



**Mariana Budjeryn, *Inheriting the Bomb: The Collapse of the USSR and the Nuclear Disarmament of Ukraine*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2022.**

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Mariana Budjeryn's gripping book, *Inheriting the Bomb: The Collapse of the USSR and the Nuclear Disarmament of Ukraine*, unveils the fascinating events of 1991 that gave birth to four countries armed with nuclear weapons. Budjeryn's masterful storytelling sheds

light on a pivotal moment in history that remains enigmatic to many. Through her meticulous account, we come to realize just how perilously close the international order came to assuming an entirely different complexion, one that could have dramatically reshaped the world. Budjeryn's work is an illuminating journey into the not-often-told story of nuclear disarmament and the profound implications it holds.

Budjeryn's groundbreaking research delves deep into the intricate dynamics, and disillusionment and confusion, that permeated the USSR during, and logically prior to, Gorbachev's leadership. She describes that it was clear that Gorbachev had little if any control of the military apparatus of the USSR. By the late 1980s, it was glaringly evident that the Soviet Union was teetering on the precipice of collapse, prompting an overarching question of how this impending demise would manifest. Drawing upon the insightful observations of esteemed scholars Kristen and Norris, Budjeryn presents a striking revelation: "Some 30,000 nuclear weapons and the enormous industrial and scientific infrastructure that built and delivered them, suddenly found itself on the territory of not one but four sovereign states: Belarus, Kazakhstan, the Russian Federation, and Ukraine" (33-34). The sheer magnitude of this unprecedented scenario, discernible even to readers with a modest understanding of nuclear weapons history, unequivocally underscores the profound significance of Budjeryn's seminal work.

*Inheriting the Bomb* is a book structured into two distinct parts and has eight chapters. These chapters meticulously trace the chronological progression of the USSR's disintegration and the ultimate emergence of four independent states. Chapter 3, titled "Road to Lisbon," delves into multifaceted concerns surrounding the potential hazards posed by "loose nukes" and the consequential "brain drain" (43). It also examines the intricate challenges arising from the potential disintegration of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Moreover, this chapter explores the concerted efforts made to encourage Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine to relinquish their inherited nuclear arsenals, facilitating their transfer to the Russian Federation.

Of particular significance, Chapter 8, "From Ownership to Renunciation," offers remarkable insights. Here, Budjeryn adeptly captures the complexities inherent in the collaborative endeavours of the Russian, US, Belarusian, Kazakhstani, and Ukrainian governments toward the implementation of the Lisbon Protocol and the Strategic Arms

Reduction Treaty commonly called START. This chapter serves as a poignant testament to the considerable challenges encountered by these five nations as they strive to forge a synergistic relationship that accommodates the fulfillment of their respective interests.

Throughout the book, Budjeryn adeptly navigates the intricate landscape of nuclear disarmament, deftly analyzing the diplomatic negotiations, political complexities, and technical intricacies involved. Her work provides a rich and nuanced exploration of the historical events and dynamics surrounding the transition from a united USSR to the independent nuclear-armed states that emerged in its wake. A slight demerit is the work missed an opportunity to applaud the work of Cooperative Threat Reduction (CTR) and the associated work the US and Russia did to improve relations. The conclusion briefly highlights Secretary of Defense William Perry's efforts through CTR to mitigate risk and build a positive relationship with the Russians. More could have been said about Perry's influential book, *My Journey at the Nuclear Brink*.<sup>1</sup> This book delves into his conscientious efforts to convey the trajectory of Russian-US relations. The work discusses the promising prospects for substantive collaboration with readers. Notably, a pivotal event that underscored this positive trajectory was the Russian Federation's support of NATO Peacekeeping operations in Bosnia in 1995. This noteworthy instance of Russian cooperation with NATO serves as a testament to the progress made in cultivating a harmonious relationship between Russia and the United States.

When examined holistically, this book offers a compelling narrative of events that remain enigmatic to many, particularly those outside the realm of defence affairs. The opening statement in the conclusion sets the tone, highlighting the activation of the consultation mechanism outlined in the Budapest Memorandum, which occurred for the first time in March 2014. This momentous occasion coincided with the infiltration of "unmarked Russian paratroops and special operations forces" into Crimea, resulting in the seizure of its parliament, and local government buildings, and the encirclement of Ukrainian military bases on the peninsula (225). These brazen acts of Russian aggression represented the culmination of a decade-long deterioration in US-Russian relations.

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<sup>1</sup> William J. Perry, *My Journey at the Nuclear Brink* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015).

Following these developments (discussed briefly by Budjeryn), a wave of speculation ensued among pundits, deliberating on whether Russia would have embarked upon such an incursion if the Ukrainian government had retained the Soviet-era nuclear weapons subsequent to the collapse of the USSR. The intensity of the discourse amplified significantly when the Russians launched an invasion of Ukraine in 2022. However, it is important to acknowledge the inherent difficulty, if not impossibility, of substantiating claims based on negative hypotheticals. The arguments concerning the presence or absence of nuclear weapons, in this scenario, appear to be fueled predominantly by emotional factors rather than concrete evidence.

In light of these considerations, the work provides a nuanced exploration of the complexities surrounding these critical events, offering readers a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted dynamics at play. Ultimately, the work intends to educate and enlighten. This is accomplished by Budjeryn with grace.

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