

1993

Sea-Launched Cruise Missiles and U.S. Security, by Eric H. Arnett reviewed by

Albert M. Bottoms

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

Recommended Citation

Bottoms, Albert M. (1993) "Sea-Launched Cruise Missiles and U.S. Security, by Eric H. Arnett reviewed by," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 46 : No. 3 , Article 27.
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol46/iss3/27>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu.

formed a team capable of repeated remarkable achievement.

RICHARD F. CROSS III
Washington, D.C.

Arnett, Eric H. *Sea-Launched Cruise Missiles and U.S. Security*. New York: Praeger, 1991. 224pp. \$45

This book is a comprehensive examination of one of the more arcane aspects of strategic warfare and of the maneuvering done to gain the advantage in arms control negotiations. As one digs through the uses proposed for sea-launched cruise missiles—American Tomahawks and their Soviet navy counterparts, the Sampson (nuclear), Styx, Sunburn, and Starbright—one wonders how much influence military considerations had on the political scientists who composed the scenarios. Dr. Arnett sheds light on some of the technological misconceptions that abound in the claims and counterclaims of the “cruise missile lobby.”

Eric Arnett holds a doctorate in engineering and public policy from Carnegie-Mellon University and is an associate at the Program on Science and International Security of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. He is therefore well qualified to discuss the issues surrounding the debate on the potential roles of sea-launched cruise missiles in the American and Russian force structures. In his discussions of the intersection of technology, strategy, and public policy, it is refreshing (and

essential) that attention is paid to technological facts and to the limitations technology imposes, as well as the opportunities it confers, on offense and defense.

Despite the use of submarine-launched Tomahawks in the Gulf War, the whole subject of sea-launched cruise missiles has been relegated to an inconspicuous place in the current debates about force structure, build-down, and arms control. Perhaps that relegation is premature. Arnett points out that the sea-launched cruise missile with a conventional explosive warhead represents an attempt by technology to provide conventional weapons for “strategic” missions. Fanciful mission scenarios such as “decapitations,” minimum-warning attacks, and so forth must be viewed in the context of attempts by each side to retain a strategic advantage even as reliance shifts away from the nuclear arsenal. Although Arnett uses a clear, unemotional style to detail mission possibilities, it is easy to imagine the fervor with which the advocates can press their cases.

The author’s technical knowledge comes into play when he convincingly demonstrates that sea-launched cruise missile technology today, and for the foreseeable future, is not equal to the demands of the missions. It is apparent that Arnett has more than a cursory familiarity with the relevant technical details of warheads, guidance systems, and missile countermeasures. He does not dismiss the performance shortcomings as

156 Naval War College Review

mere technicalities, nor does he say that certain capabilities will never be achieved; he simply says that the capabilities are not now available. In plain English, Arnett calls attention to the limitations of the missile guidance systems and to the mismatch between the potential agility and mobility of targets (Scud launchers, for example) and missile targeting capabilities.

It is interesting to follow the perceptions about sea-launched cruise missiles that appear to exist among the arms control negotiators. Apparently the Soviet negotiators so strongly believed the claims of stealth, relative invulnerability, warhead effectiveness, and "pin-point" accuracy put forward in the slick publications that they desired to have such weapons nullified. On our side, if development of cruise missile technology was ever intended only as an arms control "bargaining chip," our system of weapons advocacy nonetheless developed staunch converts, particularly among national security ideologues. Perhaps the historical record will show that the expenditures to develop the sea-launched cruise missile were productive in winning the Cold War with economic, as well as technological, weapons. The trouble is that we do not yet have an accounting of the opportunity costs that the United States incurred in its pursuit of cruise missile programs.

One could wish for a sequel that would address the opportunity costs to both antagonists associated with this type of weapon. It is not fair to criticize Dr. Arnett for this omission,

since it lies beyond the scope of what he wanted to do. But the economic questions surrounding weaponry were of vital interest then, are now, and most assuredly will be in the future.

In summary, this book is a solid contribution to the literature of the interrelationship of technology and national strategy. It lays out most, if not all, of the concepts concerned with the military use of sea-launched cruise missiles. It touches discreetly upon some of the issues of truth and credibility surrounding weapons programs that are cloaked in secrecy for national security reasons. When security embargoes lapse, will there be a torrent of revisionist exposés of various weapons programs? Maybe there should be. As with certain aspects of the Strategic Defense Initiative, hints of possible fraud as well as of waste and abuse raise far more serious questions about the overall integrity of our developmental processes. Dr. Arnett mentions these matters only briefly, and in passing. Can integrity and credibility be separated, either by military planners or arms control policy negotiators?

ALBERT M. BOTTOMS
Charlottesville, Virginia

Weidenbaum, Murray L. *Small Wars, Big Defense: Paying for the Military after the Cold War*. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1992. 228pp. \$22.95