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Review Essay on Gregory D. Miller. *The Shadow of the Past: Reputation and Military Alliances before the First World War*. Cornell Studies in Security Affairs: Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 2012. ISBN: 978-0-8014-5031-0. pp. xii + 234.

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Reviewed by **David Stevenson**, London School of Economics & Political Science

Gregory Miller's book begins with a theoretical discussion of the importance of 'reputation' in international politics, before analysing its role in four case studies taken from European diplomacy before 1914. To a quite unusual extent, his study consists of an extended critique of a single book – and one published in the same series with the same editors – Jonathan Mercer's *Reputation and International Politics*.¹ Three of Miller's case studies were used also by Mercer, and the two writers draw on very similar source material. Miller repeatedly cites and refutes Mercer's work, up to four times on a single page (p. 176). To a large extent Miller's book must be read as a foil to an earlier contribution rather than as a stand-alone study.

¹ Jonathan Mercer, *Reputation and International Politics* (Cornell Studies in Security Affairs, Ithaca and London, 1996).

Miller and Mercer disagree on a point of importance. Mercer denied that it was ever right to fight to uphold a state's reputation for 'resolve'. His book formed part of a wave of political science studies of the role of reputation. Miller contends that Mercer defined reputation too narrowly, and that it should also encompass reliability, especially as an ally. Without saying necessarily that a reputation for reliability is worth fighting for, he contends that it does bring advantages, particularly in opening up a wider selection of alliance partners and in reducing the loss of autonomy needed to make a commitment credible. Conversely, however, such a reputation is not a given quantity, and a government's own actions (or inaction) can fritter it away.

To sustain this argument, Miller draws on authors in Management Science, who stress the benefits that a reputation for integrity can bring to businesses. He also borrows from Game Theory, Thucydides, and Machiavelli. His opening chapters provide a well organized and up-to-date critique of the literature, and are generally persuasive.

The four case studies cover Britain's search for an ally between 1901 and 1905, the First Moroccan Crisis of 1905-6, the Bosnia-Herzegovina Annexation Crisis of 1908-9, and the Agadir Crisis of 1911. They are less satisfactory. Miller is so preoccupied here with critiquing Mercer that his chapters are quite difficult to read. His syntactical errors and frequent use of the first person do not help. Although the publishers, irritatingly, have provided no bibliography, the references are almost all to English-language sources. Miller appears to have used no unpublished manuscripts, except the papers of Sir Francis Bertie, and his published primary documents are largely confined to Gooch and Temperley's *British Documents on the Origins of the War*.² In fact he uses fewer primary documents than did Mercer, whose book he frequently cites in his footnotes as a source of evidence, while disputing its interpretations. It is true that he has covered fairly thoroughly the secondary books and articles on the diplomatic history of the period (including many from the 1920s and 1930s). Others, such as Thomas Otte's *The China Question: Great Power Rivalry and British Isolation, 1894-1905*³ are absent but would have assisted him. Miller's best chapter is that on Britain between 1901 and 1905, in which he argues that Berlin's poor reputation for reliability undermined its alliance talks with London, whereas the Japanese regarded Britain's reputation for reliability as a reason for closing a deal. But the chapters on the Moroccan and Bosnian crises suffer from an inadequate research base, particularly to support their generalizations about the motivations of the Continental Powers. They are also weak in their discussion of the strategic, as opposed to the diplomatic, environment in which the Powers operated. Miller relies too heavily on the rather arbitrary quantities of the Correlates of War dataset, rather than factoring in the changing assessments of the military balance and the

² G.P. Gooch and Harold Temperley, *British Documents on the Origins of the War, 1898-1914* (His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1926 - 1938).

³ Thomas Otte, *The China Question: Great Power Rivalry and British Isolation, 1894-1905* (Oxford University Press, 2007).

evolution of war planning in the period. Thus, according to the dataset, Russia's 'capabilities' at the time of the Bosnia crisis were comparable to Britain's (p.132), whereas in fact the tsarist leaders knew that their army was in no condition whatever to conduct military operations. It was primarily for this reason that they felt obliged to give way in the crisis, irrespective of how much support they received from their French ally.

The case studies halt (as in Mercer's book) with Agadir. It is a pity that the analysis is not extended to the First Balkan War in 1912-1913, the crisis of that winter being the most dangerous of the pre-war decade. The discussion of Austro-German relations in 1912 does not mention the Balkan Wars (p. 174) and that of Italy after Agadir crisis makes no reference to the fundamental deterioration in Rome's strategic position caused by its war in Libya (p.176). The analysis of July-August 1914 itself is brief (pp.195-6). Yet concerns about credibility influenced the leaders of all the Powers in the July crisis, and were frequently referred to, and a reappraisal of the role played by alliances in the crisis is overdue. To have carried the discussion beyond 1911 would have strengthened this book's contribution as a work of diplomatic history, as opposed to being primarily an essay in political science.

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