

Review

Reviewed Work(s): Abrüstung in der Sowjetunion: Wirtschaftliche Bedingungen und Soziale Folgen der Truppen Reduzierung von 1960. by Jutta Tiedtke

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ABRÜSTUNG IN DER SOWJETUNION: WIRTSCHAFTLICHE BEDINGUNGEN UND SOZIALE FOLGEN DER TRUPPEN REDUZIERUNG VON 1960. By *Jutta Tiedtke*. Frankfurt a. M. and New York: Campus, 1985. 234 pp. Tables. DM 38, paper.

Recent changes in Soviet security policy, including unilateral cutbacks in the Soviet armed forces and the willingness to accept asymmetric reductions in arms-control negotiations, have called increasing attention to the economic motives for restraint in Soviet military programs. Yet Mikhail Gorbachev is not the first Soviet leader to put economic considerations ahead of the military's demands for a large, well-equipped army. Nor is he the first to face the prospect of discontent and low morale within the ranks as a consequence of large-scale demobilization of soldiers and officers. Thus, Jutta Tiedtke's study of the economic conditions and social consequences of the unilateral Soviet troop reductions announced by Nikita Khrushchev in 1960 is of considerable relevance for contemporary policy. It is a model of historical scholarship informed by theoretical and policy concerns.

Tiedtke is interested in the internal and external factors that encourage or inhibit Soviet disarmament initiatives. The main emphasis of the study, and its most original contribution, is on the economic situation that compelled the Soviet leadership by the end of the 1950s to consider demobilizing 1.2 million soldiers and officers—one-third of the existing force—even after having unilaterally cut the armed forces by nearly two million during the preceding half decade. Tiedtke links the demobilization to shortfalls in the Seven-Year Plan (1959–1965), especially in the newly developing industrial and agricultural regions in the Far East and Kazakhstan. Tiedtke's main argument is that Soviet planners expected to compensate for an anticipated slowdown in the growth of the labor pool (as a consequence of the low birth rate during the war) by increasing labor productivity mainly through advanced technology and mechanization in agriculture. Labor productivity failed to increase as expected. At the same time, the drive to expand agricultural and industrial production east of the Urals was not attracting the necessary numbers of workers, mainly because of insufficient material incentives and the poor quality of life in the region. According to the author, the troop demobilization promised to solve both problems at once. An influx of new workers would help fulfill the plan, albeit by traditional extensive methods. Moreover, the discipline and esprit de corps associated with the newly released soldiers, in addition to their proven ability to tolerate relatively harsh living conditions, would make them ideal migrants to the new regions.

Although Tiedtke finds the internal economic explanations for the Soviet demobilization compelling, she does not neglect the role of the external environment and, particularly, United States policy. Contrary to many previous accounts, she does not portray Khrushchev as having simply transferred resources from one sector of the military (conventional ground forces) to another (nuclear weapons). She argues that he genuinely pursued a “minimum deterrent” nuclear strategy in order to reduce military expenditures overall, but she criticizes his attempts to demonstrate the value of such a strategy as counterproductive. She also points out that the John F. Kennedy administration's military buildup and commitment to nuclear superiority—even after the “missile gap” was recognized as being in the United States' favor—undermined Khrushchev's attempt to rein in the Soviet military and ultimately contributed to his downfall.

The parallels between the Khrushchev era and the present are evident (Tiedtke was unable to develop them, as her book was published just as Gorbachev came into office). Of course one should not assume that the role of economic constraints and United States behavior is precisely the same now as in the early 1960s. At the same time, however, Tiedtke's work indicates how careful research and clear analysis can shed light on the relation between these factors and Soviet policy outcomes—with important implications for United States policy as well.

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