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A BOOK FOR TODAY

A Scary Look at World Traffic in Armaments

By ORR KELLY

THE WAR BUSINESS. The International Trade in Armaments. By George Thayer. Simon & Schuster. 417 pages. \$6.95

This is the kind of book that can throw a good scare into anyone who takes the time to think about it.

What is particularly scary is not so much the threat from the international trade in armaments—scary as that may be—but the way a book like this takes gossip, rumor and journalistic reports and gives them a kind of legitimacy they do not possess on their own merits simply by encasing them between the hard covers of a book.

Take one paragraph, almost at random:

"While it was surreptitiously supporting Portugal in its war against the guerrillas by allowing it to buy B-26 bombers, the United States was and still is supporting the guerrillas themselves, a fact that is not widely known. In Angola, for instance, it has been supporting Holden Roberto. In Mozambique, also a Portuguese colony, it has been supporting a rebel group led by a pro-West nationalist named Eduardo Mondlane. Both men were educated in the United States and have been looked upon with discreet favor by Washington officials. They both have received a small amount of financial aid from U.S. sources. Several African experts have told me that the money has come and still comes from both private and government funds. One authority claims that the CIA has been directly involved with these rebels but he could not prove it. The United States has realized—as, surprisingly, do many Portuguese leaders—that someday both territories must be given their freedom and, until then, it is in the U.S.'s interest to keep potential leaders from turning away from the west."

As support for this charge that the U.S. is backing both sides in the conflict in Angola and Mozambique, Thayer refers to the export to Portugal of B-26 bombers—a case with which I am familiar and in which, I am completely convinced, the planes were smuggled without the approval of the U.S. government—and to "several African experts" and "one authority."

The footnote for that paragraph refers the reader to three news stories in the Washington Post and one in the New York Times.

One can just hear the editorials based on that kind of paragraph: "... as George Thayer has revealed in his authoritative book, 'The War Business.'"

This is not meant as a criticism of Thayer, who has apparently done a prodigious amount of work in gathering together what can be known or surmised or what has been reported about the international arms trade and has woven it together into a balanced, readable account. But it is meant to warn that this is a picture painted with a broad brush.

One of the most fascinating portions of the book is the chapter Thayer devotes to Samuel Cummings, founder, president and sole owner of International Armament Corporation, now known as Interarms but long familiar to residents of the Washington area as Interarmco. Cummings' warehouses on the Alexandria waterfront, with the antitank guns lined up out in the yard, have for years been one of the more intriguing of the area's tourist attractions.

But even the dealings of this "largest private dealer in surplus military weapons on the international market" are vastly overshadowed by the dealings of the major powers, particularly the United States and the Soviet Union.

Thayer is most critical of the role of the U.S. government which, he argues, has not adjusted to the changes which have occurred in the world since the chilliest days of the Cold War and has continued to peddle arms on a vast scale.

Whether this is true or not—and there are those within the government who would argue strongly that it is not—the relatively free flow of arms throughout the world is indeed a problem.

"It is a fact of life today that no one wants to control the trade in conventional arms—rifles, pistols, machine guns, tanks, artillery, fighter planes and bombers, warships, tactical missiles and conventional explosives," Thayer warns. "No organization, either national or international, has created any machinery to

cope specifically with this problem.

"There are no agreements among nations to control the proliferation of these arms. There are no conferences or discussions under way, or even planned, to bring some order to this field. There is not even much demand for action; few people discuss the subject. Everyone has been talking about atomic warfare and how to avoid it, when all the killing is being done by these 'mundane' weapons."

If Thayer's book at least gets people to worrying about the spread of conventional weapons his efforts will not have been in vain.

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