This issue begins with an article by Igor Lukes on U.S. intelligence operations in Czechoslovakia in the early years after World War II, prior to the Communist takeover in that country in February 1948. Lukes draws not only on U.S. documents but also on the newly opened security and intelligence files of the former Czechoslovak Interior Ministry and on other items made available in May 2006 by the Czech Intelligence Service, which even established a website featuring thousands of scanned images of declassified intelligence documents. The combination of these materials enables Lukes to consider why U.S. intelligence officials operating in post-war Czechoslovakia performed so badly, despite the access they enjoyed to many high-level Czechoslovak officials. Unlike the other East European countries, which quickly fell under Soviet domination and Communist rule, Czechoslovakia experienced a nearly three-year democratic interlude after the war. U.S. intelligence agencies had ample opportunity to prepare for a showdown with the Communist-dominated intelligence services in Czechoslovakia, but they failed to do so and were caught off-guard by the February 1948 takeover. Lukes explains how the Czechoslovak security and intelligence organs, which were hardly known for their professionalism, were able to outfox their U.S. counterparts.

The second article, by Phillip Deery, looks at the crisis that broke out in British-ruled Malaya in mid-1948. An attack on three European estate managers in June 1948 led to a crackdown by British colonial forces on the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) and other elements suspected of radical or subversive activities. Within a month, the British colonial government banned the MCP and instituted a full-blown state of emergency, justifying it on the grounds that Soviet-backed forces had been trying to install a Communist regime. The British Labour government committed an enormous amount of resources to its battle against insurgent forces in Malaya, yet it did so at a time of economic stringency without any likelihood of gaining U.S. assistance. The state of emergency remained in effect in Malaya for twelve years. Ultimately, the British colonial forces crushed the Malayan insurgency, but the vast resources needed to achieve this objective placed great strains on the British economy. Deery seeks to explain why British leaders were so intent on retaining control in Malaya and why they, unlike the French in Indochina, proved successful. Deery also looks at the nature of the threat the British were confronting in Malaya. Although he acknowledges that the MCP was strongly supportive of the Soviet Union, he finds little evidence that Soviet officials were behind the insurgency. Deery contends that the rebellion stemmed mainly from local factors and that it was poorly planned and executed. The irony of the crisis is that, despite its predominantly local origins, it was the first dramatic event that extended the Cold War into Asia.
The third article, by James Marquardt, recounts the genesis and promulgation of the Eisenhower administration’s Open Skies proposal at the U.S.-Soviet summit meeting in Geneva in July 1955. This proposal, envisaging a system of mutual aerial observation of Soviet and U.S. territory, including military sites, traces its roots back to the Truman administration, when the concept of military transparency was first discussed by U.S. officials as a key part of their Cold War relations with the Soviet Union. Marquardt draws on the realist school of international relations theory to help explain why meaningful transparency in U.S.-Soviet military affairs proved infeasible in the 1950s. Although both sides put forward proposals for inspections of various sorts, the highly intrusive monitoring favored by the United States was unacceptable to Soviet leaders. For the most part, U.S. officials were aware that their efforts to promote greater openness in Soviet foreign policy and military activities were almost certain to be unsuccessful, but they regarded these efforts as a key propaganda wedge against the USSR. In the unlikely event that Soviet leaders accepted the Open Skies proposal, the United States would stand to gain far more valuable information than the Soviet Union would. If, on the other hand, the Soviet Union rejected the idea, the U.S. administration could easily highlight this outcome as an indication of the fundamental difference between the openness of American democracy and the closed society in the Soviet Union. Realist conceptions of the security dilemma, Marquardt avers, help to account for the failure of the Open Skies proposal.

The fourth article, a review essay by Michael Szporer, looks in depth at a recently published book containing essays and reproduced documents from the former state security organs in Communist Poland. The book, Oczami Bezpieki, by Slawomir Cenckiewicz, caused a stir in Poland when it appeared in 2004. The documents reproduced by Cenckiewicz focus on the Polish regime’s efforts to maintain internal control and eliminate opposition forces, but they also shed light on Poland’s role in the Soviet bloc. Cenckiewicz’s book is only a preliminary attempt to make use of the tens of millions of pages of declassified state security documents now stored at Poland’s Instytut Pamięci Narodowej (IPN, Institute of National Remembrance), but it provides fascinating glimpses into the workings of the Communist regime and the Polish security apparatus. Although a more rounded history of Poland’s role in the Cold War requires the use of documents from several other archives along with the IPN materials, Cenckiewicz demonstrates that the secret police and intelligence files fill in key gaps (“blank spots”) in the story.

The issue ends with a section of thirty-eight shorter book reviews. From now on, we plan to publish at least thirty to forty book reviews in each issue. Although page allowances set by MIT Press occasionally limit the number of book reviews that can appear in a particular issue, we are committed to publishing at least thirty reviews per issue on a regular basis so that we can diminish the backlog that has developed.