapons, the Vietnam war, SALT I, SALT II, INF, and START, Nitze was involved in the defining moments of the Cold War and US foreign and defense policy.

David Callahan has produced an eminently readable account of Nitze's fascinating career. Yet, at the same time, one cannot but help coming away feeling dissatisfied. Were Callahan to stick to chronicling Nitze's life, his biography would be considered first rate. Unfortunately, Callahan endeavored to make this an account not only of Nitze, but a critical account of US foreign and defense policy throughout the Cold War. All well and good if the result is a balanced assessment based on a sound reading of the facts with a keen eye to the complexities, not only of the Washington bureaucracy, but of the Cold War as well. On this latter score, Callahan falls well short. He routinely simplifies exceedingly difficult situations, and is forever intruding his own often ill-considered and polemical judgements regarding key events of the Cold War.

A particularly glaring example of this tendency is his account of Nitze's involvement in the crafting of NSC-68. Nitze was the primary author of NSC-68, which was a key document, if not the key document, in defining US foreign and defense policy in the early post-war period. Yet, Callahan's discussion of this episode is almost a caricature. He attributes the hard-line tone of NSC-68 almost exclusively to Nitze's "total theoretical hostility to the Soviet Union," and to Nitze's view of Soviet leaders and diplomats as "mechanistic chess players." In condemning Nitze's view of the Soviet Union, Callahan proffers the thesis that the Soviet Union was a benign power without

hostile intent towards the United States or Western Europe. It is difficult to see how Callahan can argue such a point of view so fiercely, when his references are virtually devoid of works on the Soviet Union. NSC-68 still remains a much debated document, and it may see even greater interest if access to Soviet archives is eventually granted to Western scholars.

The most serious shortcoming of Callahan's book, however, is his treatment of the arcane and complex subject of arms control. While most readers should be prepared to forgive the odd error of fact — of which there are several — it is Callahan's total theoretical hostility to Nitze's sceptical and sometimes hard-line approach to arms control that is disturbing. Callahan obviously views arms control as a panacea to be pursued at all costs. He does not appear to be concerned that arms control agreements require adequate and effective verification if they are to be meaningful agreements. For instance, he attributes the failure to achieve a full test ban treaty in 1963 to US demands for on-site inspection. With respect to SALT I, Callahan suggests that a verifiable ban on MIRV testing and deployment could have been achieved without some form of on-site inspection. His discussion of the non-ratification of SALT II is curious to say the least. Many notable factors are overlooked, not least of which are the Soviet deployment of SS-20 intermediate range missiles in Europe, Soviet refusal to consider limits on the Backfire bomber, and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. These oversights themselves are sufficient to call into question Callahan's judgements on arms control.

Finally, Callahan's overall conclusion seems rather churlish. He lays the blame for current American social ills and fiscal woes at the feet of people like Paul Nitze who "had helped to delay a stable and lasting peace between the superpowers." He dismisses Nitze's considerable achievements over a remarkable span of service by suggesting that all he achieved was "a lost dream." Such a characterization is not only grossly unfair, but does a grave disservice to a dedicated man.

If this book were the only work available on Paul Nitze it would be possible to recommend it. It is well written and enjoyable to read. However, given the other recent accounts of his life, one would be better off with those, rather than endure the oft-times shrill and haranguing tone of Callahan's ideologically motivated critique.

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